

Reading Group Discussion Questions
You, Fascinating You

- 1) The novel's protagonist, Margit Wolf, claims, "Ballet chooses the dancer." What qualities does she have that place her among those chosen, and how do these qualities serve her in other aspects of life?



- 2) Margit leaves post-WWI Hungary for Italy, believing she will have a brighter future there. What does the Italy of that day look like through the eyes of an ambitious seventeen year old?



- 3) Four young ballerinas (Margit among them) pursue the same dream: "To dance center stage with all eyes upon us, to receive the bouquet of roses, to be loved." Which one comes closest to attaining the dream? Why do the others fail to attain it?



- 4) Each of the ballerinas casts her lot with an Italian suitor. Margit, eschewing wealth and fame, falls in love with the young Neapolitan maestro, Pasquale Frustaci. What do you think she saw in him? Had you been Margit's friend at the time of their courtship, what advice might you have given her?



- 5) Margit's career as a dancer is increasingly circumscribed by events over which she has no control. How does she respond to adversity? How does Pasquale?



- 6) At the same time that Margit becomes pregnant, Mussolini begins to embrace a policy of open anti-Semitism. How does the changing racial climate affect Margit? In your opinion, is her decision to raise her son a Catholic right, wrong, or neither? What might you do in her place?



- 7) As Margit prepares to make a long overdue visit to her family back in Hungary, she reflects that she and Pasquale have had ten happy years together. Had she stayed in Italy, what might the next ten years have been like? Would you expect their marriage to remain a happy one?



- 8) By the time Margit returns to Hungary, the Jewish laws are in effect. How does rising anti-Semitism affect her parents, Mano and Szidonia, and her brother József?



- 9) Back in Italy, Pasquale, heartbroken, writes *Tu, Solamente Tu*. Margit refers to the song as an “anthem to longing.” How does the song alter his and Margit’s destinies?



- 10) Margit’s father dies and her brother is taken for forced labor. Left to fend for themselves, Jewish women must struggle to keep their children and elderly parents fed and safe. Contrast Margit’s behavior and that of her cousin Zili. Contrast Margit’s and Klára’s. What sort of woman is best suited to survive such an ordeal?



- 11) Concerned for her son’s safety, Margit puts Cesare out on the street each night with a pillow and his baptismal certificate. Later, she sends him off on his own with a pair of smugglers who have promised to take him across the border into Italy. What would you do in Margit’s place? What effect would you expect these actions to have upon a seven-year-old boy?



- 12) Margit, Klára, and other Jewish women are herded through the rain and snow to concentration camps. En route, Margit saves Klára’s life by hiding her in a cart loaded with charcoal. Further on, she organizes an escape. What do these actions tell us about her character? Had she been less concerned about her friends, could she have spared herself what lay ahead?



- 13) Margit returns to Budapest after the war with a number tattooed on her arm. Neither she nor her mother chooses to speak about the atrocities and deprivations endured during their separation. Why do you think so many Holocaust survivors chose silence?



- 14) When Margit realizes that Cesare has not reached Italy, she vows—against all odds—to find him. To what do you attribute her eventual success? How had both mother and son been changed by the war?



- 15) Margit, having found her son, waits for the maestro to reunite their family, but he does not come. The Iron Curtain closes around Hungary. Cesare endures torture rather than renounce his Italian citizenship. Why do mother and son cling so stubbornly to the past—and at what cost?



16) Through the intervention of a future pope, Margit manages at last to send her son to Italy. Eight years later, she and Szidonia join him. The ballerina and her maestro again meet face-to-face. What does this reunion reveal about Pasquale?



17) Margit spends her last years in a nursing home, tormented by nightmares and hallucinations. The song she inspired lives on. She laments to her son, “Why couldn’t they love me?” and he insists, “But they did.” What do you think he meant? What value do we place on songs?



18) When Margit dies, Cesare rages against the people who have thwarted his mother’s happiness, saving for last his own father. Secrets come to light. Was Margit Wolf a victim, and if so, of what? Did her blind love for Pasquale contribute to her own misfortunes? What can we learn from her life?