

Discussion Questions for *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson

(Page references are to the hardback version published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, copyright 2004, 247 p.)

1. Did you like the book? If so, what was your favorite part of the book?
2. If not, why not?
3. Has anyone here ever been to a town like Gilead, Iowa? Tell us about your experiences.
4. Who was the most likeable character in the book? Who was the least likeable? Who was the most interesting?
5. The narrator talks about the trip he and his father made to find his grandfather's grave in Kansas (pp. 9-14). What did you think about the telling of this tale? Why is it such a powerful memory?
6. The narrator is stunned and even angry when he is surprised with the information that the baby Boughton he is about to baptize is to be named after himself. He says of that experience (p. 188):
...my heart froze in me and I thought, This is *not* my child – which I truly had never thought of any child before. I don't know exactly what covetise is, but in my experience it is not so much desiring someone else's virtue or happiness as rejecting it, taking offense at the beauty of it.

This passage really struck me as a truth. Do you agree?

7. Did any thing happen or was anything said in the book that stuck with you?
8. Any comments on the cat baptism? (p. 22)
9. The pantry comes in to the story several times (p. 55: "When did you figure out about the pantry? That's where we always put anything we don't want you getting into. Now that I think about it, half the things in that pantry were always there so one or another of us wouldn't get into them.") What role does the pantry play in this narration?
10. What do you think of the character of Jack Boughton?
11. The narrator tells a funny story (starting on p. 58) about townspeople building a tunnel, and a stranger's horse falling through the tunnel. The story runs for 6 pages. What's the point of this story?
12. Why do you think the author chose the title *Gilead*?

13. The narrator says (p. 71):

If you remember me at all, you may find me explained a little by what I am telling you. If you could see me not as a child but as a grown man, it is surely true that you would observe a certain crepuscular quality in me. As you read this, I hope you will understand that when I speak of the long night that preceded these days of my happiness, I do not remember grief and loneliness so much as I do peace and comfort—grief, but never without comfort; loneliness, but never without peace. Almost never.

I really liked this passage. Any comments?

14. Soapy the cat also puts in multiple appearances. What is her role in this story?
15. Any comments about the way the book ended?
16. Are there any questions you would like to ask?