



## Crows over the Wheatfield

By Adam Braver  
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### Introduction

*Crows over the Wheatfield* explores the nature of artistic genius, the emotional weight of tragedy, and the healing power of love and forgiveness. Taking its title from one of Vincent Van Gogh's masterpieces, the novel is the riveting tale of a young woman's struggle to cope with tragedy as she delves deep into the mysterious connection between the great artist's final works and his untimely death.

While driving home one night, Claire Andrews, a noted van Gogh scholar, accidentally strikes and kills a young boy who rides his skateboard into the path of her car. Though she is cleared of any blame, Claire is devastated and tries in vain to carry on with her life while dealing with the trauma. When the boy's family -- headed by a powerful and notorious Rhode Island attorney -- files a wrongful death lawsuit against her, Claire leaves everything behind and sets off to Auvers, France where she plans to finally complete her research on the connection between van Gogh's masterpiece and his mysterious suicide.

While her lawyer and estranged husband, Richard, take care of matters at home Claire delves deep into van Gogh's world in Auvers, retracing his footsteps in an attempt to get inside the master painter's disturbed mind. But when she discovers shocking evidence that it was an act of betrayal that may have led van Gogh to take his own life, Claire is overwhelmed by the disturbing parallels between the artist's life and her own. Claire knows that she must learn to accept her past and have faith in a future free from the burden of guilt if she is ever to be whole again.

### Questions for Discussion

1. After Claire hits the boy, she is considered to be innocent by the standard of the law. Do you think that innocence really is possible in this situation? Is the family right to pursue the case in civil court? What would you do?
2. Is Claire making the right decision to go off to France? How would staying at home have changed her outcome? Did she make the right choice? Is there a right choice?
3. At times the novel follows both Claire's story and the story of van Gogh's final days. What parallels can you draw between the two? How does her inquiry into *Crows Over the Wheatfield* compare with van Gogh's creation of it?
4. Early in the novel, Claire notes one of "the great ironies of art criticism -- how dispassionately one can talk about passion." How is this indicative of the rest of her life?
5. The book often looks at the permanent effects that a single unexpected moment can have on a person. In the case of Richard and Claire, it is one evening in the past when an outburst from Richard tore apart their marriage. Still, after the accident he is quick to come to Claire's aid. How would you describe Richard and Claire's relationship? Is real trust ever possible between them? Can such a devastating moment ever truly be mended?
6. While in France, Claire becomes privy to potentially damaging information about van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*. She has to make the choice either to release the information against the will of her informant, or to never reveal the information in order to protect his wishes. Should information that benefits the general public be released in spite of the potential harm it might cause to one person?
7. Much of *Crows over the Wheatfield* is about more than making moral decisions, but also the fear of making the *wrong* ones. At the end of the book when Claire is offered a potential settlement, do you think that she should accept it? What would you do in that situation?
8. In an interview, Braver said that the sad irony for Claire is that she will always have to wonder if anything positive in her life is a consequence of killing the boy on the highway. How do you read the ending of the book? Do you believe that Claire will ever live a "normal life" again? Is it even possible?

### About the Author

Adam Braver is the author of *Divine Sarah* and *Mr. Lincoln's Wars*, a selection of the Barnes & Noble Discover New Writers program and Border's Original Voices series. His work has appeared in *Daedalus*, *Cimarron Review*, *Post Road*, and the *Pittsburgh Quarterly*. He teaches creative writing at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island.