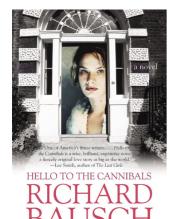
Reading Guide



Hello to the Cannibals

By Richard Bausch ISBN: 9780060930806

Best known as a short story writer, American author Richard Bausch provesthat he is indeed an accomplished novelist with this dazzling and intriguingaccount of two unusual women whose parallel lives intersect in unexpectedways. One of the women, Mary Kingsley, is the famous English explorerand writer who died in 1900 at the age of only 38, after having traveledthrough West Africa. Bausch's other heroine is a young woman called LilyAustin who lives in the United States in contemporary times. Althoughthese two women can obviously never meet they seem to sense each other'sexistence, and Lily has had a fascination with Mary even since she was given book about explorers for her fourteenth birthday.

Both Lily and Mary are unconventional women according to the standardsset by the society into which they are born. After nursing her mother andbrother for years, Mary decides to use her inheritance to become an explorerin Africa, far removed from her confining life in Cambridge. Lily sets herselfapart from others because she is determined to be true to herself and herideals. Despite being white, middle-

class, intelligent and financiallycomfortable thanks to the support of her parents, Lily leaves college withoutgraduating, marries a man she has only recently met and brings up a childconceived in unusual circumstances.

While Mary keeps a diary in which she writes down her most private thoughtsand feelings, as well as accounts of the people and experiences she encountersin Africa, Lily finds herself writing letters to Mary as she imagines her to be. Even though they are separated by time, distance and imagination Lily and Mary are clearly soul mates - the true friend each longed for. Eventually Lily, who has studied drama, writes a play about Mary, thus bringing together both her own story and Mary's.

Bausch has written an emotionally complex novel about the different wayswe can be both explorers and observers of the societies we choose to immerseourselves in. While Mary explores the physical unknown continent, Lilyexplores the terrain of her own heart. Both women struggle with theknowledge that they are outsiders and yet neither of them is prepared tosacrifice their own integrity and values for the sake of convention. Friendshipis also an important theme in *Hello to the Cannibals* and Braush states inhis author note that he wanted in particular to write about "the affectionswe form for those who have gone before us".

- 1. The night of Rhonda's birthday party is a major pivotal event in Lily'slife. Discuss the things that happened that night, the people she metand her first encounter with Mary Kingsley. How do these people andevents shape the rest of Lily's life.
- 2. How do Lily's relationships with the men in her life compare with Mary'srelationships with men? How important are their fathers to them?
- 3. Discuss Lily's "relationship" with Mary. Do the links between them seemtoo contrived? How is Lily helped by Mary? How does the thought that one day her diary may be read by someone who understands her comfortMary?
- 4. What qualities do Lily and Mary have in common? How do they differ? Who did you prefer?
- 5. How importance is family for both these women?
- 6. What effect does Buddy's death have on those who knew him?
- 7. While Lily's story is told in the past tense, Mary's story is told in thepresent tense. How does this affect the style and the tone of theirstories? Which did you prefer and why?
- 8. What is the significance of the title of this novel?