

## The Bookseller

Harper Paperbacks

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### Introduction

1962: It may be the Swinging Sixties in New York, but in Denver—as in many other American cities—it’s different: being a single gal over thirty is almost bohemian. Still, thirty-eight-year-old Kitty Miller has come to terms with her unconventional life. She was involved, once, but things didn’t work out. Now she dedicates herself to the bookstore she runs, returning home each evening to her cozy apartment.

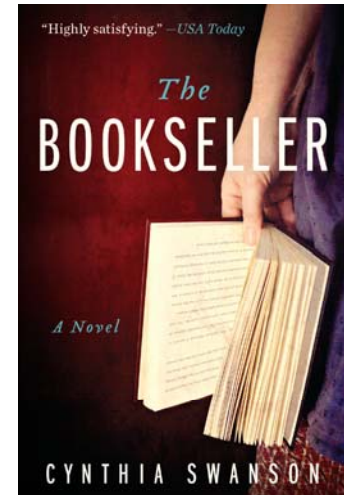
Then the dreams begin.

1963: Katharyn Andersson is married to Lars, the love of her life. They live in a picture-perfect home in a suburban area of Denver, the ideal place to raise their children. Katharyn’s world is exactly what Kitty once believed she wanted . . . but it exists only when she sleeps.

At first, Kitty enjoys her nighttime forays into this alternate world. But with each visit, Katharyn’s alluring life grows more real. As the lines between the two worlds begin to blur, Kitty faces an uncertain future. What price must she pay to stay? What is the cost of letting go?

### Questions for Discussion

1. The novel begins with a friendly disagreement when Frieda suggests that Kitty’s newly painted yellow bedroom has “too much sunniness.” What might this suggest about each of them? How might such an idea be relevant as the novel proceeds?
2. Of what significance is it that the novel is set in the 1960s? That Kitty lives in the city, and Katharyn in a suburban neighborhood?
3. Examine what the society of the time expects from, allows, or forbids women. In what ways do various characters push against such definition? What empowers them to do so?
4. Compare and contrast Kitty and Frieda. What makes them such good friends? In what significant ways are they different?
5. Consider the many literary works mentioned throughout the novel. Which is most interesting to you? What does it add to the novel? What’s the particular significance of Ray Bradbury’s *SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES*? Or Katherine Anne Porter’s *SHIP OF FOOLS*?



6. At one point Kitty changes her name to Katharyn. How does each name suit her? What power or influence does one's name have?
  7. Think about the many sources of information Swanson employs in the telling of the story: old letters, postcards, books, newspaper articles, microfilm. What are the benefits or challenges of telling a story in such a way?
  8. What does the character of Kitty's mother bring to the novel? Of what particular importance are the postcards she sends?
  9. What role does music—especially that of Patsy Cline—play in the novel?
  10. At one point in Katharyn's struggle to understand her predicament she says her mind is playing tricks on her, is "using [her] body as a clever prop." How do the mind and body work with or against each other in times of distress?
  11. Why do we dream? What might be the value of dreaming while asleep? What do powerful dreams have in common with reality?
  12. Kitty makes impassioned and creative efforts to teach her young neighbor Greg Hansen to read. What are the various reasons this is so important to her?
  13. What does Alma bring to the novel?
  14. Of Lars's many good qualities, which are most helpful to Katharyn?
  15. What complexities are introduced with Michael, Katharyn and Lars's third child? What effects do the 1960s medical theories about the nature and causes of autism have on Katharyn?
  16. In a time of great frustration Kitty concedes that, "there is no such thing as a perfect life." Why is this? How close can we get? What's most important in our attempt?
  17. Kitty's initial interaction with Lars suggests that very different lives might result for a person simply because of timing, even a matter of seconds. To what extent and in what ways has timing played a role in your life?
  18. Frieda offers to Katharyn the simple and profound idea that, in life, "you can't have it all, sister." What choices do each of the two friends make that determine their relationship? What kinds of mutually exclusive things must one choose between in life?
  19. Of what value is the imagination, that "remarkably clever and hardworking creature"? In what ways might an active imagination become problematic or even unhealthy?
  20. What many and varied elements help Katharyn recover from her "heartbreaking triumvirate"?
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