

Discussion Questions for *Milkman*

1. When and where does *Milkman* take place? How do you know?
2. Describe middle-sister. She's 18 years old and bookish. What else? She says she prefers 19th century books "because I did not like the 20th century." What does that statement (or any of her others) suggest about her?
3. Who is middle-sister closest to? Who does she turn to when she needs to talk?
4. What is it about the middle-sister that draws Milkman to her? Reviewers call him creepy. Do you agree? How else would you describe him: aggressive, violent, obsessive, intimidating ... all of the above, none of the above, something else?
5. The milkman causes extreme fear and anxiety for middle-sister, complicating her life even though their interactions are quite brief and never physical. Where does this power come from? Is it violent?
6. How does the milkman compare to villains you have encountered in other stories?
7. When Milkman finally prevails in his pursuit, middle-sister says, "I'd been thwarted into a carefully constructed nothingness by that man. Also by the community, by the very mental atmosphere, that minutiae of invasion." There's a lot to unpack in that sentence, which encapsulates the primary tension within the novel. Care to talk about what the statement means, say, phrase by phrase?
8. How would you describe the society in which the book is set (presumably Belfast, though never acknowledged). Consider the city's atmosphere, the sense of totalitarian oppression.
9. How do various characters in the novel express their political allegiances?
10. The book is concerned with power. How does power operate in *Milkman*—on a personal as well as societal level? Who has power and for what purpose? How is power used and over whom?
11. *Milkman* is also about tribalism. Talk about how group identity functions in this novel. Consider the us versus them allegiances, even down to the brand of butter or tea.
12. Did you find the author's stream-of-consciousness style difficult?
13. What about the lack of character names? The author says that in her initial writing that she used names, but that the book never worked until she removed them. Why might the writing have gone more smoothly without names? Does the lack of names lend a dystopian quality to the work? How does this affect your experience of reading the book?
14. The author wrote *Milkman* years before the onset of the #MeToo movement, yet its subject of sexual predation is timely. How did you experience the book in light of today's more aware society? How might you have read it several years ago...or even (if you're old enough) 40 years ago when the events of the book supposedly (though not specifically) take place?
15. What are some cultural similarities or differences between the community in *Milkman* and your own?

Sources: www.litlovers.com and <https://readinggroupchoices.com>

