

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Almost all of the characters in *The Fetishist* are going through some stage of grief, loss, or longing. Yet Katherine Min's sharp, incisive prose maintains a wonderfully comedic undertone. To what extent is humor imperative to this story?
2. Kyoko's kidnapping plot is fueled by grief. What do you think she really wanted to achieve? What part of her evolving plan do you think she ultimately found the most healing?
3. From Kyoko's manga creations to Sigrid's role as an art dealer, the idea of aesthetics holds a perpetual feature in *The Fetishist*. Discuss how creating versus observing art is actualized as a form of expression, and which characters "create" or "observe" in *The Fetishist*. To what extent is art a buffer and for what?
4. Through Daniel's eyes, the novel's three notable women are Alma, Emi, and Sigrid, of which the latter two often seep into Daniel's mind as an afterthought. Why do you think Daniel was so intensely drawn to Alma compared to Emi and Sigrid? Do you think he truly loved her?
5. Looking at the "jaundiced" descriptions, references to "yellow fever," and Alma's physical degeneration throughout, discuss how illness embeds itself into this story, and the role it plays.
6. Throughout the novel, Min highlights her characters' failure to follow through with their intentions. How might fetishization be subconscious—a failed translation, a mismatch between impulse and execution? Do you believe it is possible for love and fetishization to coexist?
7. Min illustrates fetishism as "the promise of allure . . . at the cost of self-erasure," in which "the twisted roots of racism . . . become so deeply embedded in desire that [one cannot] distinguish them from the healthy roots." Which character, if any, best embodies this example of "self-erasure"? In what ways is the fetishized a participant in the act of fetishization? Discuss Alma's perspective, many years after her relationship with Daniel, in this regard.
8. Kyoko recalls her mother Emi's own reliance on Daniel's gaze. Do you think Kyoko blames Daniel in the end? What do you think drove Emi to her death?
9. In the novel, sexual desire is often analogized through one's palate: an impulse for flavor, a taste, and an eventual consumption. Discussing the symbolism of the Japanese blowfish, how does Daniel's piscine incident interact with this idea?
10. Sex and death are often illustrated in tandem in *The Fetishist*. How might ideology around sex interact with the erasure or completion of death? What do you think Min intended to convey through this?
11. Alma spends her final days wondering if she was ever truly loved. Do you think she was?
12. *The Fetishist* begins with an author's note in which Min describes the story as "a fairy tale of sorts." Discuss in what ways *The Fetishist* emulates a fairy tale. How did you interpret Min's cryptic reference to happy endings, and how does Min provide Alma, Daniel, and Kyoko with one?
13. Near the end of the novel, Daniel makes a confession to Alma, and later, through the final chapter, to us readers. What did you make of these two confessions? Share with the group your final impression of Daniel.

