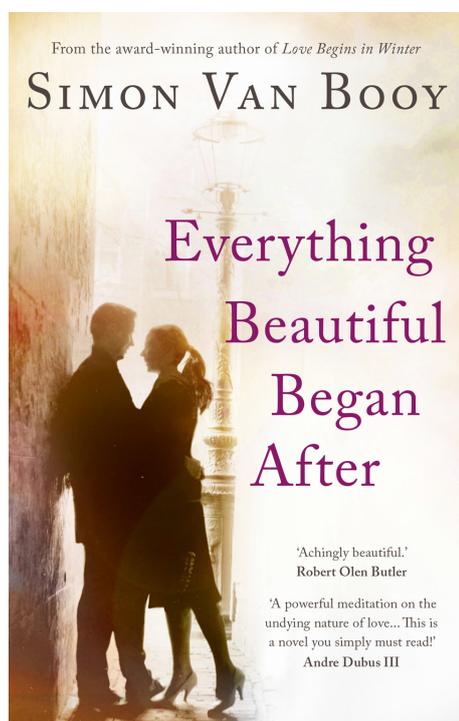




Oneworld Readers' Guide

Everything Beautiful Began After



Everything Beautiful Began After

Simon Van Booy

Simon Van Booy, winner of the prestigious Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, brings his gift for poetic dialogue and sumptuous imagery to this debut novel of longing and discovery amidst the ruins of Ancient Greece.

Rebecca is young, lost and beautiful. A gifted artist, she seeks solace and inspiration in the Mediterranean heat of Athens – trying to understand who she is and how she can love without fear. George has come to Athens to learn ancient languages after growing up in New England boarding schools and Ivy League colleges. He has no close relationships with anyone and spends his days hunched over books or in a drunken stupor. And then there is Henry, an accomplished young Welsh archaeologist who spends his days devotedly uncovering the city's past as a way to escape his own – a past that holds a secret not even his doting parents can talk about.

As these three lost and lonely souls wander the city, a series of chance encounters sets off events that will forever define them, in this powerful portrait of friendship and young love.

Questions for Discussion

1. Rebecca, Henry and George all have different reasons for moving to Athens – but what are the real reasons these three loners have ended up in the city?
2. Do you think early childhood experiences play a part in the kinds of work the characters choose to pursue? Do you think early childhood experiences play a major part in who we end up becoming as adults?
3. The author switches between first, third and the rarely used second person viewpoint in the second half of the book. How did this impact your experience as a reader?
4. How does the prologue tie into the final part (set in Paris) of the book?
5. By the end of the book, do you think the characters have resolved their inner torments?



Oneworld Readers' Guide

Everything Beautiful Began After

6. Were you surprised by what happened in the middle of the story?
7. In many ways, this book is about second chances. Do you think life is full of second chances?
8. The emotional success of the characters in the novel seems to depend on how they react to setback and tragedy. Do you think it's true that people are able to love deeply after some devastating experience?
9. Professor Peterson remains a strong but elusive character – do you think there's a reason for this? What might he represent?
10. Why do you think Henry decides not to share the 'journal' with Rebecca's sister?
11. What was your experience of how the author related the experiences of the Rebecca, Henry, and George to the characters of Greek literature?
12. Why do you think Henry took to the skies in the middle of the book? Do you think it's possible to travel and not 'learn anything'?

About the Author

Simon Van Booy is the author of two novels and two collections of short stories, including *The Illusion of Separateness*, *The Secret Lives of People in Love* and *Love Begins in Winter*, which won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. He is the editor of three philosophy books, and has written for the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, NPR and BBC. His work has been translated into fifteen languages. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and daughter.