

A READER'S GUIDE

THE *wicked*-PAVILION

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DAWN POWELL

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ZOLAND BOOKS

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## Questions for Discussion

1. Dawn Powell loved New York, and one of her specialties was to describe the city through the eyes of a newcomer, in this case Rick Prescott: “It was the first time he’d been to New York, the city of his dreams, the first time he’d worn an officer’s uniform, the first time he’d been drunk on champagne. New York loved him as it loved no other young man, and he embraced the city, impulsively discarding everything he had hitherto cherished of his Michigan boyhood loyalties.” The attraction of New York is timeless, and its impression on people, even if they simply visit or live there for a few years before moving away again, is indelible. New York’s competitive climate can bring out the best and worst in people. In what ways can it be said that the story Powell tells in *The Wicked Pavilion* depends on its New York setting?

2. For the first time in one of her books Powell also introduces Boston “society” through the characters of Elsie Hookley and her

brother, Wharton. What are some of the notable differences between New York and Boston social standards and dynamics as presented in the novel? Does a similar divide exist today?

3. Dennis Orphen, Powell's fictional novelist who is a central character in her previous book, *Turn, Magic Wheel*, stands outside of the action in *The Wicked Pavilion* but frames it with his writing at the beginning and end of the story. What purpose does this device serve?

4. For Rick Prescott and Ellenora Carsdale it's love at first sight. He is going off to war and she is engaged to another man, and yet they both know they are meant for each other. After the war they meet regularly at the Café Julien without ever going out on a real date, becoming romantically involved, or professing their love for each other. And then they spend years apart without any contact whatsoever. Does their relationship ring true for you? Is it possible for a person to have more than one "soul mate" at a time?

5. The artist Marius is a central figure whose supposed death drives the plot forward. Why is it so often the case that artists, and painters in particular, become better appreciated and their works more valuable after they die?

6. *The Wicked Pavilion* was the only Dawn Powell novel to make the *New York Times* best-seller list. What aspects—from its characters and plot, to its tone, themes, dialogue, descriptive prose, and so forth—do you think contributed to its appeal when it was first published in 1954? Could a book like this make the best-seller lists today?

7. Jerry Dulaine is an operator and a survivor. What do you think of her “striving?” Do you admire, condemn, or feel indifferent to the manner in which she chooses to make her way in the world?

8. When the Café Julien, the “wicked pavilion” of the book’s title, gives way in the end to the wrecking ball, it becomes clear that the mere existence of the Julien as a regular gathering place has dramatically affected the lives of a disparate group of people. In today’s commuter, high-tech society, do public gathering places still play such a role?