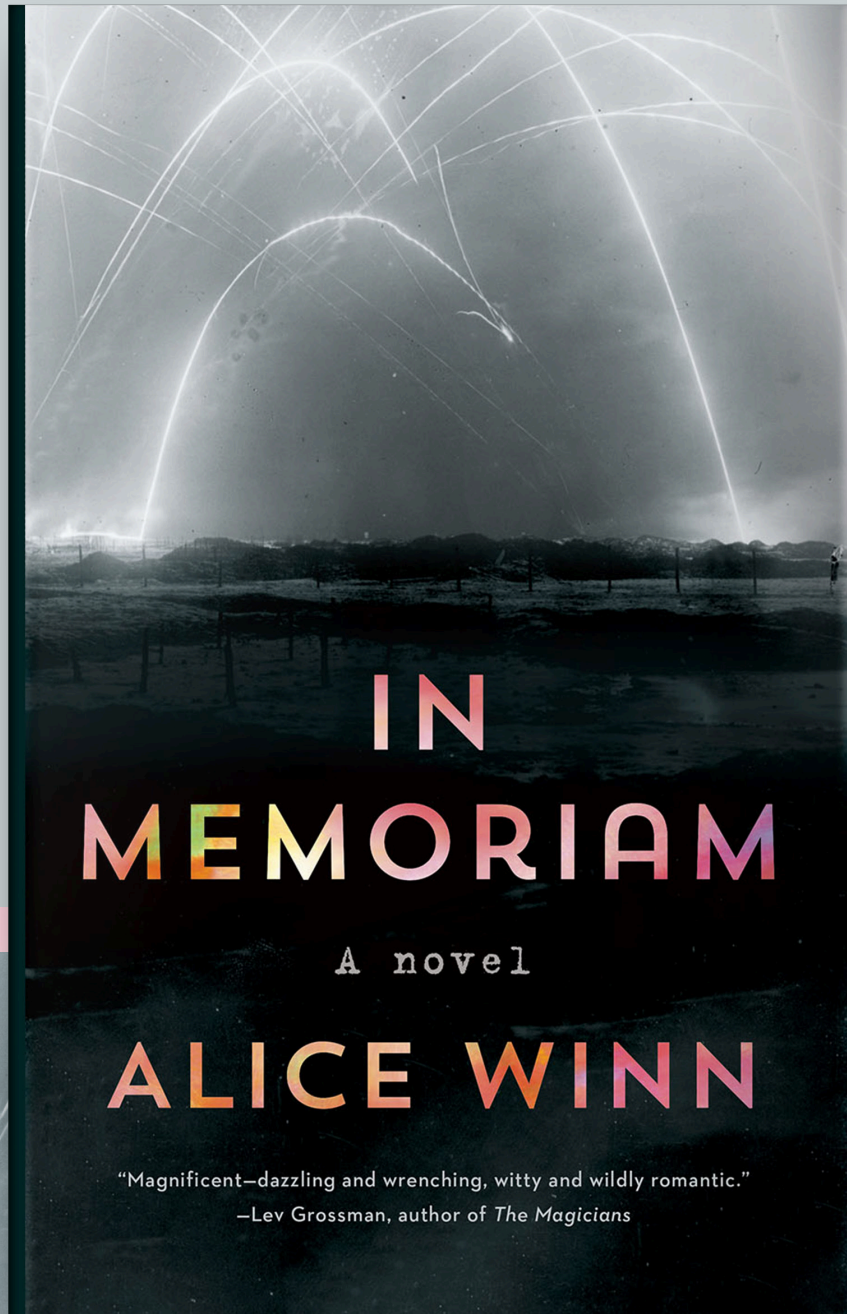


# BOOK CLUB KIT



DEAR READER,

Thank you for choosing *In Memoriam* for your book club! It's a book as much about the yearning wistfulness of first love as it is about war. I hope you'll enjoy it!

The book begins at an idyllic boarding school in the English countryside—think *Brideshead Revisited* or *The Secret History*. Henry Gaunt and Sidney Ellwood are close friends despite their differences: Gaunt is hulking, gloomy, and a violent pacifist, whereas Ellwood is glamorous and popular and romantically thrilled by the prospect of fighting in a European land war.

Both of them are in love with each other. But it's 1914, and they have no way of communicating this.

Soon they and all their friends have enlisted and been sent to the Western Front. Against the terrible backdrop of war, the tension that has always simmered between Gaunt and Ellwood comes to a head. But the question now is whether they—or any of their friends—will survive.

I'm thrilled when people tell me that they read *In Memoriam* all in a couple of sittings. Despite the grim subject matter, I think it is in many ways an uplifting novel about friendship and love. There are so many wonderful books to read, so I'm very honoured that you've chosen to spend time on *In Memoriam*—I hope you like it!

Yours,

Alice Winn



Jamie Ting



From the inspiration  
for the book's title  
to conversations  
between Ellwood and  
Gaunt, Tennyson's  
poetry is referenced  
throughout *In  
Memoriam*. As said  
in Chapter One,  
"Like every English  
schoolboy, he knew  
Tennyson's 'Charge  
of the Light Brigade'  
off by heart."

## *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

### I

*Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!  
Charge for the guns!" he said.  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.*

### II

*"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismayed?  
Not though the soldier knew  
Someone had blundered.  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.*

### III

*Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volleyed and thundered;  
Stormed at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of hell  
Rode the six hundred.*

#### IV

*Flashed all their sabres bare,  
Flashed as they turned in air  
Sabring the gunners there,  
Charging an army, while  
All the world wondered.  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right through the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
Reeled from the sabre stroke  
Shattered and sundered.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.*

#### V

*Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon behind them  
Volleyed and thundered;  
Stormed at with shot and shell,  
While horse and hero fell.  
They that had fought so well  
Came through the jaws of Death,  
Back from the mouth of hell,  
All that was left of them,  
Left of six hundred.*

#### VI

*When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
All the world wondered.  
Honour the charge they made!  
Honour the Light Brigade  
Noble six hundred!*

*Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
December 9, 1854*



Before enlisting in the war, the main characters attend Preshute College—an idyllic boarding school in the English countryside. *The Preshutian* is their school newspaper, and throughout the novel, students receive weekly dispatches informing them of their older classmates killed or wounded in action. Our *Preshutian* is inspired by the edition featured in the first few pages of the novel.

# THE PRESUTIAN



VOL. XLIX.—No. 739.

JUNE 27TH, 1914.

Price 3d.

The most distinguished newspaper of any English public school,  
written by and for the students of Preshute College.

## Editorial

Oh, Jove! Save the editor from the editorial! But term has ended, and a marvellous one at that, so conclusions must be drawn for the hungry readers of the humble *Preshutian*. Another splendid year has passed, and those grand Upper Sixth men now leave us for the glories of Oxford, Cambridge and Sandhurst! We cherish a hope that they will remember us poor schoolboys from time to time, as they bounce from lectures to revels. May our futures be as bright as theirs!  
—S. Cuthbert-Smith

## Notes on News

The Bishop of London preached on Sunday, June 14th.

\*\*\*

"Would the person practising Bach's 'Well-Tempered Clavier' six times a day on the piano near the Old Reading Room kindly learn a new piece?" Sincerely, *A Musically Frustrated Gentleman*.

\*\*\*

The three audience members at the junior boys' performance of Aristophanes' lesser known plays report the experience was "exactly what Aristophanes would have hoped for."

\*\*\*

The debate next term will be "This House declines to believe in the existence of ghosts." Contact H. Weeding if willing to argue in favour of the occult.

## Debating Society

On Monday, June 22nd, the Society met to discuss the motion that: "In the opinion of the House, war is a necessary evil."

Mr Ellwood proposed. After a few insolent remarks regarding the opposition's brass tie pin, he gave a rather colourful if inaccurate history of the Punic Wars. Mr Gaunt, arguing (in a most cowardly fashion) ("Can I keep that in?"—*Author*: "Only if you don't mind Gaunt's almost certainly violent revenge. He is a prize boxer, although a beastly pacifist."—*Editor*.) against the motion, suggested that war destroys the soul. Those listeners who have fought Mr Gaunt in the ring were inclined to mutter mutinously "What soul?" This in no  
(cont. on pg. 5)

## Poetry

Evening at Preshute College

The sky grows cold, and in the troubled west,  
The sun sinks sleepily towards other worlds.  
The dark of night soothes the troubled breast:  
From Heaven have the Clouds of Dreams unfurled.

The Chapel's steeple stabs into the sky—  
"It's too long again, Ellwood."—*Editor*,  
"It's barely three stanzas!"—*Author*,  
"That's too long, Ellwood."—*Editor*.

## A Notice

It is with regret *The Preshutian* must inform you that all matches against Harrow School have been cancelled due to an outbreak of pneumonia—Mr Hammick begs to remind the esteemed reader that it is ungentlemanly to gloat at the ill-fortune of one's inferiors.

## Killing Up Space

"You, sir!" cried the senior editor to the hapless junior editor who happened to pass by. "Do you realise we have three more pages of the *Preshutian* to get up by lunchtime?"

"Ask Ellwood to write another poem," said the junior editor, with laconic confidence in that poet's propensity for length.

"He's already put in two," said the senior editor, "and there's only so much the reader can take."

"Did you need another poem?" asked the poet in question, who was slumped out of sight in an armchair.

"No," said the senior editor.

"Oh, all right," said the thwarted poet. "I can ask Gaunt to write something in Greek if you like."

"No one would like that," replied the senior editor, with cold hauteur.

"Print this conversation, then," said the sensible junior editor. "I wish you wouldn't bother me about it. I'm only the junior editor."

"Πόλλ' ἀνδρὶ βασιλεὶ καὶ στρατηλάτῃ μέλει!" cried the senior editor.

"Don't be grandiose, Cuthbert-Smith," said Gaunt, who was of course near Ellwood, and quite ready to puncture other people's feelings of Euripidean tragedy. "You're neither a king nor a general."

"A senior editor faces greater challenges than either," sighed the weary senior editor. "Very well: Ellwood shall write another poem."

"Splendid! I have three right here, come and see—"  
The senior editor submitted to his fate.

## Poetry

Thoughts on Breakfast

What meat art thou, O sausage strange?  
What creature wert thou once?  
I hold thee on my fork aloft  
And long for sustenance! (cont. on pg. 5)

## A Literary Visitor

ON Saturday, June 13th, aspiring authoress Mrs Alice Winn came to give a talk at Preshute College to the lately established Society for the Enrichment of Literary Gentlemen. Mrs Winn, like many authors (Mr Henry James and Mrs Frances Hodgson Burnett come to mind) is of a muddled, transatlantic nationality—she was born and raised in France to American parents and educated in England.



Aspiring authoress Mrs Alice M. F. Winn

Numbers were high—the less charitable among us suggested that the crowd was owing to the cancelled cricket match following absolutely *disgraceful* weather. Nonetheless, we came in our masses to hear the lady novelist. Mrs Winn writes on the subject of war, specifically on the risk of a European land war. She espoused a pacifism that was both touching and appropriate in the gentler sex, but the general feeling among her masculine audience was unchanged *vis-à-vis* Prussian militarism. It is the personal opinion of *this* writer that Mrs Winn's impassioned anti-war writing is irrelevant, in any case—we'll never be so lucky as to get to fight ourselves!



From *IN MEMORIAM*,  
a novel by Alice Winn.  
Coming from  
Alfred A. Knopf in March 2023.



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation of Alice Winn's masterly debut novel, *In Memoriam*, which follows the forbidden romance of two classmates from their home in a British boys' prep school into the trenches of World War I, where the way they make sense of the world through literature, love, and death is completely upended by the atrocities of war, even as they learn to embrace a future laced with unprecedented uncertainty, fear, and a promise of freedom and forgiveness.

## QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The novel starts off with excerpts from The Preshutian, and newspapers and letters play an important role in the communication of life-or-death information (literal and figurative) throughout the war. What effect did these media have on your reading experience and ability to know the characters? In particular, how did reading the obituaries written on the field—by Ellwood and others—reinforce the intimacy with which the boys were being asked to confront the totality of life at such a young age?
2. Throughout the book, Ellwood in particular defers to poetry and other literary references (Tennyson, Shakespeare, etc.) to convey or admit to feelings that are too intense—or even illegal—to speak of explicitly. How does this tactic preserve the boys' relationships at school and at war? When it breaks down—and Ellwood cannot find the poems he once knew—what might this reveal about how his feelings have changed in light of his experiences on the front?
3. Discuss how Gaunt and Ellwood change roles in their relationship over the course of the novel, as it pertains to communication, sex, and survival on the front, separately and together. At what point does one become more dominant or confident compared to the other? How does this affect each man's sense of themselves?
4. Ellwood tells Gaunt the first time they have sex that "It doesn't mean anything, Henry. Only that we want to forget things, once in a while" (page 108). What are they trying to forget in this moment, and how does the nature of their intimacy change over time?
5. Discuss the love triangle between Maud, Ellwood, and Gaunt. How does Maud's presence highlight and reinforce the

## QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

authenticity of the boys' love? Does Ellwood and Gaunt's future look anything like the heterosexual married life they hold as a standard of love—as Gaunt reflects, “If Ellwood were a girl, he might have held his hand, kissed his temple. He might have bought a ring and tied their lives together” (page 121)?

6. On the front, Gaunt and Ellwood are at risk as soldiers and as lovers. Which risk is greater, death or injury or being found out?
7. How do we learn about the psychological effects of war? Consider Hayes's breakdown (Chapter Seventeen), to which Ellwood replies, “I think you're so frightened of losing your mind that you're driving yourself insane” (page 201); and later Ellwood's interactions with Maud, Gaunt, and his family after his injury, including Gaunt's reflection: “It felt like loving a brittle impostor, one who had stolen Ellwood and would not return him. And yet, Gaunt was powerless: he loved every part of Ellwood, changed or not. If there was a lonelier feeling, Gaunt could not imagine it” (page 343). Was society prepared to handle how the war was changing the soldiers' psyches, as well as the psyches of those who stayed home?
8. What details about the physical effects of war—hunger, fatigue, injury, pain—stood out to you most? Was there a line between the men's experience as men—i.e., humans—and as animals? How did this division manifest itself in how their “bodies were used to stop bullets” (page 338)?
9. Discuss the shifting politics between the Allies (England, France, etc.), Central Powers (Germany, etc.), and neutral countries, as revealed in Gaunt's motive to enlist, his rescue from the battlefield, his experience in the POW camps, their attempt to escape into the Netherlands and reception by the farmer, and Maud's attraction towards Berlin after the war when England rejects the “Surplus Women” (page 371). What does this suggest about the reality of the terms of war—how easily do ideologies shift, on a national and an individual level?
10. What's the significance of the men's attachment to Adam Bede in the POW camp? What does the world of that novel (published in 1859) offer the soldiers by way of distraction, comfort, or focus in such an intense space?



## QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- 11.** What could have gone differently—better or worse—in Devi’s escape plan? Where does he get the ingenuity and perseverance to attempt (and fail) to escape ten times? What do you think happens to him after the war?
- 12.** How do Gaunt and Ellwood’s assumptions about each other’s fate after Gaunt’s fall in battle affect their will to live, as well as to kill and perpetuate the violence of the war? Who and what are they fighting for in the end, including when Ellwood returns to France?
- 13.** How do the members of the Roseveare family allow for Gaunt and Ellwood’s survival, on and off the battlefield? What does the family’s experience demonstrate by way of an answer to the repeated question of who suffers most during war: parents, soldiers, or women?
- 14.** Cyril Roseveare says of their time at Preshute that “It’s your peers. Your friends [who raise you]. You can’t imagine how much we loved it, even when it was awful” (page 275). What lessons do the boys teach each other in school about the connection between love and violence, and how does that translate into their relationships in war? As young soldiers, who do they learn most from about how to fight and love, live and die?
- 15.** When do the boys—Gaunt, Ellwood, and their friends—become men? Are they men in the sense of how their fathers and grandfathers served in their families and societies? What indicators are there in the novel of a changing dynamic for not only gender roles, but the place and necessity for men’s emotions to be expressed?
- 16.** Have you read any literature written during or after World War I (see suggested reading below)? If so, what about this novel aligned with those more contemporary accounts of the Great War, as well as how wars since (through the present day) are depicted in writing and other media? What’s changed (or not) about the effects of war on the human spirit?

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

17. What was your impression of the image chosen for the jacket/cover of the novel—a dark scene from No Man’s Land? Which is a more powerful way of imagining this place for you—a literal image, as in a photograph, or the writing?
18. Revisit the author’s “Historical Note” at the end of the novel. Did you sense the authenticity of her descriptions of the battle scenes and other aspects of the war experience while reading? Did learning about the characters’ real-life inspirations change your impression of them?
19. What do you imagine happens to Gaunt and Ellwood after the novel ends? Does Ellwood’s recitation of the line from King Lear open a possibility for him to be able to love Gaunt again, which Gaunt fears is impossible? What does love—romantic or otherwise—mean in the postwar period?
20. What aspect of the In Memoriam writings stood out to you most by the end of the war—the stories of the men who died, or the act of memorializing done by the men who lived? Who is being memorialized more in those reflections? Consider the newspapers and Ellwood’s battle poetry and his rendition of Tennyson’s “In Memoriam” for Gaunt.

*Waiting for Eden*  
by Elliot Ackerman

*The Runaways*  
by Fatima Bhutto

*Testament of Youth*  
by Vera Brittain

*At Night All Blood Is Black*  
by David Diop

*Maurice*  
by E. M. Forster

*The Art of Fielding*  
by Chad Harbach

*A Farewell to Arms*  
by Ernest Hemingway

*The Great Believers*  
by Rebecca Makkai

*The Things They Carried*  
by Tim O’Brien

*Counter-Attack and Other Poems*  
by Siegfried Sassoon

*“In Memoriam A. H. H. OBIIT  
MDCCCXXXIII: 106”*  
by Alfred Lord Tennyson

*Johnny Got His Gun*  
by Dalton Trumbo

*Alf*  
by Bruno Vogel

*A Little Life*  
by Hanya Yanagihara