

Reader's Guide to *The Pattern Maker*

Summary

Paul Slater is an ordinary man from small-town Furnass, Pennsylvania. He's a machinist, a pattern maker, at the steel mill that lies at the town's economic and emotional center. He served in Vietnam and married his high school sweetheart. But one day, guided by an impulse he doesn't understand, he makes an unexpected turn while driving to work and ends up in downtown Pittsburgh, where he watches a movie being filmed on location. Befriended by a panhandler, an aging hippie full of folk wisdom, Paul returns over the next few days, entranced, among other things, by Suzy, an ambitious young intern on the film set. In his signature style of shifting perspectives and points of view, Snodgrass illuminates the inner worlds of the characters connected with the film, all of whom, like Paul, are at a turning point—the hot-tempered director, hoping to create his masterpiece; his long-suffering but quick-witted wife, starved for attention; a lonely, sensitive aspiring actor; and the police lieutenant investigating a murder that bears a striking resemblance to a scene in one of the director's earlier films. Ultimately Paul's world collides with the world of the big city in ways no one could have predicted. *The Pattern Maker* is both a page-turning drama and an affecting look at the desires of the human heart.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Have you ever been tempted to do what Paul did—start out for one place and follow your nose to a completely different place? If so, what was the experience like for you?
2. Who is the real Suzy? Is it the well-read student of film history? The childlike innocent? The master manipulator?
3. In making his films, Nicko was trying to show the link he perceived between sex and violence. Do you think such a link exists? Why or why not? And does Nicko's explanation of the link, during his interview with Janet, ring true to you?
4. What does Suzy's motto, "Help yourself, tootsie," mean to you? How does she act upon this motto throughout the course of the book? Do the other female characters subscribe to a similar philosophy?
5. Furnass and Pittsburgh are as different from each other as night and day, yet they lie only ten miles apart. Why would a citizen of one place find the other so "foreign"? In what sense does geography dictate destiny?
6. The *Pattern Maker* takes place in May of 1975. In what way are the characters products of their time? What other books—or what films—that take place during the same era cover the same themes?

7. The omniscient narrator of the italicized passages occasionally reveals what's going to happen in the pages that follow. Why do you think the author provides these revelations? How do they change your perception of the ensuing events?

8. Paul, Nicko, Jeff, and Sam all seem to have violent fantasies of one sort or another. Do they come from the same source in each man? Or does something different in each man give rise to these thoughts?

9. Why does Mac read bodice-ripper romances? What urge do they satisfy in him? What do they do for him?

10. When describing Paul, Sam says, "He's all the scarier because when you first look at him he looks normal. Then you realize he's kind of supernormal. Too normal. There's all kinds of stuff going on that you can't see and he doesn't want you to see." Is this quality of being "supernormal" a red flag in real life? Should we be suspicious of people who seem "too normal"?

About the Author

Richard Snodgrass's short stories and essays have appeared in the *New England Review*, *Bread Loaf Quarterly*, *South Dakota Review*, *California Review*, and other publications. He is the recipient of a fellowship from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and has been artist in residence at Light Work, in Syracuse, New York, and at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation, in Taos, New Mexico. His other books include *An Uncommon Field: The Flight 93 Temporary Memorial*, published in September of 2011 by Carnegie Mellon University Press, and *Kitchen Things: An Album of Vintage Utensils and Farm Kitchen Recipes*, published in 2013 by Skyhorse and named one of the year's "best books to get you thinking about food" by the Associated Press.