

Isis: Reading Guide Discussion Questions

- 1) How does the author use setting to establish mood? Which elements of Belerion Hall enhance the novel's suspenseful atmosphere?
- 2) At the heart of the novella is a myth concerning the Egyptian deities Osiris, Isis, and Set. How does the play, *The Tragic Tale of Isis and Osiris*, connect the Villiers siblings to mythological counterparts? How do their performances foreshadow subsequent events?
- 3) *The Tragic Tale of Isis and Osiris* imbues the story with a sense of irreversible fate. How do the characters resist, or, inversely, succumb to inevitable events?
- 4) To Iris, Harvey was "a golden boy in a world of brass and tin." Have you ever lost somebody you loved as totally as Iris loves Harvey? What was the grieving process like?
- 5) Harvey's sacrifice transforms Iris, who later attributes her madness to "the loss of the good and the victory of the evil." How does this mentality overflow into the rest of the plot?
- 6) Describe a situation you refused to accept, to counterproductive or even catastrophic effect.
- 7) Throughout the novella, Iris reacts antagonistically to many other women, including Edyth Bright, the kitchen girl who makes Harvey soap, the young beauties posing in the photographs—all of whom are seducers or destroyers. How does Iris, ironically or not, embody the same archetype?
- 8) Iris Villiers' heightened sensitivity to the spiritual realm is conveyed through repeated use of window and doorway imagery. In this network of symbolism, what is the significance of the sparrow that Iris finds trapped in a toilet bowl?
- 9) Spence's accusation of Iris' complicity in Harvey's accident comes as a shock. Does this episode highlight Spence's vile nature only, or has Iris been an unreliable narrator? Does her assessment of Spencer ever seem unfair?
- 10) Despite repeated warnings and signals not to disrupt the natural order of life and death, Iris manages to resurrect Harvey—and still the results are unfulfilling. What is surprising about Harvey's demeanor? Why does the reunion do nothing to heal the emotional void within Iris?
- 11) During a meaningful conversation, Harvey tells Iris she is the only Villiers child who should have offspring, because she "understands love." However, after the terrible curse the reanimated Harvey is forced to endure—almost a second sacrifice—would you characterize Iris as mostly loving or mostly selfish? Or is selfishness simply a corollary of intense love?
- 12) The novella's ending leaves Harvey's status unresolved. Does such a non-resolution withhold catharsis? How does it make you feel?