



etruscan press

The Last Orgasm By Nin Andrews

A Study Guide

Synopsis

Nin Andrews has divided *The Last Orgasm* into four sections, moving back and forth between the orgasm's perspective and her own. Just as the orgasm questions human nature, Andrews questions the nature of sexuality and Eros, especially for a girl, a young woman, and now a mature woman. She takes the opportunity to include some poems about gender roles, sexuality and women. One of the most important aspects of the book is the topic of poetry itself. Both the orgasm and the author reflect on poets, poetry, favorite poems, and the nature of inspiration.

In the book, Andrews elaborates on some of the more obvious differences between her point of view and that of the orgasm. While she believes in finitude and the need to bid farewell to loved ones, the orgasm believes in resurrection. Andrews questions her own existential reality and cultural discomfort, especially on erotic topics; however, the orgasm offers her advice. The book has elements of an ongoing dialogue between the two and presents its own set of insights and satirical musings.

Author Bio

Nin Andrews' poems have appeared in many literary journals and anthologies including *Ploughshares*, *Agni*, *The Paris Review*, and four editions of *Best American Poetry*.

The author of six chapbooks and seven full-length poetry collections, she has won two Ohio individual artist grants, the Pearl Chapbook Contest, the Kent State University chapbook contest, the Gerald Cable Poetry Award, and the Ohioana Prize for Poetry. She is also the editor of a book of translations of the Belgian poet, Henri Michaux, *Someone Wants to Steal My Name*.

Andrews lives on a farm in Charlottesville, Virginia with her husband, cows, coyotes, and many bears.

Reasons to Include in the Classroom

The Last Orgasm presents a fresh and often humorous look at the themes of sexuality, womanhood, and beauty by giving the orgasm its own platform to speak for itself. This book continues the dialogue on the nature of sexuality, especially for women, and so specifically details the feelings of pleasure, longing and loss.

Study Questions & Writing Prompts Part 1 - The Orgasm

1. Why do you think the orgasm addresses the reader directly, instead of simply having a dialogue with the author? How does this influence your connection with the poems?
2. Choose three poems from this section and explore what they imply about human nature.
3. What does the orgasm believe about human nature? What makes her assessment accurate or inaccurate?
4. Who or what is the "orgasm" and what does it represent?
5. Read "The orgasm joins an artist community." Then read Robert Hass's poem, "A Story about the Body." How does the orgasm's view of breast cancer and female sexuality differ from Robert Hass'?

Writing Prompt: Write a 500-word letter to the orgasm. Express how you feel about its ideals, and actions. Use specific sources from the text.

Study Questions & Writing Prompts Part 2 - Nin

1. How does the “Truth According to Nin” differ from that of the orgasm?
2. Invent an image of both Andrews and the orgasm. Think about what they would look like, how they would dress, and act in social settings. Share with the class.
3. What does the tone of this section reveal about the author’s outlook on life?
4. Does the author or the orgasm have a more accurate view of life?
5. Read “My Mother’s Advice” and debate whether the mother is warranted in the advice she gave Andrews.

Writing Prompt: Write a short narrative from the perspective of an inanimate object, and detail how this object would view you and society as a whole. Be sure to avoid letting your own biases get in the way of its perspective.

Study Questions & Writing Prompts Part 3 - Nin and Orgasm

1. In this section we see Andrews and the orgasm in a later part of life. How has her relationship with the orgasm developed? What does this imply about sexuality and aging?
2. What age do you believe Andrews is in the section? What words or phrases make you come to this conclusion, and are her experiences universal to women of this age group?
3. Why are topics regarding sex considered more taboo for women than they are for men? What can be done to change this social norm?
4. Read “The Orgasm and the Magic Maid” and discuss what takes place. How does this poem relate or distance itself from the rest of the poems? Would you have had a different reaction to the poem if the genders were reversed? Do you recognize the inspirational source of this poem, revealed in “Notes on the Poems”?
5. Read, “What I Keep Telling Nin,” and then read Mary Oliver’s famous poem, “Wild Geese.” Compare the two. What is the orgasm’s message to the world? What is Mary Oliver’s?

Study Questions & Writing Prompts Part 3 - Nin and Orgasm (continued)

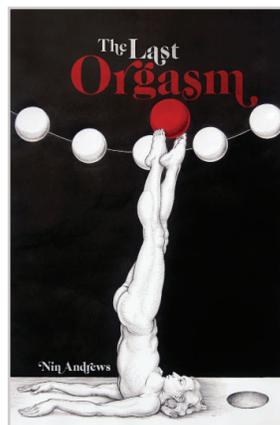
6. The poem, “Song of the Orgasm,” is a parody of what famous poem?

Writing Prompt: Write a 750-word essay on how this book has influenced your view regarding sex and about such things as sexuality, gender roles, feminism and social norms.

Study Questions & Writing Prompts Part 4 - The Last Orgasm

1. What does the orgasm think of Nin in this section? Of mankind?
2. In “The Afterward, or Reflections on ‘The Instruction Manual,’” Andrews describes her love of John Ashbery. How does this poem also explain her motivation for writing the book?
3. What does the long list of poems and paintings in the “Notes on the Poems” reveal about the book?
4. Why does the last poem of the book, “The Definition of Postmodernism: A Response to Critics of The Last Orgasm” appear after the “Notes on the Poems”? Is this poem a postmodern poem? Is this book a postmodern poetry collection?
5. Does Andrews equate poems and orgasms? Could the final section also be called The Last Poem?

Writing Prompt: List five of your favorite poems. Compose a poem of your own in the manner, style, or voice of one of these poems.



etruscan press

84 West South Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766

P: 570.408.4546

www.etruscanpress.org
books@etruscanpress.org