



Discussion Questions: *A Bright Ray of Darkness*

“Words, Words, Words” Book Club—April 2021

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? Were there any passages that stuck out to you?
2. Hawke himself performed in a star-studded production of *Henry IV* at Lincoln Center, and the novel is loosely based that experience. Are there other Shakespeare plays or characters that you think would have been interesting to explore through this story? Would that change how William processed his emotions?
3. What did you think of William Harding as a character? Did you find yourself rooting for him? Why or why not?
4. Throughout the novel, Hawke borrows chapter titles from Shakespeare, but the novel’s title, *A Bright Ray of Darkness*, is entirely his own. What do you think it means in the context of the story? Are there any Shakespeare quotes you think would be fitting substitutes?
5. William gets advice from many different people throughout the novel. Who did you feel gave him the best advice? Who gave the worst? Were there any words of wisdom that stuck out to you?
6. This book is unique in that it’s not authored by a famous novelist, but rather a famous person who is writing a novel. What did you think of Hawke’s ruminations on fame and notoriety? Did the novel challenge or confirm any of your previously held notions of celebrity?
7. How did you feel about the portrayal of the female characters in the novel? What did you think of the fact that only William’s ex-wife and the “secret admirer” were given names?
8. What did you think of the descriptions of professional theater? Did anything surprise you? If you are a “theater person” did anything feel particularly familiar or alien to you?
9. At the end of the novel, William receives conflicting feedback on the fact that he never missed a performance. Should he have “dropped the bow” and let his understudy go on, as Edward advised? Or was he right to stick it out?
10. What did you think of William’s reconciliation with his father? Who were some of the other “father figures” he encountered throughout the novel?
11. Hawke has said this novel is an exploration of masculinity and the “attempt to arrive at some kind of ‘manhood’ or ‘adulthood.’” What do you think William learns by the end of the novel? What kind of future do you imagine for him?