BOOK SYNOPSIS

From one of our fiercest stylists, a roaring epic chronicling the life, times, and secrets of a notorious artist.

When X—an iconoclastic artist, writer, and polarizing shape-shifter—falls dead in her office, her widow, CM, wild with grief and refusing everyone’s good advice, hurls herself into writing a biography of the woman she deified. Though X was recognized as a crucial creative force of her era, she kept a tight grip on her life story. Not even CM knows where X was born, and in her quest to find out, she opens a Pandora’s box of secrets, betrayals, and destruction. All the while, she immerses herself in the history of the Southern Territory, a fascist theocracy that split from the rest of the country after World War II, and which finally, in the present day, is being forced into an uneasy reunification.

A masterfully constructed literary adventure complete with original images assembled by X’s widow, Biography of X follows CM as she traces X’s peripatetic trajectory over decades, from Europe to the ruins of America’s divided territories, and through her collaborations and feuds with everyone from Bowie and Waits to Sontag and Acker. At last, when she finally understands the scope of X’s defining artistic project, CM realizes her wife’s deceptions were far crueler than she imagined.

Pulsing with suspense and intellect while blending nonfiction and fiction, Biography of X is a roaring epic that plumbs the depths of grief, art, and love. In her most ambitious novel yet, Catherine Lacey pushes her craft to its highest level, introducing us to an unforgettable character who, in her tantalizing mystery, shows us the fallibility of the stories we craft for ourselves.

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: BIOGRAPHY OF X
Catherine Lacey is the author of the novels *Nobody Is Ever Missing*, *The Answers*, and *Pew*, and the short story collection *Certain American States*. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Whiting Award, the New York Public Library's Young Lions Fiction Award, and a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship. She has been a finalist for the Dylan Thomas Prize and the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, and was named one of Granta’s Best of Young American Novelists. Her essays and short fiction have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Believer*, and elsewhere.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CATHERINE AT CATHERINELACEY.COM.
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

1. In a *Guardian* review, Marcel Theroux called *Biography of X* "a lovingly made facsimile of a nonfiction book." Discuss the structure of *Biography of X*. How does Lacey employ methods typically used in nonfiction? Why do you think she choose to approach her subject this way? What's the effect of doing so?

2. What did you think of CM? What do you think attracted her to X initially? Describe her relationship to X. Do you think their relationship works? Explain your answer.

3. What's the effect of having images interspersed throughout the book? Did they enhance your understanding of the events described? If so, how? Were there images that were missing that you would have liked to see? What were they?

4. Maureen Corrigan described *Biography of X* as "A Scheherazade-like sequence of stories." What's the effect of presenting X's life in this way? How would you describe her? Do you think that CM ultimately got to the heart of who X was? Why or why not?

5. Lacey was praised by *The New Yorker* for "making uncomfortable connections between X’s fragile world and our own." Did the inclusion of historical anecdotes and real figures change the way that you thought of them or how you thought of X and her life? If so, how? Why do you think that Lacey choose to include fact and fiction within *Biography of X*?

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER FSG AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.
RESEARCH YOUR FAMILY HISTORY THROUGH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY:

- **HeritageQuest**: Genealogical tool that includes U.S. Federal Census records, genealogical and historical sources for more than 60 countries, Census data, slave schedules, maps, local history books and articles, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant application files, and the Freedman's Bank Records 1865-1874. This online resource requires a library card.

- **Ancestry.com**: A searchable collection of billions of historical records from the USA and other countries. Get access to census and military records, birth, marriage and death records, and immigration records. Available at public computers at all Brooklyn Public Library locations.
INTERVIEWS WITH CATHERINE LACEY

• The 92nd Street Y – Catherine Lacey and Miriam Toews

• The Atlantic – This Novelist Is Pushing All the Buttons at the Same Time

• Vogue – How Catherine Lacey Crafted her Intricate, Genre-Bending New Novel

• Chicago Review of Books – “I Had to Have a Different America:” An Interview with Catherine Lacey about “Biography of X”

• Slate – What It’s Like to Write a Biography of Your Dead Wife

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: BIOGRAPHY OF X
BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy Biography of X? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

- *Witches* by Brenda Lozano
- *The Wren, The Wren* by Anne Enright
- *The Birdcatcher* by Gayl Jones
- *Percival Everett* by Virgil Russell by Percival L. Everett
- *Eat Your Mind: The Radical Life and Work of Kathy Acker* by Jason McBride

You can access the list and place holds on these titles in multiple formats through the BPL catalog: borrow.bklynlibrary.org

In the mood for something else? Get customized reading recommendations from Brooklyn Public Library’s free BKLYN BOOKMATCH service: bklynlibrary.org/bookmatch

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: BIOGRAPHY OF X