

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT TJ KLUNE



TJ Klune is a *New York Times* bestselling author known for his works frequently centered on queer identities, found family, grief, and moral transformation. He is most renowned for *Under the Whispering Door*, *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, *In the Lives of Puppets*, and the *Green Creek* series. Klune explores social isolation, emotional responsibility, and structural suffering by fusing reality with futuristic fiction. His work has received several accolades including the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Romance in 2014 for *Into This River I Drown* and the Alex Award for Young Adults in 2021 for *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. Klune currently resides in Washington as a full-time author. Prior to becoming a writer, he worked in insurance claims, which had a significant influence on *Under the Whispering Door* and its main character.



QUESTIONS: UNDER THE WHISPERING DOOR (2021)

- At the beginning, Wallace introduces the concepts of capitalist production, emotional detachment, and bureaucracy. In what ways does his transformation criticize the culture of modern business?
- Hugo serves as a caretaker as well as a ferryman. How does his job challenge conventional representations of authority, emotional labor, and masculinity?
- When it comes to grief, death, and regret, how might comedy work as a storytelling technique? Does it strengthen or weaken these themes' gravity?
- The teashop functions as a liminal space. How does Klune use setting to blur the lines between past and present, the living and the dead?
- In contrast to theological or philosophical conceptions of the afterlife, what does the book propose about moral reckoning after death?
- What lessons about forgiveness does the book impart?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- How does Klune's depiction of death compare to existentialist concepts found in works by Jean-Paul Sartre or Albert Camus?
- As a tool for societal commentary, how does the book contribute to the tradition of magical realism?
- How do other works about the afterlife, such as Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* or Matt Haig's *The Midnight Library*, differ from Klune's depiction?
- How does Wallace's journey mirror contemporary society's concerns about legacy, productivity, and emotional isolation, particularly in cultures that equate personal worth with constant achievement?
- How could readers who have suffered a major loss relate to this book differently than those who haven't?
- How does the book address the cultural reluctance in many Western societies to talk openly about death, particularly in academic or professional settings where emotional vulnerability is often discouraged?

LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- Wallace's life is shaped by prioritizing work over relationships. Do you see similar pressures on campus or in your community? How do these stresses affect relationships and mental health? What support networks exist for people who feel alone or burned out?
- Hugo's work highlights emotional labor and care for the grieving. How are loss and death handled in your community? Are conversations about mourning encouraged or avoided? What support systems—such as counseling, support groups, or hospice care—are available?
- The book explores unresolved relationships and loneliness. Which campus clubs or programs support mental health or crisis intervention? How can readers strengthen their relationships through small but meaningful actions like helping a friend, raising awareness, or volunteering?

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [National Alliance for Care at Home](#)
- [Crisis Text Line](#)
- [Mental Health America](#)
- [Hospice Foundation of America](#)
- [988 Lifeline](#)
- [The National Alliance for Caregiving](#)

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Becky Chambers, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* (2021)
- Mikki Brammer, *The Collected Regrets of Clover* (2023)
- Sangu Mandanna, *A Witch's Guide to Magical Innkeeping* (2025)
- V.E. Schwab, *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue* (2020)
- Diana Wynne, *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986)