

## *Under the Wide and Starry Sky* ~ Nancy Horan

### **PAGE TURNERS MEETING – APRIL 14, 2015 @ 6:30**

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. In order to separate from her unfaithful husband, Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne takes her children across the continental U.S. and the Atlantic to study art in Europe. Do you think it's the wisest choice, given the impact on her children? Would you make a similar decision under the circumstances? Are there other options she could have pursued?
2. At first glance, Fanny and Robert Louis Stevenson might seem an unlikely match. Why do you think they are so drawn to each other? Why does their relationship endure?
3. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has become a phrase synonymous with the idea of the divided self. At any points in the novel, does Louis seem to live a double life? Does Fanny? In what ways do Fanny, Louis, and other characters struggle with their own identities?
4. After criticizing a story of Fanny's, W. E. Henley incites a quarrel with Louis that threatens their friendship. Does Fanny deserve the criticism? Do you think she and RLS enhance or hinder each other's artistic ambitions and accomplishments?
5. Take a look at John Singer Sargent's painting "Robert Louis Stevenson and His Wife" (1885; currently in the Steve Wynn collection). What do you think of his portrayal of Fanny and Louis?
6. Many of us feel the need to shape a story out of the facts of our lives. In making these stories, we sometimes create myths about ourselves. Does Fanny invent myths about herself? Does RLS do the same?
7. The Stevensons travel all over the globe in search of the ideal climate for their family, from Switzerland to the South Seas. How do landscape and environment affect each of them?
8. Many of Louis's friends find Fanny overprotective of her husband. Do you agree or disagree? Are her actions justified?

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**9.** In Samoa, late in their marriage, Louis suggests that the work Fanny does is not that of an artist. He tells her, “No one should be offended if it is said that he is not an artist. The only person who should be insulted by such an observation is an artist who supports his family with his work.” Do you agree with this? What does Fanny consider her art? Do you agree with her views?

**10.** Why do you think Horan chooses “Out of my country and myself I go” as the epigraph for this book?

**11.** What is Robert Louis Stevenson’s literary legacy? In what ways does reading *Under the Wide and Starry Sky* change your view of him and his writing?

**JOTTINGS...**