



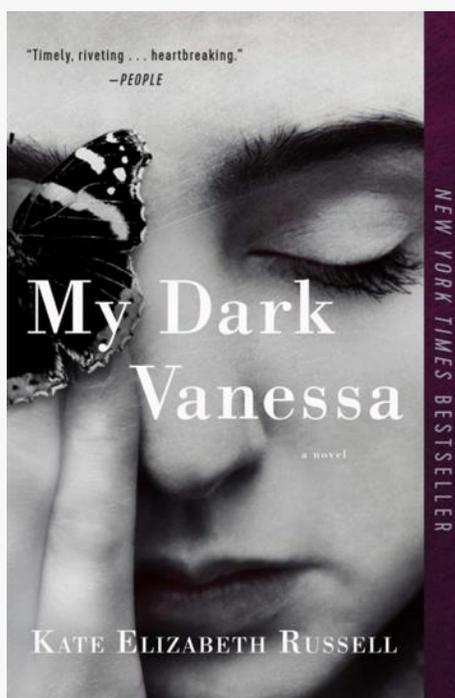
FOPSL Book Club: September 17, 2021

Book: *My Dark Vanessa*

Author: Kate Elizabeth Russell

Discussion leader: Don Markley

## Don Markley Leads Discussion of *My Dark Vanessa*



Don Markley led the discussion of this month's selection, *My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell, beginning with information about the author and the controversy regarding the novel's similarities to writer Wendy Ortiz's memoirs.

Participants began by discussing whether Vanessa was a provocateur who encouraged Strane and how much responsibility each took for the relationship. Members disagreed on whether the relationship was more than just physical and whether Vanessa and Strane were actually in love. Some believed that Strane gave Vanessa self-confidence; others thought that she was clearly abused and that the relationship negatively affected the rest of her life. Inevitable comparisons were drawn between these characters and real individuals, such as Mary Jo LaTourneau and the 11-year-old student whom she subsequently married. There was much discussion about these types of relationships, what stops people from having inappropriate relationships, and whether the characters were "sick" or simply acting in a way that any of us might in given circumstances. Many group members told personal stories of similar events from their youth and how they dealt with them.

The club also discussed the role of school personnel in the novel, why the author included the character of Henry Plough and how he was different from/similar to Strane, and the possible reasons behind Strane's suicide: shame, fear of jail, and the knowledge that he was becoming old and unattractive to young girls.

When asked to rate the novel on a scale of 1–5, responses varied greatly, but the majority rated it highly. Participants noted the excellent use of detail and especially the effectiveness of the dialogue in showing Vanessa's age progression. Members also enjoyed the interweaving of literature and poetry throughout the novel. The group discussed the time shifts in the novel; everyone seemed to think this technique was effective, and some indicated relief in knowing early on that Vanessa was still ok 16 years later. Most agreed that the novel was powerfully written and that it was interesting to see Vanessa's perspective and how it developed over the years.

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Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

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