

## BACK TO BLOOD

by Tom Wolfe

### Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. The title of *Back to Blood's* prologue, "We een Mee-AH-mee Now," is a Latina character's retort to a "gringa's" request that she speak English, because "YOU'RE IN AMERICA NOW!" How has your town or city changed due to its immigrant population? To what extent have the elements in its melting pot melted?
2. Tom Wolfe made a dozen extended trips to Miami over two years while researching *Back to Blood*. He has said that writers should "leave the desk" in order to gather material for their books, and he admires nineteenth-century naturalistic novelists like Balzac and Zola for having done so. What are some of this novel's memorable details that could have been learned and conveyed only by Wolfe's direct observation? Would you know how the neighborhood of Hialeah looks or what really goes on at the Biscayne Bay Columbus Day Regatta if he hadn't been there and told us?
3. One reviewer noted that *Back to Blood* is both "a breezy, funny read...and an examination of what it means to be a man." In what ways did you sympathize with Nestor Camacho as he struggles with his various identities as a cop, a Cuban American, and a young man on his own? Did you expect the happy endings for both his career and his love life?
4. Ghislaine Lantier's French Haitian American father is horrified by the prospect of his daughter's dating "a Cuban cop!" Discuss the ways in which Professor Lantier manifests both the meaning of the novel's title and the more general theme of people's strong drive to fit in and rise.
5. In an interview, Tom Wolfe has said, "People may complain about my exclamation points, but I honestly think that's the way people think. They don't think in essays." Does this strike you as true?

6. How do your thoughts about “de-skilled,” “hands-free” art jibe with the narrator’s? Were you aware of how much money was at stake in the current art world before reading Wolfe’s rendition of Art Basel Miami? Did you know about the business of forgery in the art world?
7. Novelist Tibor Fischer, in a review of *Back to Blood*, wrote that “for bringing the world, or at least a world, to the page, Wolfe is the boss.” And the books editor of the *Miami Herald* wrote that “flamboyance is Miami’s native tongue....There is nothing in this novel that couldn’t happen.” Do these comments about the veracity of *Back to Blood* make you want to visit Miami or run the other way? Do you consider place or milieu to be important to your enjoyment of a novel? Discuss.
8. Magdalena Otero takes many chances with her well-being in her constant striving to assimilate and move up in Miami’s pecking order. Which of the minor characters also exhibit her preoccupation with status? Can you think of any who don’t? Discuss social ambition as a theme of *Back to Blood*.
9. Tom Wolfe has said that one of the writers he most admires is John Steinbeck. Although the work of these two writers differs stylistically, both attest to Wolfe’s belief that “no single organism could be understood without observing and comprehending the entire colony.” What is your response to that idea? How strongly do you think the individual is shaped by his society?