

III Will Discussion Questions by Dan Chaon

Author Bio: (Fantastic Fiction & Wikipedia)

Chaon lives in Cleveland, Ohio, and teaches at Oberlin College, where he is a Professor of Creative Writing.

Chaon was adopted and grew up in a small village in Nebraska. Chaon graduated from Northwestern and received his MA from Syracuse. He was married to the late writer Sheila Schwartz and has two teenage sons.



Characters:

- **Dustin Tillman** – (Age 41 in 2012); (Age 13 in 1983) – Psychologist. Married to Jill. Has 2 sons – Dennis & Aaron. Parents (Colleen and Dave) were murdered in 1983. Dustin’s older adopted foster brother, Russell, was charged with the crime.
- **Aaron Tillman** – Dustin’s younger son. Best friend’s name is Rabbit. Drug addict.
- **Russell (Rusty) Bickers** – Dustin’s adopted foster brother. Age 14 in 1978 when he first fostered with the Tillmans. Birth mother was a drug addict who hanged herself before Rusty ended up in foster care. Low level drug dealer in 1983. Ended up in prison for the Tillman murders. He was innocent. Got out of prison in May 2012 at 48 yrs. old.
- **Rabbit (Bruce) Berend** – Aaron’s best friend. Heroin addict. His mother, Terri, is dying of ovarian cancer.
- **Jack Daniels** – Serial killer who may be killing/drowning college students.
- **Gergely** – Contact in Rabbit’s phone. “Bad Dude” per Amy. Likes to tie up teenage boys for dope.
- **Aqit Ozorowski** – Former Cleveland police officer (on medical leave). Patient of Dustin’s who wanted help to stop smoking and stayed to talk. Becomes Dustin’s friend.
- **Xzavious “Amy” Reinbolt** – Rabbit’s friend, heroin addict, and drug dealer. Thinks he is a psychic vampire.
- **Dave Tillman** – Dustin’s father. Lost his arm in a workplace accident. Murdered in 1983.
- **Dennis Tillman** – Dustin’s older son. Is away at college.
- **Jill (Bell) Tillman** – Dustin’s wife. Ruthlessly organized lawyer. Gets ovarian cancer in 2012. Dies of ovarian cancer in 2012.
- **Kate Tillman** – Dustin’s older cousin. Has a twin sister, Wave. Parents (Vicki and Lucky) were murdered in 1983 with Dustin’s. Kate is a hairdresser.
- **Waverna (Wave) Tillman** – Dustin’s cousin. Kate’s twin sister. Parents (Vicki and Lucky) were murdered in 1983 with Dustin’s. An off the grid hippie who is a palmist and tarot reader. Changed her name to Galadriel Bluecloud later in life.

Deaths – University Students – “Accidental Drownings”

- **Jonathon Frisbie** – 1/01/2001
- **Vincent Isolato** – 2/20/2002
- **Matt Potts** – 3/30/2003
- **Jessie Hamblin** – 4/04/2004
- **Clinton Combe** – 5/05/2005
- **Zachary Orozco** – 6/06/2006
- **Jeff Wamsley** – 7/07/2007
- **Joshua McGiboney** – 8/08/2008
- **Luke Gorring** – 9/11/2009
- **Vince Norby** – 10/10/2010
- **Peter Allington** – 11/11/2011

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Do you consider this book a Mystery/Suspense or is it just plain generic fiction? Why?
3. The book was written from multiple characters' points of view, as well as flipping between decades - 1980s when Rusty is adopted and Dustin's parents are eventually killed, 2010s when Jill is diagnosed with Cancer and eventually dies, and the present, when Aaron and Rabbit's problems occur. Was it successfully done? Did that make it more interesting or did the long time frame harm the story?
4. Dustin says, “Sometimes a dead bird is a dead bird,” meaning that you have a choice to give a moment meaning or to ignore it. You have a choice about the story you tell yourself. Do you believe that? Do you have an example of this philosophy from your own life? Is this a universal truth or is this just Dustin's denial of his own history?
5. In an interview, Chaon said, “We can believe ourselves into these incredible feats of self-deception. Just that idea of somebody who's basically decent, but is also doomed by their own lack of self-awareness. I think that's something that's very terrifying because I think all of us are kind of afraid that we're not as self-aware as we'd like to be.”
<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/features/dan-chaon/> Do you think that “**III Will**” showcases the lack of self-awareness Chaon was referring to? How?
6. Why do you think Rusty talked about killing Dusty's parents when they were kids? Even though Rusty didn't kill the Tillmans, do you think he was innocent? Why or why not?
7. Aaron is a drug addict and is in withdraw. Why doesn't anyone notice? Was this side plot necessary to the story? What about the interlude between Aaron and Rabbit's mom, Terri? Why do you think the author added it?
8. What did you think about the formatting of the book? Were the trailing letters, dropped sentences, columns, and other formatting options an effective way of showing mental deterioration? Did you like or dislike the formatting choices the author made in this book?
9. Jill tells Dustin, “Poor people don't have good luck. Disproportionate numbers of bad things happen to people who are economically disadvantaged.” What do you think about this statement? Is it true? Why or why not?
10. What do you think happened to Dustin's parents and aunt and uncle?
11. Is Dustin responsible for lying as a child at Rusty's trial? Is Kate? Why or why not?

12. Wave tells Kate, "You sacrificed them. This is your reward." What did she mean? Who did Kate sacrifice?
13. Why do you think Dustin went into therapy as an occupation? Do you think his mental aberrations had anything to do with this decision?
14. Why do you think Dustin's mental stability degraded so rapidly after the death of his wife? Were there always problems or did her death trigger something? Do you think the medications he was taking helped, harmed, or had no effect on Dustin's mental health?
15. Why do you think Aqil decided to see Dustin as his therapist?
16. Do you think college-age boys is a good demographic for a serial killer to target? What are the advantages? Disadvantages?
17. Did you know who the serial killer was before it was revealed? When? How did you know?
18. Do you think Dustin meant to fire the gun at the end of the story?
19. What do you think happened to Dustin at the end of the book? Why go back to St. Bonaventure, Nebraska?
20. Do you think Dennis (Dustin's older son) will ever figure out the truth of what happened? Would it benefit or harm him to know the truth?
21. Discuss the significance of the title, "**Ill Will**." In what ways does it refer to Dustin? Rusty? Kate? Aqil? To what other characters and situations might it also apply?
22. What do you think about the depiction of Cleveland and its suburbs portrayed in this book? How does it make you feel?
23. Dan Chaon has written two other novels and three short story collections. Will you read them?

References:

- Dan Chaon website - <http://danchaon.com>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/c/dan-chaon/>
- GoodReads – <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/30687788-ill-will>
- Kirkus Review – <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/features/dan-chaon/>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=b4f9e1af-7a6a-48ce-9fd0-95c3693ff420%40sessionmgr4010&hid=4209&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10549373&db=neh>
- Wikipedia – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Chaon

Dan Chaon's Books

Novels

- You Remind Me of Me (2004)
 - Await Your Reply (2009)
 - Ill Will (2017)

Collections

- Fitting Ends (1995)
- Among the Missing (2001)
- Stay Awake (2012)

If you liked Ill Will, try...

- Into the Water – Paula Hawkins
- Motive – Jonathan Kellerman
- The Good Girl – Mary Kubica
- A Secret Kept – Tatiana de Rosnay
- Faithful Place – Tana French