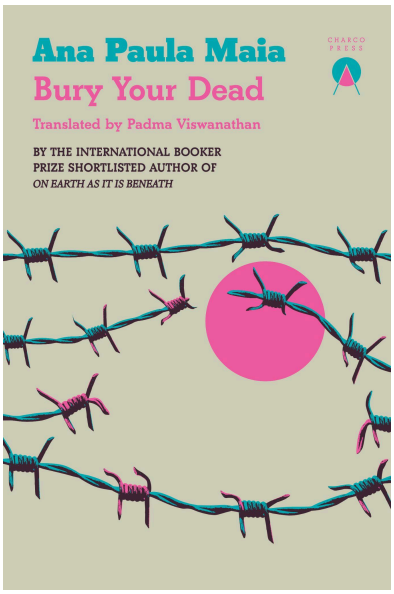
CHARCO PRESS

Reading Guide

Bury Your Dead

Author: Ana Paula Maia

Translator: Padma Viswanathan



Please be aware that this discussion guide contains spoilers.

Short Summary of the Novel

Edgar Wilson makes a living collecting the bodies of animals killed on the roads. Alongside him is Tomás, an excommunicated priest struggling with his faith, and a small cast of people whose work places them face to face with death every day.

When a series of human deaths begins to echo the abandoned animal carcasses Edgar collects, the novel asks uncomfortable questions about whose lives matter and who gets forgotten. Set against the stark backdrop of rural Brazil, *Bury Your Dead* is less a mystery than a meditation on work, dignity, compassion and the value of life in a world where both people and animals can become invisible.

Dark, spare and unexpectedly moving, Ana Paula Maia's novel shines a light on those who perform society's most overlooked jobs while asking what it means to care for the dead—and for the living.

11 August 2026 • 9781917260343 • £11.99 • 128 pages • 198mm x 129mm

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A Little Background

Ana Paula Maia is one of Brazil's most original contemporary writers. Her novels often focus on people whose work most of us rarely think about: slaughterhouse workers, rubbish collectors, crematorium employees and others whose labour keeps society functioning while remaining largely unseen.

Although *Bury Your Dead* is set in Brazil, its questions feel universal. It explores inequality, environmental destruction, harsh working conditions and the quiet dignity of people whose jobs are physically demanding but rarely valued. Rather than making political arguments directly, Maia lets these ideas emerge through her characters' everyday lives.

Why Read This Novel Now?

Bury Your Dead feels particularly timely in a world that has become more aware of the people who do essential work but rarely receive their due recognition.

The novel invites us to think about who keeps our communities running, who gets left behind, and how easily both people and places can be forgotten. It also raises questions about our relationship with animals, the environment and the systems that encourage us to treat living things as disposable.

For reading groups, it's a book that offers plenty to discuss without providing easy answers. Beneath its quiet, understated style are big questions about compassion, responsibility and what it means to live with dignity.

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Discussion Questions

1. **Work and identity**
   Edgar Wilson's job is one that most people would rather not think about. How did his work shape the way you saw him? Do you think the novel changes the way we think about jobs that are often overlooked or undervalued?

2. **The unseen people**
   Many of the characters live on the edges of society. Why do you think Maia chose to tell their stories? Who do you think is 'invisible' in our own communities?

3. **Living alongside death**
   Death is present throughout the novel, but it is treated as part of everyday life rather than as something shocking. How did this affect your reading? Did it make the story more moving, or more unsettling?

4. **People and animals**
   Animals are everywhere in this novel. Did you think Maia was drawing comparisons between the treatment of animals and the treatment of people? If so, what point was she trying to make?

5. **Edgar Wilson**
   Edgar is a quiet, thoughtful character who rarely says more than he needs to. What did you make of him? Did your opinion of him change as the story unfolded?

6. **Faith and doubt**
   Tomás is questioning his faith throughout the novel. What role does religion play in the story? Do you think the novel suggests that kindness and morality depend on religion?

7. **Different kinds of violence**
   The novel contains acts of violence, but it also shows the damage caused by neglect, poverty and indifference. Which forms of violence struck you most, and why? How does this differ from other comparable novels you have read? How does Maia differentiate herself from other Latin American authors in this regard?

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8. **The setting**
   The roads, forests and remote landscapes are so vividly described that they almost become characters themselves. How did the setting shape the mood of the novel? Could this story have been told anywhere else?

9. **A spare writing style**
   Maia writes with remarkable restraint, saying a great deal in very few words. How did you respond to her style? Did you find it powerful, challenging or both?

10. **Capturing the original**
    Padma Viswanathan has spoken about the challenges and rewards of translating Brazilian Portuguese, particularly voices that are both lyrical and economical. If your group enjoys discussing translation, consider how Maia's restrained style comes across in English.

11. **Responsibility**
    The novel asks us to think about responsibility in many different ways. Who, if anyone, is responsible for the suffering we see? Individuals? Society? Institutions? Or is the answer more complicated than that?

12. **What do we throw away?**
    The idea of disposal runs throughout the novel – not just of dead animals, but of people, places and even memories. What do you think Maia is saying about the things society chooses to value – or discard?

13. **The title: *Bury Your Dead***
    What did the title mean to you by the end of the novel? Is it simply about burying the dead, or is it also about grief, memory, respect and learning to move forward?

14. **A hopeful novel?**
    Bury Your Dead is full of death, loss and neglect, yet many readers have described it as surprisingly hopeful. Do you agree? Where did you find hope in the novel? Was it in the characters, their friendships, the small acts of kindness they show one another, or something else.

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A Final Thought

One of the most striking aspects of *Bury Your Dead* is the contrast between its bleak subject matter and its deep compassion. Rather than dwelling on violence itself, Ana Paula Maia asks us to pay attention – to the people, animals and places we so often overlook. As you discuss the novel, you might return to one central question:

Who does society ask us to look away from – and what happens when a writer insists that we look at them instead?

About the Author

Ana Paula Maia is the author of *On Earth As It Is Beneath*, shortlisted for the International Booker Prize 2026. Her novel *Of Cattle and Men* won the UK Republic of Consciousness Prize, the inaugural Cercador Prize for Literature in Translation in the United States, and an English PEN Translates Award. An award-winning Brazilian writer and scriptwriter, she is widely regarded as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary Brazilian fiction.

About the Translator

Padma Viswanathan is a Canadian-American novelist, translator and professor. Her acclaimed translations from Portuguese include *Bury Your Dead*, and her work as a novelist gives her a particular sensitivity to rhythm, voice and character. As you read, you might consider how the novel's restrained style and vivid imagery shape your experience—and remember that every translated novel is also the result of a creative partnership between author and translator.



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