

ISBN: 978-1-936747-57-3
eISBN: 978-1-936747-56-6
Price: \$15.95/\$12.00
Trim: 5.5" x 8.5"
Trade Paperback / eBook
176 pp

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Distributed to the trade by
Consortium Book Sales
& Distribution, Inc.
(800) 283-3572



Reader's Guide

Author Asks

from Thomas Heise
author of *Moth; or how I came
to be with you again*

1. I've given brief clues to the narrator's past, bits and pieces of memories, but I've intentionally left out the whole story. I want the reader to imaginatively participate in the act of reconstructing and inventing. What is the story of his past, as you sense it?
2. What is the narrator's relation to his own memory—his memories of his mother, his childhood, his father—and in what ways does this shape, pre-determine, or illuminate his experience of the present, the places he lives, and the people with whom he interacts?
3. Hypnotism, dreams, and sleepwalking are featured prominently in the book. Why do you think the narrator's sleep is so 'disturbed' and on a related note, why do you think he so easily slips between reality and dreams?
4. Travel, exploration, and pursuit are also subjects that I return to frequently in the book. The narrator seems always to be in motion, from Berlin to New York City to Copenhagen to many places in between. What do you think the narrator is looking for or running from?
5. Clearly, I've arranged this book in long paragraphs scrolling down the page without breaks. What effect does this have on your own reading experience? Does this form underscore for you some of the themes of the book? If so, which ones?
6. What do you think are some of the possible metaphoric and linguistic meanings of the title *Moth*?
7. One of the formal devices I use is complex, unfolding syntax that stretches the limit of the sentence. In what ways does this impact your reading?
8. In writing *Moth*, I felt the vital importance of certain landscapes and cityscapes: sea-sides, fjords, the industrial outskirts of cities, buildings, bodies of water. How would you characterize "place" or "setting" in the book? To what extent do some seem more psychological than literal, more a product of one narrator's perception than they are "real" places? What kind of psychology or what kind of emotional disposition do these landscapes and cityscapes suggest?
9. The cover photograph is very near and dear to me. For me, it contains a lot of mystery. It feels very haunted. How does the cover photo relate to the book for you?
10. The narrator is fascinated by collections of ephemera, but seems particularly fascinated by them when they are assiduously organized. Why do you suppose this is the case?

Writing Exercises

1. Try writing sentences that extend far beyond the point where you'd typically bring them to an end; let your syntax build on itself, gather momentum, and drive your imagination in new directions.
2. Write a description of an object or a landscape, but instead of aiming for straightforward realistic description, infuse the scene with deep emotional coloring that is revealed indirectly. In other words, create a psycho-geography that reflects back on the inner state of the narrator or character.
3. I'm fascinated by old photographs of strangers that I sometimes find at fleamarkets. They can be rich sources of imaginative material because they give you details to work with—clothing, hairstyle, familial relations, period furnishings, landscapes—but leave so much open for speculation. I have a small collection of them that I've assembled over the years. I look and ask how did this picture come to be? What is the backstory of this person or family? What happened in the day, weeks, or years afterwards? Find a few old photos of people you don't know and use them to write a character sketch, to develop a new story line, or to create a background for a narrator or character.

Suggested Reading

1. Giorgio de Chirico, *Hebdomeros*
2. W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo*
3. Thomas Bernhard, *Gargoyles*
4. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*