

COLLECTED WORKS

A NOVEL

READING GUIDE

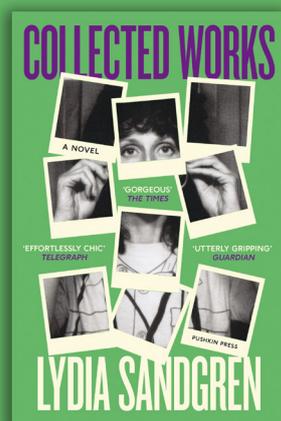
PART I: THE GREAT LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA

At the very beginning of the novel, Martin finds himself 'trying to trace a path from his current position back to some kind of origin' (8). Over the course of Part 1, what do you learn about Martin's origins? How do you think they have shaped his character?

'The irony was that this Michel, who Elis spoke of as some kind of mythological figure, had led Elis down the same track Martin would have liked to guide him down himself' (30). Having read the first part of the novel, what are your impressions of Martin as a father? Comparing the older Martin to the younger Martin, is there anything that surprises you?

"The others always have all these thoughts about what their pieces are supposed to convey," he said finally. "But I don't. I just paint" (135). Does Gustav's attitude towards his art as a student tell you anything about his deeper character?

'She had an attentive way of looking at things. Even though the room was smoky and loud, she seemed enveloped in a sphere of stillness' (182). What is it about Cecilia that attracts Martin to her? Does the reality of their first encounter on page 198 live up to his expectations?



PART 2: GERMAN GRAMMAR

'I think it was a very valuable experience. Incredibly valuable' (293). Between Martin and Gustav, who is most changed by their year living in Paris?

'Martin marvelled at this secret life that went on entirely without his knowledge or involvement' (434). Martin is thinking of Cecilia in this moment, but how far could this statement also be applied to his relationship with Gustav?

Elis is a colicky baby 'crying inconsolably for hours on end' (508). As Martin retreats further and further into his work, what are the effects on Cecilia? This whole experience is told from Martin's point of view; do you think there's anything that he's omitting about this period?

'And there's a clear trend, let me tell you. I'm the one who reaches out. I'm the one who calls. Then he pops up, expecting me to go out drinking with him and for everything to be like it was ten years ago' (536). How has Gustav and Martin's relationship changed after university? Do you think that Martin is always a good friend to Gustav, and vice versa?

PART 3: KAIROS

Rakel grows closer and closer to unravelling the mystery of her mother's disappearance, as new voices paint new portraits of the enigmatic, inscrutable Cecilia. By the end of the book, did you feel Rakel had come any closer to understanding her mother? As a reader, did you?

When he meets Rakel, Philip Franke, the author of *Ein Jahr der Liebe*, finds himself thinking that 'Cecilia didn't hold grudges. If anything, her problem was that no one ever made a mark on her life' (616). Do you think that this is Cecilia's problem, or the problem of other people?

Cecilia's mother Inger believes that 'What Cecilia had never wanted to accept was that motherhood took time. It took everything you had' (656). Do you think this is why Cecilia left?

When Martin informs Gustav's sister of his death, her response is 'It's an awful thing to say, but I suppose it was just a matter of time' (667). When Dolores tells Martin about the first time that Gustav 'fell apart' and was admitted to a psychiatric ward, she refers to his 'secret life' (692). How has your perception of Gustav changed by the end of the novel? How well do you think Martin truly knew him?

