

PICADOR

# Reading Group Gold

## *The Motion of Puppets:* *A Novel*

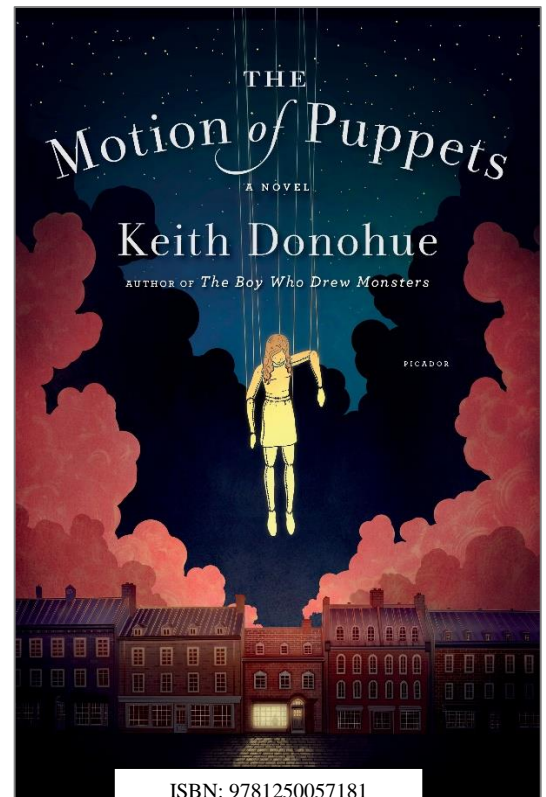
By Keith Donohue

### ABOUT THE BOOK

From the bestselling author of *The Boy Who Drew Monsters* and *The Stolen Child* comes a modern take on the Orpheus and Eurydice Myth—A Suspenseful tale of romance and enchantment

In the Old City of Québec, Kay Harper falls in love with a puppet in the window of the Quatre Mains, a toy shop that is never open. She is spending her summer working as an acrobat with the cirque while her husband, Theo, is translating a biography of the pioneering photographer Eadweard Muybridge. Late one night, Kay fears someone is following her home. Surprised to see that the lights of the toy shop are on and the door is open, she takes shelter inside.

The next morning Theo wakes up to discover his wife is missing. Under police suspicion and frantic at her disappearance, he obsessively searches the streets of the Old City. Meanwhile, Kay has been transformed into a puppet, and is now a prisoner of the back room of the Quatre Mains, trapped with an odd assemblage of puppets from all over the world who can only come alive between the hours of midnight and dawn. The only way she can return to the human world is if Theo can find her and recognize her in her new form. So begins the dual odyssey of Keith Donohue's *The Motion of Puppets*: of a husband determined to find his wife, and of a woman trapped in a magical world where her life is not her own.



## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Authors often agonize over their first line, and Keith Donohue has selected a very striking one, “She fell in love with a puppet.” What kind of effect did this line have on you and what kind of tone did it set for the novel?
2. Soon after Kay is transformed into a puppet, the Queen lays out several of the rules that the puppets must abide by: they must stay still during the day but are free to move about at night, they cannot leave the Back Room, and they cannot bother the toys on the other side. She ends with the message, “Live simply and know your place.” Have there been any times in your own life that you have felt as if you or those around you are living as puppets?
3. Donohue uses lots of imaginative word play in his novel. For example, what do you think he was suggesting with the sentence, “Let’s put the Devil on your left and the Good Fairy on your right. Judges, perhaps you can make her walk”? Can you recall other instances of similar, clever word play?
4. There is one Muybridge sequence that Theo is entranced with, the sequence of a nude woman descending the stairs. What do you think it is about this sequence that grabbed him and why do you think it helped him remember what happened the night Kay disappeared?
5. How does Muybridge’s work relate to the idea of puppets?
6. How would you describe Kay and Theo’s relationship?
7. When Kay plays Beth in the puppet show, in her opening monologue she says, “All art needs a little sadness in it, a small tragedy to balance the human comedy.” Do you agree with this sentiment?
8. Kay recounts to Noë a story about her wedding day in which a bee was swarming around her hat and bouquet during the ceremony. Theo failed to do anything to help the situation so she tossed her hat aside and was left disappointed by Theo’s inability to act. What does this incident reveal about their relationship?
9. Why do you think Kay has such a difficult time recalling Theo’s name and face?
10. Were you surprised when you found out that Kay used to have a drug problem?
11. How did you feel about the Original? What does he represent?
12. Mitchell tells us about the long history of puppets and their cultural significance. Why do you think so many cultures have made puppets for so long?

13. The Devil tries to persuade Kay to see the positive sides of puppet life: they have no hunger or thirst, no day-to-day anxieties, no heartbreak, sadness, hate, or jealousy. The only thing they are asked to do is perform. Do you think a life without these human needs and emotions would be better than life as you know it now?
14. While they are plotting their escape from the other puppets, Kay insists that Theo go first through the hole in the wall and that she will follow. Do you think she truly wanted to leave? Why or why not?

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