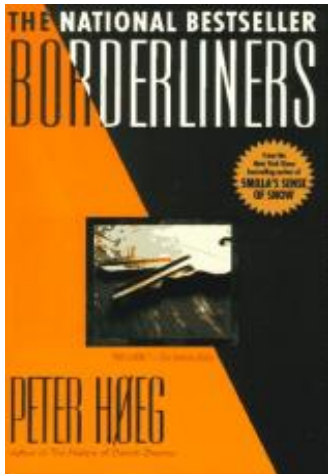


Borderliners

by Peter Høeg



About the Book

"What is time?" begins **Borderliners**, the story of Peter, a student at Biehl's Academy in the 1970s. A troubled youth who grew up in institutions, acceptance in Biehl's is Peter's last chance to join "normal" society. Immediately, Peter is drawn to the school's outsiders: Katarina, recently orphaned, with whom he has fallen in love; and August, a psychotic boy who murdered his parents after years of abuse. The three begin to realize that they and the other students at Biehl's are part of a bizarre, brutal experiment that alters their sense of time and will tragically change their lives forever.

Discussion Guide

1. In Chapter One, Biehl says, "When I speak, you should listen, first and foremost, to my pauses. They speak louder than my words." Discuss the role of silence in this book. How is silence used to invoke fear? How do the students use silence?
2. The children in *Borderliners*, Peter, Katarina, August--have lost their parents, or been abused and abandoned by them. How does this affect their attitudes toward authority figures, such as Biehl and Karin Aero? Are all adults portrayed as abusive? Why do you think in the end Peter decides he wants to be adopted?
3. Since the children have no parent figures, they must form attachments among themselves. Describe the nature of the friendships between Peter, Katarina, and August. What do they have in common? How do they communicate?
4. The two ravens on Biehl's wooden chest stand for Surveillance and Control. The school attempts to control the students with timetables, schedules, charts, and bells, and keeps them under constant surveillance this way. What kind of freedom can exist under surveillance? Discuss what the students do in order to be free, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Is knowledge freedom?

5. Biehl and other authority figures use corporal punishment in class to maintain order. What does this book say about the effectiveness of physical punishment, by teachers and by parents? How do the children react? Discuss whether control and power can ever be maintained this way.

6. The clock in *Borderliners* is a metaphor for the accuracy, or inaccuracy, of the universe. Discuss how the measurement of time is both precise and inarguable, like mathematics and science, and also creative and malleable, like a work of art. Does Peter see time as science, art or both?

7. Peter says you can set yourself free by helping others. Describe how he feels responsible for August and tries to help him. How does this compare to how Humlum tried to help Peter?

8. One of the themes in *Borderliners* is how we remember. Katarina says people remember their lives as a time line of events, except for when they are young, and then the past has no chronological order. Compare this to how August remembers his past and his parents. Discuss how *Borderliners* as a whole is the expression of Peter's memory. Does he remember chronologically. Does he choose to repress certain memories?

9. In the author's previous novel *Smilla's Sense of Snow*, snow and ice are central images. To what effect does the author use the cold, snowy Danish landscape in this novel? Discuss how environment can reflect the inner lives of characters. What other images does the author use throughout *Borderliners*?

10. Peter notes the difference between linear time and circular time. Discuss how the author incorporates both of these concepts into the narrative structure of *Borderliners*. Do you think the narrative is linear or circular? How does the author use Peter's memory to disrupt the narrative flow? Is this an effective technique?

11. Biehl has his own vision of the ideal school system, a place where marginal students--borderliners--coexist with students of higher ability. Discuss the implications of Biehl's plan. Is such a plan possible? How do his good intentions turn into tragedy?

12. Despite the fact that *Borderliners* is a novel of intellectual depth and discussion, it still contains a great deal of suspense. Discuss how the author maintains suspense throughout. What elements of mystery does he use to propel the plot? How does he continue this suspense after the climactic scene with August and Biehl?

13. In *Borderliners*, Peter notes that the German biologist Jakob von Uexkull says man is fundamentally alone. Describe how the author uses language and setting to achieve a sense of isolation in this novel. Also discuss whether Peter himself is truly alone. How does he build up barriers against people? How does he try to achieve intimacy? Is there a feeling of hope for him at the end of the novel? "*The Catcher in the Rye* meets *A Brief History of Time* in Peter Hoeg's *Borderliners*. Høeg makes it all brilliantly tormenting and philosophically haunting." --*Glamour* "An intriguing mystery tale... Høeg's second novel delivers a powerful punch." --*Entertainment Weekly*

Author Bio

Peter Høeg was born in Copenhagen, Denmark. Before becoming a writer, he worked variously as a sailor, ballet dancer, and actor. He published his first novel, *A HISTORY OF DANISH DREAMS* (1988), to positive reviews. However, it

was SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW (1992), a million-copy bestseller, that earned Høeg immediate and international literary celebrity. His books have been published in more than 30 countries.

Critical Praise

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