

Retrograde

a novel by Kat Hausler

<http://meerkatpress.com/books/retrograde/>

Book club discussion questions:

1. At what point should Joachim have told Helena the truth? How would that have changed the dynamics of their situation?
2. On page 235, Helena thinks of what has happened between them as “a meaningless disjointed episode, outside of time.” Do you think the period of time described in the book will ultimately be meaningless to Helena and Joachim, or that it will have changed things for them? If so, how?
3. Are Helena’s lies justified in light of Joachim’s dishonesty and her initial amnesia, or is she equally culpable?
4. Although the situation described in *Retrograde* is unusual, it addresses issues ordinary couples deal with such as trust, honest communication, struggling to break out of destructive patterns and dealing with past problems. In what ways does Helena’s amnesia change how they handle (or fail to handle) these issues? Is it the deciding factor, or would these ordinary issues have been enough to doom their relationship?
5. Joachim initially thinks of their situation as “a wonderful thing, an unbelievable thing, a chance most people don’t have in their entire lives” (44), but he and Helena become increasingly miserable over time. Could Helena’s accident have been a blessing in disguise if she and Joachim had done things differently?
6. On page 198, Helena thinks “The future, even the present, is brimming with possibilities, hundreds, thousands of decisions to make every hour. But there is only one possible past, and no one can change it.” Do you think changing how we think about or deal with the past can change things in the present?
7. In *Retrograde*, Joachim and Helena each temporarily believe they can go back and fix what went wrong. Was that ever really possible? Would editing out bad things that have happened be a desirable outcome, or would the characters be missing something in the present without those past experiences?
8. What role does a shared past, whether positive or negative, play in a relationship? Can a couple who has been together before ever truly start over?

9. What intentions drive the characters in this novel to keep secrets? When are they trying to spare each other's feelings, and when are they withholding information to have power over the other person, or because they themselves are unable to face the truth?
10. Long before she regains her memory, Helena has the feeling that "There's something cautious about [Joachim...] As if he were taking great care to avoid a certain subject" (48), yet she does little to find out the truth, just as she refused to discuss Esther's accusations with Joachim at the time. What are her motives for avoiding these discussions, and what has changed by the time she begins actively seeking information from Dagmar, Tobias and Ester?
11. Is what happens in the novel a result of not moving on from the past, or not having addressed it?

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