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# Reader's Guide

from Jordan Zandi  
 author of *Solarium*

## Author Asks:

1. If you've read *Solarium*, you've likely noticed that there's also a poem called "Solarium." One of the reasons I decided to use that poem's title for the book was because I felt it represented the governing spirit of the whole. What "spirit" visible in the rest of the book do you think it captures? How is it a good 'face' for the book?
2. I used a lot of different forms throughout *Solarium*, including prose poems, couplets, tercets, and sequences, among others. In the poem "Solarium," each section is a different form. I remember a friend once told me that it's better if sequence poems are formally consistent. Do you agree? Explain.
3. In his foreword to the book, Henri Cole writes the following:  
 "The poetry of earth is never dead," Keats wrote in his psychological sonnet "On the Grasshopper and Cricket," and with their muddy rivers, fecund fields, and train horns in the distance, Zandi's poems seem to bear this out.  
 What do you think he means? How might the poems "bear out" the message or messages in Keats's sonnet?
4. I broke the book into four different sections or movements. How do you feel each section differs? How do the epigraphs inform each one? If you had to give each section a name, what would they be?
5. Often throughout the book I have the speaker take on a child-like voice. What do you think are some of the limitations to such a voice? What are the benefits?
6. *Solarium* is punctuated throughout by a series of prose poems I associated together calling them each "On My [Something] Life." How do you think these poems work together or speak to one another?
7. I grew up in the rural Midwest, and I've always felt drawn to the outdoors and to animals. There are a lot of animals in this book, and the most frequently appearing one is a horse. What do you think the horse represents?
8. There's so much isolation and loneliness in the world of *Solarium* that sometimes I wondered how people would feel about the lack of interaction with a "real world" of political and social issues. Do you feel that this is a weakness in the book, or do you think it's okay? Or do you think pieces of art always make a political statement, regardless?

9. When I wrote the poems with the mother and father in them, I was not writing about my own parents. Knowing they're not autobiographical, what do you think they might represent?

10. I love to collect many fragments, to write fragments, to work in a collage style. Many of the poems in the book in fact come from two, or three, sometimes even four or five fragments or different poems I've put together and revised into one. Which poems do you think are most obviously made in this way? Which least?

11. This book has in its first line the phrase 'you got out,' which can mean 'exiting' but also 'extinguishing' and the book ends with 'dark as a wick.' Much is made throughout the book of light and darkness. What do you make of this repeated motif in beginning and end?

## Writing Exercises:

### A Storm, A Musical Instrument, and A Memory

I was given the following exercise (or one very close to it—it's been years) by Louise Glück, and it led to "Chamber Music."

Write a sequence poem of five different sections. It must contain a storm, a musical instrument and a memory. Its title must be a piece of music.

### Poem of Clichés

In *Ulysses*, James Joyce writes a section made almost entirely of clichés. You can feel free to tweak or combine them, but try writing a poem out of clichés. (I was trying to do this myself with the poem "The Gift Horse.")

### A Question, A Constellation, and "Circular"

Write a sequence poem with seven sections. However, you may only write one section each day. The poem must contain a question and a constellation, and it must have the word "circular" in it.



# Further Reading:

1. Wallace Stevens, *Harmonium*
2. Mark Strand, *Blizzard of One / Almost Invisible*
3. Wislawa Szymborska, *Calling Out to Yeti*
4. Louise Glück, *Averno*
5. Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*
6. Eugenio Montale, *Cuttlefish Bones*
7. Marianne Moore, *Selected Poems*
8. Federico Garcia Lorca, *Poet in New York*
9. Sylvia Plath, *The Colossus*
10. Hart Crane, *White Buildings*
11. Octavio Paz, *Eagle or Sun?*
12. Geoffrey Hill, *The Triumph of Love*
13. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
14. Dan Chiasson, *Natural History / Where's the Moon, There's the Moon*

