

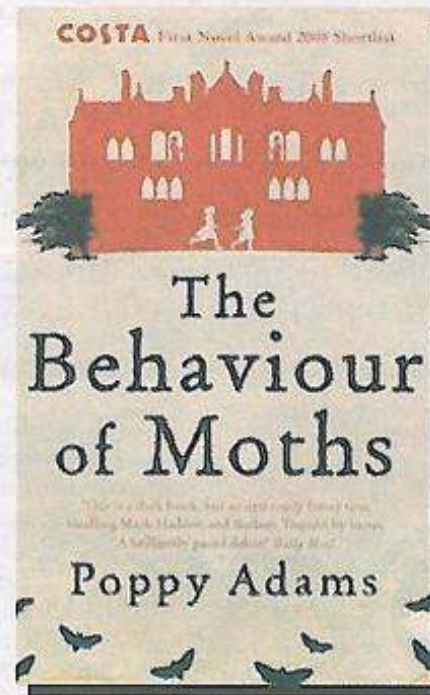
The Behaviour of Moths

By Poppy Adams
(Virago)

WHEN I FIRST picked up this book I wondered why anybody would want to read about how moths behave. But seeing that it was short-listed for the 2008 Costa First Novel Award piqued my interest.

The Behaviour of Moths, as the title suggests, takes the study of lepidoptery as its starting point, but it's the surrounding tale of madness and sibling rivalry, and the dangerous consequences of bending others to your will, that made me turn the pages of this debut novel by Poppy Adams.

Virginia (Ginny) and Vivien, born three years apart, are the offspring of Clive and Maud, and they have a happy childhood growing up in a vast and crumbling Victorian mansion. Vivien, the younger sibling, is an extrovert and flees the nest as soon as she can, while Ginny, the introverted reader, stays to carry on her father's research into the



lives of moths.

More than 40 years later Vivien returns to live with her, and Virginia soon discovers that the close-knit relationship between her and her sister was just a one-sided illusion, and any hopes of recapturing their idyllic past are shattered by Vivien's selfishness and determination to unravel the threads of their constructed realities.

In this unsettling story, Poppy Adams wants to expose the danger of uncompromising single-mindedness and obsession, and

how unspoken hurt can fester to become a prurient, dangerous weapon.

None more so is this evident than in the character of Ginny, who never lets her own opinions and desires get in the way of what others would rather have her say or do – yet she is single-minded, like her father, burying her hurts and desires in her work. She becomes a noted moth expert and achieves fame, but she also isolates herself from friend and foe alike, her quest for perfection turning to obsession, showing that the pursuit of any goal at the exclusion of all other things carries a high price.

The Behaviour of Moths is well written, with a sedate pace that belies the insidious, creeping madness behind the character's words and action that will make you to turn every page with goosebumps. Adams' sense of humour, masterly prose and powers of observation are a refreshing bonus.



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of *She Was Foolish?* More details about her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at www.irishwritersexchange.com