

Black Inc. Book Club Notes

TITLE: A World With No Shore

AUTHOR: H  l  ne Gaudy

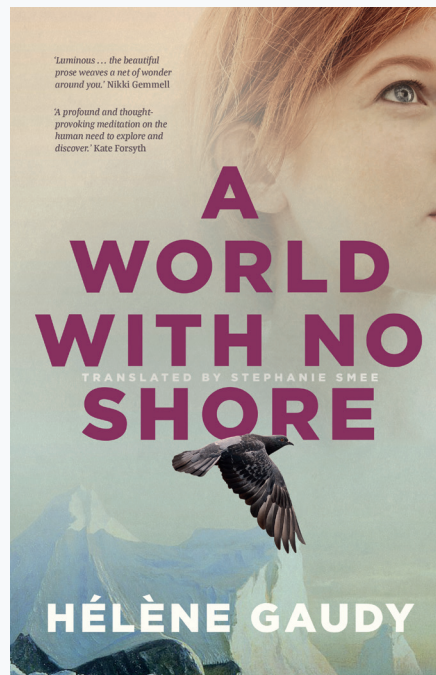
Translated by Stephanie Smee

Book description

I can't go with you. Spring 1897: Anna Charlier farewells her fianc   Nils, the explorer, as he sets off to conquer the world. She will endure many years of waiting and the unknown, will marry and move continents, but will never be able to forget.

Summer 1930, Svalbard, Norway: a walrus-hunting boat sets sail for White Island, one of the last lands before the North Pole. The melting ice has revealed terrain that is usually inaccessible. As they move across the island, the men discover bodies and the remains of a makeshift camp. It is the solution to a mystery that has hung in the air for thirty-three years: the disappearance in July 1897 of Salomon August Andr  e, Knut Fr  nkel and Nils Strindberg as they tried to reach the North Pole in a hydrogen balloon. Among the remains, some rolls of negatives are found and one hundred images are retrieved.

Based on these lunar-like black-and-white photographs and the expedition logbooks, H  l  ne Gaudy retraces and reimagines this great adventure that was blown off course, weaving in the painfully beautiful love affair between Nils and Anna. From the conquest of the skies to the exploration of the Poles, this haunting and brilliant award-winning novel, set in the ethereal landscape of the Arctic, reflects on the human need to discover, describe, conquer and ultimately shrink the world.



About the author

Born in Paris in 1979, H  l  ne Gaudy studied at L'  cole sup  rieure des arts d  coratifs de Strasbourg. She is a member of the Inculte collective and lives in Paris. She is the author of six novels and has also written some dozen books for children.



Black Inc. Book Club Notes

Discussion Points

1. Anna is remembered 'not because she was an engineer, an artist or a musician, because she had suffered a misfortune' (p. 15). How has the value society prescribes women changed? How has it stayed the same? How does Gaudy revive the various women in the text and subvert gender expectations?
2. What is your response to reading the descriptions of the way the Arctic is 'sold', as 'a piece of clay to be moulded, its black riches lying beneath the whiteness, waiting to be extracted, for under the snow, there is coal' (p. 19)? How is this relevant to contemporary attitudes of the environment?
3. Discuss how the book compares to other historical nonfiction and creative nonfiction works that you are familiar with. Does it fit neatly into either genre? Why/why not?
4. What makes a life 'worthy'? How is worth explored in relation to death, gender and ambition in the book?
5. What is the meaning of the story of the old woman and the church (p. 57–8)? What does it say about immortality, ambition, and our relationship with place?
6. How does Gaudy use the motif of photographic development to explore the way that the characters perceive themselves in the world, and the way we perceive them in that moment in time?
7. Why do you think the writer includes vignettes about minor and peripheral characters? How do each of them connect to the main narrative?
8. What would these explorers think if they were to wake up today? What would they do? How might they reflect on their earlier explorations?
9. Discuss the way that the writer uses white space increasingly towards the end of the book to enhance themes of isolation?
10. Towards the end of the book, Gaudy writes that we shall never see the images of their final days, and so we remember them as they had been. 'It is an image they will manage to construct, to the very end: this alternative vision of themselves, never entirely defeated, never quite done in, an image they maintain, upright and glistening, a screen between themselves and our imagination' (p. 189–190). What is the interplay between illusion and reality in the book?
11. Where is the writer present in the text? How does she signal her imaginative leaps, and does this make you trust her more or less? What is your response to the penultimate chapter of the book, where the narrative focuses on her directly?
12. Why tell this story now? What does this story reveal about our human compulsion to explore and conquer?