

# Black Inc. Book Club Notes

**TITLE:** Melting Moments

**AUTHOR:** Anna Goldsworthy

**ISBN:** 9781863959988

**PRICE:** \$29.99

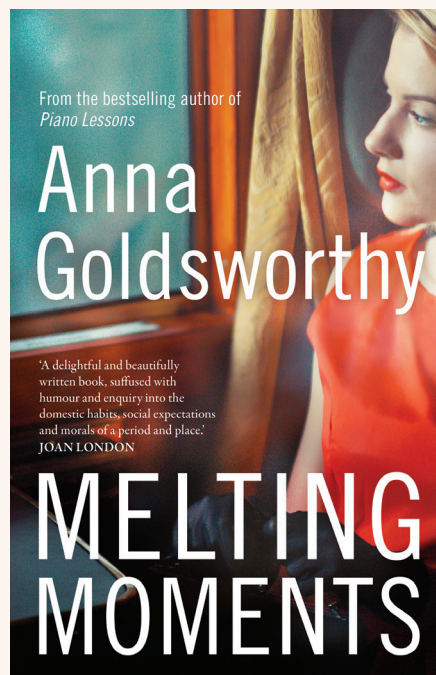
**SUBJECT:** Literary Fiction

## Book description

Sometimes events occur as one might wish but sometimes they do not.

So says the ever-practical Ruby, always striving for what is right and proper, from the time we meet her as a striking soldier's fiancée through to the rather less steady years of her old age. With an eyebrow pencil in one hand and gardening shears in the other, Ruby navigates the intervening years doing her duty as a woman, allowing marriage and motherhood to fill her with purpose and pleasure – and only occasionally wondering, *Is this all there is?*

In her moving, captivating fiction debut, award-winning author Anna Goldsworthy recreates Adelaide and Melbourne of half a century ago, bringing a family to life as they move through the decades, challenging and caring for and loving one another, often in surprising ways. Charming and sharply observed, *Melting Moments* is, like Ruby herself, a gentle powerhouse.



## About the author

Anna Goldsworthy is the award-winning author of *Piano Lessons*, *Welcome to Your New Life* and the Quarterly Essay *Unfinished Business: Sex, Freedom and Misogyny*. Her writing has appeared in *The Monthly*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, the *Adelaide Review* and *The Best Australian Essays*. She is also a concert pianist, with several recordings to her name, and a lecturer at the Elder Conservatorium of Music.



# Black Inc. Book Club Notes

## Quotes

'A delightful and beautifully written book, suffused with humour and enquiry into the domestic habits, social expectations and morals of a period and place.'

—**JOAN LONDON**

'*Melting Moments* is a quiet masterpiece. An intimate portrait and celebration of the interior life of a woman who is a dutiful daughter, wife and mother, it is certain to become an Australian classic.' —**ALEX MILLER**

'A tender evocation of times past, and a subtle, elegant portrait of one woman's life and loves as she grows and adapts to a changing world.' —**CERIDWEN DOVEY**

'An example of the way in which a work of fiction, which is by its definition made up, can sometimes be nonetheless exquisitely true.' —**LOUISE SWINN, THE SATURDAY PAPER**

'A skilful blend of wit and pathos ... There is much to enjoy in this accomplished novel: resonant moments of tenderness or acerbic observations; the contradictions and complexities of character; and a stylistic poise that makes the writing feel uniformly, deceptively effortless.'

—**AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW**

'Goldsworthy is a superb writer and an exceptional observer of human nature ... Even as she beautifully renders, with restraint and insight, Ruby's specific story and era, there is a timelessness to this novel and its concern with women's lives and desires.' —**READINGS**

'[A] charming novel ... a sensitive and insightful account of a middle-class woman living in the suburbia of her time.' —**ARTSHUB**

'A generous and vivid picture of the microscopic details of so many women's lives ... a feminist document of a particularly penetrating kind.' —**CARMEL BIRD, THE AUSTRALIAN**

## Discussion Points

1. 'There is comfort in the fact of all the husbands packed into their offices, of the wives and babies in their modern homes. Everyone in their rightful place, guaranteeing the safe stewardship of the world.' (p.63) What are the social expectations that shape Ruby's early life and indeed all women in the early 20th century?
2. The book covers almost all of Ruby's adult life. What do you think of the structure of the book? Did you find the inclusion of Ruby's internal dialogue helpful in understanding her decisions?
3. When Ruby has a brief encounter with Bill in a dance hall cloakroom, we find that she 'has never quite believed in falling in love. Surely it is a decision rather than an accident. A dive, rather than a fall.' What does this tell us about the way Ruby sees romantic love?
4. Discuss the idea of 'the path not taken' and how this has affected Ruby's life. What might her life have looked like if she had made different choices?
5. In part two of the book, Ruby takes her daughter, Eva, to see the head teacher at the Ladies College where Eva's education is being hindered by sexist ideologies. Given what we know about Ruby and the importance she puts on being 'proper' and a woman's role in society, were you surprised at Ruby's decision to take Eva out of the school? Why do you think she made that choice?
6. The book shows us three generations of Australian women. How do their lives differ and what role does feminism play in each? Do you consider this a feminist story?
7. How does Ruby react to Eva's decision to join the Armed Forces? Discuss Ruby's hopes for Eva, and how these conflict with or are constrained by her own life decisions.

# Black Inc. Book Club Notes

8. In part three of the book, when Eva tells Ruby her husband is having an affair, Ruby is internally enraged but tells Eva, 'We've never had a divorce in the family before. Don't forget that men have their needs. Sometimes we all need to find it in our hearts to forgive.' What is this idea of protecting the family name? Who does it protect, more often than not?

9. Throughout her life, Ruby returns often to the memory of a fleeting moment with Bill. In part three, her feeling of regret is described 'As if she had missed a summons. As if she had somehow misplaced her life.' Then, immediately, we have the dismissal of the idea with 'It was all nothing, really. It was just a look.' This is a common turnaround in Ruby's reactions and thinking throughout the book. What does it say about the ways in which women are taught to repress their desires and hopes?

10. On page 222, toward the end of the book, Ruby is frustrated at Bill's insistence that the neighbour likes him and says, 'For Pete's sake! What does it even matter what she or anyone else thinks? We've got our own lives to live.' What change has happened in Ruby's way of thinking that elicits this response?

11. After Ruby's long married life with Arthur, the end of the book sees her develop a relationship with Bill that has a very different dynamic. Ruby is frustrated by Bill's weaknesses, stating that as a woman, wife, and mother, she had always maintained her side of the bargain: 'There was never any weakness in it; she would not have allowed it in the door.' Discuss the dichotomy of societal expectations of women to be at once demure and submissive, but also strong and resilient.

12. Where does Ruby try to find happiness throughout the book? How does her relationship with her daughter shape her later life?

13. Do you think the book gives an accurate account of a middle-class woman living in the suburbia of her time? Do you see Ruby in the lives of women you know, or in aspects of your own life?