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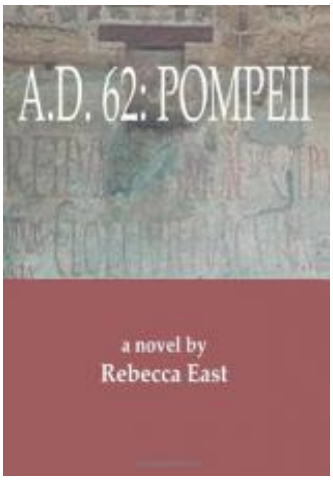
# A. D. 62: Pompeii: A Novel

by Rebecca East




## About the Book

A twenty-first century woman is stranded in first century Pompeii when a time travel experiment goes awry; she is sold to a wealthy family as a house slave. This provides her with an intimate, upstairs/downstairs perspective on household life in ancient times. At first she does menial work, but she improves her situation by telling stories and making prophecies. As her influence grows, she wins the love of her master and his daughter and provokes the vengeful jealousy of his wife.

In this gentle fable about the power of stories to change people's lives, the heroine uses sources that include fairy tales and great works of literature to argue for womens rights and the humanity of slaves, and to inspire herself and others to be resourceful, courageous and independent. Miranda's own life becomes as mythic as the stories she tells. In a narrative that is part adventure, part romance, and part fantasy, the heroine triumphs over adversity and makes a place for herself in the world of the past.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Why does Miranda feel so out of place in the modern world? What is she looking for at the beginning of her journey?

**2.** If you could escape to another time, or another place - what era, or what culture, would you choose? Why?

**3.** Early in the story, Demetrius becomes Miranda's informant and guide. Did their relationship develop in the way that you expected?

**4.** Why is the cutting off of Miranda's hair significant? How does this event help to establish her status in the household, and her relationships with other women in the household?

**5.** Miranda struggles with two issues in her relationship with Marcus: the slave/ master relationship involves intimacy, but it also involves an extreme inequality of power. How does she feel about this inequality? What other kinds of relationships involve inequalities of power along with intimacy? What relationship problems arise when there is an inequality of power?

**6.** Did you feel that this story ignored or minimized many of the problems of slavery? (Another time travel novel about slavery is Olivia Butler's "Kindred"; the heroine of that novel has much more painful experiences as a slave).

**7.** In many respects this novel is a "fairy tale for grownups", that is, it uses storytelling conventions that are familiar from childhood fairy tales. What features of this story reminded you of fairy tales?

**8.** There are numerous stories within this story. How does the story of Dick Whittington's Cat foreshadow events in Miranda's own life? What messages does Miranda try to convey when she tells her master the Hans Christian Anderson story of The Nightingale? The legend of the Selkies? Is Marcus always receptive to these messages? Could you think of other stories that might have served Miranda's purposes better, or perhaps guided events in different directions?

**9.** What thematic repetitions occur in the story? (For example, what types of rings are used throughout the story to symbolize different types of relationships? In what ways is Miranda a "daughter of Neptune"?)

**10.** In the end, did Miranda find what she was searching for? Is she ambivalent about her decision? Did the end of the story seem natural to you? Why or why not? What choice would you make, if you were in Miranda's situation?

## Author Bio

Rebecca East was born in Yakima, Washington in 1951, and grew up in a mill town in western Pennsylvania. She has a BA from Carnegie-Mellon University and a PhD from Harvard. She now teaches at a university in New England. Her experiences include volunteer work at an archaeological dig in Scotland, social service with the American Friends Service Committee, lectures at a university in China as a visiting foreign scholar, consulting for the World Health Organization in Geneva, and participation in Project Orbis missions to Cyprus, Swaziland, and Malawi. She spent a substantial amount of time walking around the Pompeii excavation. Fascination with the idea of experiencing Pompeii as a living city led her to read extensively about ancient Roman life and to write this first novel.

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