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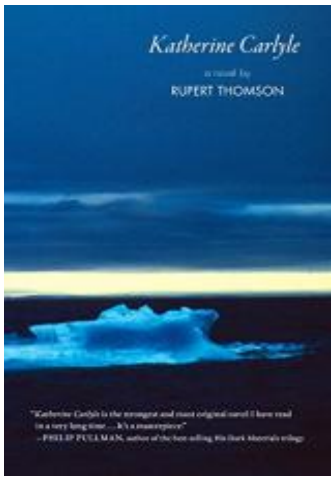
Katherine Carlyle

by Rupert Thomson



About the Book

KATHERINE CARLYLE is Rupert Thomson?s breakthrough novel. Written in the beautifully spare, lucid and cinematic prose Thomson is known for, and powered by his natural gift for storytelling, it uses the modern techniques of IVF to throw new light on the myth of origins. It is a profound and moving novel about identity, the search for personal meaning, and how we are loved.

Unmoored by her mother?s death and feeling her father to be an increasingly distant figure, Katherine Carlyle abandons the set course of her life and starts out on a mysterious journey to the ends of the world. Instead of going to college, she disappears, telling no one where she has gone. What begins as an attempt to punish her father for his absence gradually becomes a testing ground of his love for her, a coming-to-terms with the death of her mother, and finally the mise-en-scène for a courageous leap to true empowerment.

Discussion Guide

1. On page 64 Katherine muses, ?My disappearance is like a crime without a motive.? Why do you think she goes on this journey? Does Katherine ever articulate why she leaves her life behind and heads north?

2. Katherine remembers her mother reassuring her that her death isn?t her fault, then explains ?That last exchange didn?t happen? (p 212). What is the space between memory and imagination in KATHERINE CARLYLE, and what is Katherine?s relationship to each?

3. Discuss Katherine?s views on and relationships with men. How does each of the men she encounters on her journey compare to her father --- how she describes him, and her relationship with him?

4. Katherine makes several references to Antonioni?s *The Passenger* (see pp 11, 248, 292). Do you think Katherine?s

imagination and understanding of her world is shaped by film, and if so, how?

5. What kind of a narrator is Katherine? What is the effect of having the story of her journey told in her voice and from her point of view?

6. In what ways does Katherine?s journey to the north mirror the journey of Mary Shelley?s monster in FRANKENSTEIN? Are there any other similarities between the two novels?

7. Do you think the relationship between Katherine and her mother is idealized?

8. Katherine describes the painting in Klaus?s apartment as ?Glossy, smooth, and two-dimensional, its subject is the surface --- the power of the superficial --- but at the same time it?s an exercise in concealment, inscrutability? (p 110). What is the significance of the painting?

9. Throughout the novel Katherine displays an awareness of the power dynamics between her and the people she meets, asking ?Is it any wonder I feel powerful?? (p 253). Do you think Katherine actually holds any power? Why does Katherine believe she is powerful, and how is that displayed in the story she tells? Are there moments in which Katherine is stripped of power? If so, what characterizes those moments?

10. Katherine often imagines her father?s reaction to her disappearance (see ?My father calls, and I don?t answer? p 36; ?My father will contact my friends? p 100; ?My father might fly to Russia? p 183; ?My father has arrived by ship? p287). What do her envisioned scenarios reveal about her desires and fears?

11. How does Katherine change over the course of the novel?

12. What was your reaction to the ending, and did it make you recall anything that had previously happened?

Author Bio

Rupert Thomson is the author of more than a dozen acclaimed novels, including KATHERINE CARLYLE; SECRECY; THE INSULT, which was shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Prize and selected by David Bowie as one of his 100 Must-Read Books of All Time; THE BOOK OF REVELATION, which was made into a feature film by Ana Kokkinos; and DEATH OF A MURDERER, which was shortlisted for the Costa Novel of the Year Award. His memoir, THE PARTY'S GOT TO STOP, was named Writers? Guild Non-Fiction Book of the Year. He lives in London.

Critical Praise

"Elegant...[with] poised and crystalline prose that piles lovely sentence atop lovely sentence...a story told with authority about a bold woman."

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