



Reader's Guide



Other novels by Jenny Erpenbeck
The Old Child & The Book of Words (2008)
Visitation (2010)
The End of Days (2014)

Go, Went, Gone Jenny Erpenbeck

Translated by Susan Bernofsky

Portobello Books

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About the author

Jenny Erpenbeck was born in Berlin, Germany, in March 1967. She is the author of *The Old Child & The Book of Words* (2008), *Visitation* (2010) and *The End of Days* (2014, winner of the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize), all published by Portobello. Her fiction is published in 14 languages.

About the translator

Susan Bernofksy was born in Cleveland, USA, in July 1966. She has translated works by Robert Walser, Hermann Hesse, Gregor von Rezzori, Yoko Tawada, Ludwig Harig and Franz Kafka. She is the author of *Foreign Words: Translator-Authors in the Age of Goethe* and is currently at work on a biography of Robert Walser. Her translation of *The Old Child and Other Stories* was awarded the 2006 Helen and Kurt Wolff Translator's Prize.

About the book

Newly retired Richard is considering his new life without his work as a university professor. He spends his days cooking, pottering in his garden and walking around his home city of Berlin – a place he has lived his entire life. Following an excursion to Alexanderplatz he befriends a group of African men whose camp is being pulled down by the authorities. These asylum seekers have found their way to Berlin from all over Africa by way of Libya and then Italy. They have no 'right' to be in Berlin, and they must follow the protocols and rules if they have any hope in being allowed to remain.

Richard is captivated by their stories and by their predicament. Born during World War II, he was almost lost as a baby due to the 'chaos of war'. He grew up and worked in East Berlin until one day East and West unified and his home and horizons changed dramatically. *Go, Went, Gone* is a novel that explores some of the most important issues of the day of race, immigration and the question of European identity.

Discussion points

The protagonist, Richard, is living a comfortable if uninspiring life at the start of the novel. What is the catalyst for change?

Before engaging with the refugees, Richard creates a list of questions he wants to ask them – what does his approach tell you about him?

The African refugees protest under a sign saying "We become visible". Discuss the visibility of refugees both here and abroad.

Erpenbeck conducted many hours of interviews with refugees to inform her storytelling – did this research shine through in the narrative?

Themed reading

Mohsin Hamid *Exit West*

Emma Jane Kirby *The Optician of Lampedusa*

Patrick Kingsley *The New Odyssey*

Chris Cleave *Little Bee*

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/23/go-went-gone-review-jenny-erpenbeck>

<http://www.dw.com/en/jenny-erpenbeck-what-happens-when-youre-only-seen-as-a-refugee/a-18727533>

<https://www.ft.com/content/ded53f96-8cc8-11e7-9580-c651950d3672>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/25/a-novelists-powerful-response-to-the-refugee-crisis>