

She Rises

by Kate Worsley

Sarah Waters meets Carol Birch in a breath-taking story of love, adventure, and identity.

About the book

It is 1740 and Louise Fletcher, a young dairymaid on an Essex farm, has been warned of the lure of the sea for as long as she can remember after all, it stole away her father and brother. But when she is offered work in the bustling naval port of Harwich, as maid to a wealthy captain's daughter, she leaps at the chance to see more of the world. There she meets Rebecca, her haughty young mistress, who is unlike anyone Louise has encountered before: as unexpected as she is fascinating.

Fifteen year old Luke is drinking in a Harwich tavern when it is raided by His Majesty's Navy. Unable to escape, Luke is beaten and press-ganged and sent to sea on board the warship Essex. He must learn fast and choose his friends well if he is to survive the brutal hardships of a sailor's life and its many dangers, both up high in the rigging and in the dark below decks.

Louise navigates her new life among the streets and crooked alleys of Harwich, where fine houses concealing smugglers' tunnels are flooded by the Spring tides, and love burns brightly in the shadows. And Luke, aching for the girl he left behind and determined to one day find his way back to her, embarks on a long and perilous journey across the ocean.

The worlds they find are more dangerous and more exciting than they could ever have imagined, and when they collide the consequences are astonishing and irrevocable.

A breathtakingly accomplished love story and a gripping search for identity and survival, *She Rises* is a bold, brilliant and original novel.

About the Author

Kate Worsley was born in Preston, Lancashire, and studied English at University College London. She has worked variously as a journalist, a massage practitioner and follow-spot operator, and has an MA in Creative Writing (Novels) from City University London, where she was mentored by Sarah Waters. She now lives on the Essex coast. *She Rises* is her first novel.

Discussion

- 1) 'Harwich is a wicked place.' (p.23) What kind of town is Harwich? What impressions does it give the reader of seafaring towns in the 1700s?
- 2) 'She wanted us girls up and away and out of sight of the glinting waters. She hoped that the land would hold us fast' (p.19). How are the lives of women affected by press-ganging and the Navy?

- 3) When Louise first becomes Rebecca's maid, she is bewildered by Rebecca's flirtatious and mischievous behaviour, but is, nevertheless, drawn to her. Why does Louise fall in love with Rebecca?
- 4) As the novel unfolds, the stories of Luke and Louise gradually merge. When you discover that they are the same person, how does this change your understanding of Luke's experiences on *The Essex*? How does the novel engage with ideas of identity?
- 5) Romantic and sexual love spills over the boundaries of heterosexual or homosexual relationships in *She Rises*. How would you describe the relationship between Rebecca and Louise?
- 6) 'And over and over for years to come, he will ask himself: why did I not tell the truth?' (p. 56) When Louise/Luke is press-ganged into the navy, why does she not reveal herself?
- 7) Nick Stavanger is described as Luke's 'Sea Daddy'. Discuss the intimate friendship between Luke and Nick. Why do they become so close?
- 8) What do we learn from the character of Powell about press-ganging and life in the Navy? What is the impact of Powell's death upon the reader?
- 9) After Furness dies, the men on *The Essex* turn against Nick. Discuss the dynamics on board the ship. Do you agree with the men's stance?
- 10) 'It made her weep to think how many fathers and brothers and sons had been drawn away by the moon and the tides and the winds ... the sea never gives them up once she's got them' (p. 19). What is the lure of the sea in *She Rises*? How does the sea take hold of Louise/Luke?
- 11) When Louise/Luke escapes from *The Essex*, she no longer feels able to act a woman. After she is reunited with Rebecca in Ipswich, she tells Rebecca never to call her Lou again. How does Louise/Luke's gender shift and change throughout the novel? How does the relationship between Rebecca and Louise/Luke change?
- 12) At the end of the novel Louise/Luke longs for the sea. Instead of dwelling on her happy experiences on the merchant ship, *The Gemini*, she thinks about her tumultuous experiences on *The Essex*. Why does she miss *The Essex* more?
- 13) At the end of the novel Louise/Luke wades into the sea at night. She goes back inside and, finding Rebecca asleep, goes back out to the sea. The tide has begun to pull out and Louise/Luke can almost reach one of the skiffs. 'I didn't wake you. I am very sorry now that I didn't wake you' (p. 14) Why do you think Louise/Luke regrets not waking Rebecca? Do you feel that this was a suitable way to end the novel?