



Clear

By Nicola Barker
ISBN: 9780060797577

Introduction

In September of 2003, illusionist David Blaine climbed inside a Perspex box, suspended from a crane by the Thames, for the beginning of what would be a 44 day fast. Over the course of his disturbing exhibit, a country would become fixated by Blaine: his purpose, his meaning, and whether he represented all that was good in this world, or everything that was wrong. Amidst the media frenzy and the chaos below, one man, Adair Graham MacKenny, struggles to find meaning not only in Blaine's life, but in his own life and in the lives of others. Raucous and outrageous, **Clear** provides an honest look at our modern world, where celebrity brings out the best and worst in humankind, and where illusions are not just magic tricks, but part of the mysteries of life.

Questions for Discussion

1. There are characters in the novel who believe David Blaine represents everything good, and those who believe Blaine represents everything bad. Why does Adair's opinion of the illusionist flip-flop throughout the novel?
2. The "Insiders" love David Blaine and the "Outsiders" hate him. Bly says it's "because he's a blank canvas. He's transparent. He's Clear. So when people look up at him they don't hate what he is. They project everything they're feeling on to him ... He's like a mirror in which people can see the very best and the very worst of themselves" [pg 311]. How, then, are Adair, Aphra, and Solomon's opinions of Blaine a reflection of their own selves?
3. While David Blaine starves himself, Aphra cooks up delicacies for her dying husband who is not allowed to eat. Do you feel Aphra sees her dying husband in David Blaine's exhibit?
4. Hunger artists fast for 40 days. Do you believe David Blaine and other hunger artists choose the 40 day mark for its religious significance, or because, as Adair points out, it's as long as the media is going to pay attention to them? Or maybe because it's the absolute limit a human body can endure?
5. Why is Solomon so outraged when the media uncovers Rasket's connection to the white music teacher? Is his anger racially motivated, or is he actually disillusioned? Is Rasket just another "illusionist" then?
6. Do you believe David Blaine tried to make a connection between his starving artist act and the Holocaust? Are they connected in any way? If so, how?
7. How does the novel explore art and capitalism, and the fine line that separates them? Do you believe David Blaine's magic is art or capitalism?
8. Hilary predicts the future, Aphra can tell everything about people through her sense of smell. Is David Blaine any more spectacular than some of the average people watching him?
9. Despite his hostility to Jalisa, Solomon is devastated when they break up. Why? Is Solomon threatened by Jalisa?
10. How are Shane and David Blaine alike? What is their connection in the novel?
11. Is Aphra a negative or a positive influence on Adair's life?
12. Why does Adair return night after night to read to Brandy Leyland? Does Adair sympathize with this dying man or is it part of his obsession with Aphra?
13. Adair takes pains to point out what he doesn't like about Aphra in the beginning, but slowly becomes more and more drawn to her. Why does Adair become so obsessed with Aphra?

About the Author

Nicola Barker's previous books include **Behindlings**; **The Three Button Trick**, **Other Stores**, and **Wide Open**. She lives in London.