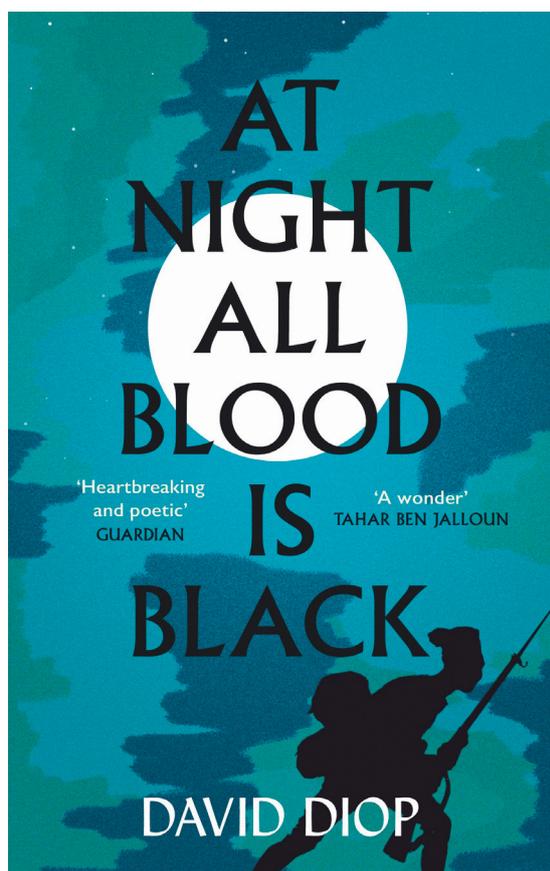




From Judging Room to Living Room A Discussion Guide for Readers



At Night All Blood Is Black

David Diop

Translated from French by Anna Moschovakis

Pushkin Press

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What the judges decided

‘Horrible, cruel and continually present in the action it describes, it is partly a personal report from the front in the first world war by a traumatised Senegalese soldier. Like nothing else in terms of tone and power, it is a blinding revelation, an incantatory work of kinship and terror.’

What the judges discussed: ideas to explore

- The trauma and brutal inhumanity of war drive people mad. How is that represented in *At Night All Blood Is Black*?
- Although it is called the ‘First World War’, many people think of the 1914-18 conflict as being a European war, fought in the trenches that stretched from the North Sea coast of Belgium southward through France. What does *At Night All Blood Is Black* tell us about the 135,000 troops who came from Senegal to fight for the French, and of whom 30,000 were killed?
- Novels that require a lot of research often fail. Why is that? And why is it not the case in this instance?
- The judges thought this was an ‘astonishing’ book. In the end, *At Night All Blood Is Black* becomes a ghost story. Why is this so effective?
- The novel is written in French, but Alfa Ndiaye, the main character, speaks Wolof, a language spoken in Senegal. How do both the writer and the translator carry that dichotomy across in English?
- The judges thought this was a profoundly anti-war book, but it never has an agenda. What, then, drives the narrative?

About the book

At Night All Blood Is Black captures the tragedy of a young man’s mind hurtling towards madness and tells the little-known story of the Senegalese who fought for France on the Western Front during the First World War.

Alfa Ndiaye and Mademba Diop are two of the many Senegalese tirailleurs fighting in the Great War under the French flag. Whenever Captain Armand blows his whistle they climb out of their trenches to attack the blue-eyed enemy. But one day Mademba is mortally wounded, and without his friend, his more-than-brother, Alfa, is alone amidst the savagery of the trenches, far from all he knows and holds dear. He throws himself into combat with renewed vigour, but soon begins to scare even his own comrades in arms.

About the author and translator

David Diop was born in February 1966 in Paris, France, and grew up in Senegal. He now lives in France, where he is a professor of 18th-century literature at the University of Pau. *At Night All Blood Is Black* is Diop’s second novel. It was shortlisted for ten major prizes in France and won the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens as well as the Swiss Prix Ahmadou Korouma. It is currently being translated into 13 languages and has already won the Strega European Prize in Italy. Diop’s novels in French include *1889*, *l’Attraction universelle* and *Rhétorique nègre au xviiiè siècle*.

Anna Moschovakis was born in September 1970 in Los Angeles, California, USA. She is a poet, author and translator, whose works include the James Laughlin Award-winning poetry collection *You and Three Others Are Approaching a Lake* and a novel, *Eleanor: or, The Rejection of the Progress of Love*. Her translations from French include Albert Cossery’s *The Jokers*, Annie Ernaux’s *The Possession*, and Bresson on Bresson. She lives in South Kortright, New York.

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The author says...

'I didn't want Alfa Ndiaye, the main character of my novel, to be a French speaker. I translated his thoughts into French, but I also wanted the reader to understand, thanks to the rhythm of the language I used, that Alfa was thinking in Wolof, a language spoken in Senegal. Like every language, Wolof has its own rhythm, its own unique patterns of speech, which I replicated in French through the repetition of certain phrases and constructions. The great challenge for my translator Anna Moschovakis, and her great success, was to reproduce this same rhythm in the English language, so that the reader would understand that the text is haunted by an African voice.'



The translator says...

'In countless self-evident ways Alfa's experiences are distant from my own, but elements of his psychic torment as he tries to think himself out of impossible conditions felt familiar. So some of the terror I was able to experience intimately, while much of it I could feel only at an angle — a cruel and uncomfortable angle of colonial histories, racism, gender difference, and language dominance. I think this is one of the most remarkable accomplishments of the novel: how it brings each reader's position/s up against different elements of Alfa's narration, creating a unique, in some cases possibly necessary, horror.'