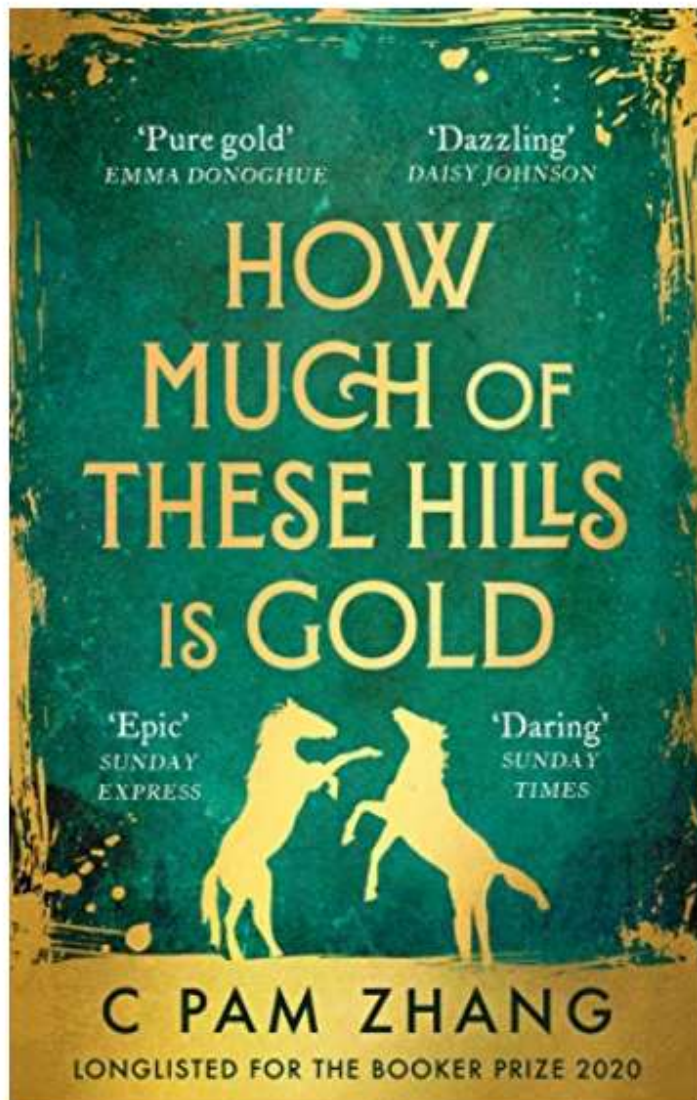


November 2021



November's book was *How Much of These Hills is Gold* by C Pam Zhang.

This novel tells the story of two orphans, Lucy and Sam, who are roaming a hostile landscape in the hills of Northern California with the remains of their dead father stowed in a trunk strapped across their horse's back. During their trek, the two siblings recall events from their family's past and their attempts to prospect for gold that always ended in tragedy. The novel spans the years between 1842 and 1867.

Lucy and Sam are American born but are of Chinese descent. Sam was born a girl but identifies as male. Their father, Ba, was an unsuccessful gold prospector who never gave up his dream of striking it

rich, and briefly succeeded at mining a deposit of gold before the family's wealth was stolen by greedy townsfolk. The children's mother died giving birth to a stillborn son.

After many setbacks, the siblings finally find a place to bury their father. Once this task is completed, the narration shifts to Ba, who tells a different tale of the family's past from the one Lucy believes to be true. Among other revelations, Ba reveals that the children's mother didn't die in childbirth, but stole the family's last piece of gold to make her escape, leaving Ba to hold the family together as best as he could.

Lucy's narrative continues after she and Sam part ways. She drifts through life, first as a laundress, then as the friend of a rich girl. Sam returns years later and explains that he struck gold, which was then stolen by some white men who are now pursuing him because he stole it back. The siblings flee to San Francisco, where Lucy puts Sam on a ship bound for China. The gold men catch up with Lucy, who then works as a prostitute to pay off Sam's debt. When she is released from her obligation a year later, she still doesn't know what she wants or where to find a true home.

The novel explores race and the question of where immigrants are allowed to belong. Alongside Lucy and Sam's family story are the stories of the genocide and persecution of Native Americans, the colonisation of the West and the exploitation of the land by desperate settlers and greedy opportunists.

During discussion there were comments about the quality and style of the writing (this is a debut novel for the writer). Some members felt that the writer had been too ambitious and not quite pulled it off with this novel, though some liked her use of imagery (specifically, the tiger) and her inclusion of the Chinese language throughout the book.

While some of the group appreciated the writer's ability to convey the hostility and vastness of the landscape, overall the novel was considered quite bleak, and the ending unsatisfying.

Ratings: Lynda, Janet and Viv 2.5 Nicola, Pauline and Margie 3 and Dianne and Di 3.5.

Next month we'll get together 13/12 at 6:30pm to celebrate a great year of reading. We will be back 10/01/22 to discuss *The rain before it falls* by Johnathan Coe hope to see you there and Happy Reading!

Gold Coast Book Lovers

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Other Books We Read

November 2021

Boy Swallows Universe by Trent Dalton, 2.5

Dark as Last Night by Tony Birch, 3.5

Beautiful World, Where are You by Sally Rooney, 3.5

Oh William by Elizabeth Strout, 4

Mad Bad and Dangerous to know, the fathers of Wilde Yeats and Joyce by Colm Toibin, 4

Nightingale by Kristin Hannah, 2.5

Checkmate in Berlin by Giles Milton, 4

Hope Adventures of a Diamond by Marion Fowler, 3

Still Life by Sarah Winman, 3.5

Vida by Jacqueline Kent, 3.5