



## ★ **The Blue Book of Nebo**

**Manon Steffan Ros**

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Reminiscent of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Manon Steffan Ros's *The Blue Book of Nebo* is an elegant, elegiac novel that tempers the enormity of nuclear Armageddon with personal, intimate relationships.

Rowenna and her fourteen-year-old son Dylan survive a transatlantic nuclear apocalypse in the Welsh hinterlands. The harrowing details of some of the after effects are present, but their feelings of love still bloom: for a mutated pet rabbit; for a sickly girl whom Rowenna gives birth to, even though neighbors and men are scarce. And the primeval beauty of the Welsh landscape speaks to the devastation of life returned to a primitive point, without electricity or running water. Rowenna and Dylan have to catch, trap, or grow their food.

Written with narrative economy and supreme tonal control, the story is told from Rowenna and Dylan's interpellated perspectives, as both jot down their thoughts about the events that happened before and after The End in a notebook that Rowenna found in a raid of people's houses in Nebo. Silence dominates their daily life, because "there aren't any words that fit"; the notebook allows for their secrets to be expressed, including the secrets of who Dylan and Mona's fathers are.

As the novel juxtaposes Dylan's simple understandings of the world with the poetic ellipses in Rowenna's thoughts, language itself becomes a metaphor for what makes people human. Written in Welsh (and subsequently translated into English by Ros herself), the novel *The Blue Book of Nebo* brilliantly highlights how Welsh as a disappearing language becomes synonymous with vanishing civilization. A starkness prevails in everyday facts, and death is unavoidable, but within these harrowing confines of life and language, hope survives in all the silent spaces.

ELAINE CHIEW (September / October 2021)

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