

Vendela Vida, *Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name*

(London: Atlantic Books, 2007) pp.256.

Reviewed by ELENI CHELIOTI

Vendela Vida's *Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name* is the first adults' fiction novel that I've read in a very long time, mainly due to my re-developing passion for children's literature. The first thing that caught my attention about the book was the physical characteristics of its cover: its striking title had the words "Northern Lights" pulled out from the page, calling to the reader, printed in a vibrant blue. These words anticipate the surface attractions of the book's story, which are so compelling that two days later, after having finished the book, I found myself returning to its pages.

One mesmerizing element of the book is, without a doubt, its brutal honesty. This honesty is a reflection of the strange openness of its author's narrative technique. The entire book is written in the first person as the author's distinct voice mixes with the narrator's uniqueness of style to thus embody in the book's heroine, Clarissa Iverton, with a life on the page. The story begins as Clarissa arrives at Helsinki airport on a quest to determine the identity of her father. The book's plot twists and turns as she becomes caught in an intrigue that lands her on the doorstep of her mother, a figure who deserted Clarissa and Clarissa's father when the former was only fourteen years old. Now, fourteen years later, upon losing her father, the story ends upon a note of discovery: Clarissa makes the realization that her supposed father was not her biological father, an understanding her fiancé has apparently known all along.

The novel is divided into ten sections, each section containing anywhere from six to twenty-four sub-sections. Chronologically, it follows a linear projection that is frequently interrupted as narrative events trigger emotional flashbacks in Clarissa:

Shortly after I settled into my room, the phone stuttered a staccato cry, far from an American brrring. It was Kari telling me he'd be getting off work in an hour. "You'd like to join me in the lobby for a drink?" he asked. I said yes in part out of relief that the call wasn't from Pankaj, my fiancé. My fiancé still? I was no longer sure. Recently, everything around me felt familiar yet amiss, like the first time you ride in the back seat of your own car. (4)

Despite the first-person narration, this novel does not read like a diary. The frank style is such that it seems as if the heroine is recounting her story to her listener face-to-face, and includes every thought, concern and fear, every minute detail that she remembers from the incidents of quest. Clarissa is first seen as disappointed, bitter and empty inside yet this is a beginning state within her transformation. It is through observing the vivid rendering of the narrator's emotional metamorphosis wherein the pleasure of this novel lies. Vendela Vida's *Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name* is a pleasure to read.