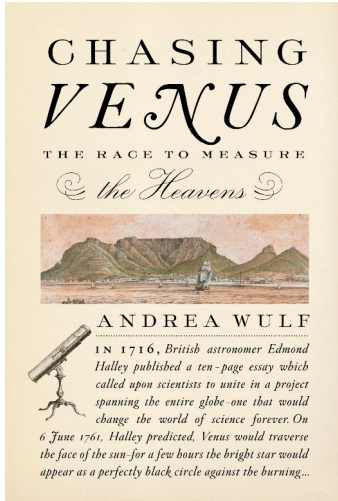


November 2014



Reading Guide: *Chasing Venus: The Race to Measure the Heavens* by Andrea Wulf (2012)

1. After reading the entire book, do you agree with the following statement in the prologue (page xviii)? “The race to observe and measure the transit of Venus was a pivotal moment in a new era—one in which man tried to understand nature through the application of reason.”
2. What do you think the goal of each nation was? Was this all for scientific progress or world power? Why? Did each nation have a different goal?
3. Does it surprise you that locations were not accurately mapped (pg. 31–32) until the transit of Venus? Why or why not? In the same vein, is it surprising that time was not able to be accurately measured?
4. The collaboration needed for this project was great, and it was done in a world that lacked the constant contact we have today. In chapter 5, the author states, “They could only hope everything was going according to plan” (pg. 60). What do you think about organizing such a project with such uncertainties?
5. What do you think about Wulf’s writing style? Does she clearly and accurately present scientific and historical information? Was there something you particularly liked or disliked? If you read *The Brother Gardeners* or *The Founding Gardeners* with the book club, how do you think this book compares? What do you think about the indexes and notes? Are they helpful?
6. Do you think that the success to measure the second transit was due to the change in political leaders and their Enlightenment attitudes toward science? Would the scientists have been able to be successful without the backing of powerful leaders?
7. What does this small book tell us about the Enlightenment? Does Wulf’s text give the reader a solid, yet pithy understanding of a vast international intellectual movement?

About Andrea Wulf

Andrea Wulf was born in India and moved to Germany as a child. She lives in Britain where she trained as a design historian at the Royal College of Art. As well as *Chasing Venus*, she is the author of *Founding Gardeners*; *The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire and the Birth of an Obsession*; and the coauthor of *This Other Eden: Seven Great Gardens and 300 Years of English History*. She has written for *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Sunday Times*, and *The Guardian*.

Other Related Texts

- *The Telescope: A Short History* by Richard Dunn (2011)
A chronicle of the development of the instrument that helped to advance the study of the world. Invented in Holland in 1608, telescopes were crucial to exploring Earth.

- *The Day the World Discovered the Sun: An Extraordinary Story of Scientific Adventure and the Race to Track the Transit of Venus* by Mark Anderson (2012)
An in-depth look at the harrowing journeys to the Arctic, the New World, and the Pacific to view the 1769 transit of Venus.
- *The Age of Wonder: The Romantic Generation and the Discovery of the Beauty and Terror of Science* by Richard Holmes (2010)
A colorful and absorbing history of the inventions, people, and discoveries that were made in the late eighteenth century bringing the world into modernity.

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