



▲ Novelist Rose Tremain has said that she aims to attain a 'new clarity' through her books for both herself and her readers.

'SIGNIFICANT CIGARETTES' (FROM *THE ROAD HOME*) ROSE TREMAIN

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Rose Tremain is an established and very successful English novelist who seeks out the strange, the unfamiliar and the near-unknowable as subjects for her fiction. 'Significant Cigarettes' is an extract from her novel, *The Road Home*. It tells the story of a journey of a desperately poor man called Lev. He travels from Eastern Europe to London, where he hopes to make a better life for himself. Before Lev left his own country, his wife had died. In order to make the journey he has to leave his young daughter behind.

The arrival in Britain of large numbers of migrants who want to find work has caused concern and anger among some people. In 'Significant Cigarettes', Tremain shows the reader something of what it is like to be poor, homeless and desperate.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 What do you think might be difficult about welcoming strangers into your home?
- 2 How would you try to help a child who was suddenly left in your care by a parent who was fleeing abroad? What considerations would be the most important?
- 3 Have you ever explored or visited a place that was totally unfamiliar to you? What did you find? What did you learn?

▼ 'SIGNIFICANT CIGARETTES' BY ROSE TREMAIN

On the coach, Lev chose a seat near the back and he sat huddled against the window, staring out at the land he was leaving: at the fields of sunflowers scorched by the dry wind, at the pig farms, at the quarries and rivers and at the wild garlic growing green at the edge of the road.

Lev wore a leather jacket and jeans and a leather cap pulled low over his eyes and his handsome face was grey-toned from his smoking and in his hands he clutched an old red cotton handkerchief and a dented pack of Russian cigarettes. He would soon be forty-three.

After some miles, as the sun came up, Lev took out a cigarette and stuck it between his lips, and the woman sitting next to him, a plump, contained person with moles like splashes of mud on her face, said quickly: 'I'm sorry, but there is no smoking allowed on this bus.'

Lev knew this, had known it in advance, had tried to prepare himself mentally for the long agony of it. But even an unlit cigarette was a companion – something to hold on to, something that had promise in it – and all he could