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The Leeds Library



# Speaks Volumes 25

The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of The Leeds Library

February 2021



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# The Leeds Library

## From Your CEO

### Dear Member

We hope you, your family and friends remain in good health during this latest and potentially final lockdown.

With the Government announcements this week for the roadmap to leave lockdown over the coming months, the Library team is now taking forward its planning for the Library to reopen in the next few weeks.

We are pleased to confirm, Government restrictions permitting, that the Library will reopen to Members from Monday 12th April. Our opening hours will be Monday - Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 10am - 4pm and Thursday, 12-6pm. We are looking to further extend these opening hours in mid May and it is hoped that by the end of June we will have moved to a position where the Library is fully open. In the days before opening we will confirm to all Members the social distancing measures that will be in place so that the welfare of staff, Members and visitors is not compromised.



In the lead up to April's reopening, the Library team will be entering a very busy period of work. Firstly, we are heavily involved in [Leeds Lit Fest](#) which is taking place next week from Tuesday 2nd to Sunday 7th March. In being the lead partner of the festival, the Library has programmed 7 of the 26 events, all of which will be taking place online. Further details of the programme can be found in this edition of Speaks Volumes.

After the Festival is over and in the run up to Easter, the plan is for all of the flooring throughout the main part of the Library to be replaced at the same time so that this can be completed before we reopen again to Members. To undertake this work at any other time would mean closing the Library for a few weeks. In consultation with the staff team, it was agreed by the Trustees that there was a unique opportunity to undertake the work now during the lockdown period without causing any impact to Members.

The last 12 months has been a challenging one for everybody, but throughout this period of time the Library has tried to make progress in improving services for Members wherever possible and taking forward important maintenance work whilst the Library is closed.

I think it is fair to say that once the replacement of the flooring is completed, the Library which has seen several areas redecorated and new furniture purchased will look better than at any time since the New Room was opened in 1880-81, and the services that are provided for Members including a variety of online services will be more extensive than at any period in our history.

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## From Your CEO, cont'd

Whilst the cost of undertaking these many improvements have been partly covered through the support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, a significant financial commitment has also been made by the Library, especially with regards to the replacement of the Library flooring and setting up of new online services.

This investment in the Library by the Trustees should be welcomed and appreciated as it is a brave time for any charity to invest in improving the work that it does. We all hope and expect that this timely long term commitment to improving and developing the Library will benefit many Members for years to come.

Over the coming weeks we will keep Members updated on the progress of the flooring work. We hope that before too long you will be able to see the finished results in person once the Library reopens again.

Meanwhile, if we can be of assistance please email the Library at [counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk) or call the Library direct on 0113 245 3071 which will be staffed by the Library team between 10am to 2pm every Monday, Wednesday and Friday until further notice.

Until we see you again, please stay safe and well.

Best wishes

Carl Hutton





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## From Your Editor

Welcome to Speaks Volumes 25, our first edition of 2021 and there's a lot to look forward to. We hope that many of you have received your first vaccine jabs with the second one to follow soon. There's a huge sense of relief at the unveiling of the road map out of lockdown and the hope that the Library can re-open on 12th April if all goes to plan. We cannot wait to welcome you back and the excitement is building!



However, before all of that, we have Leeds Lit Fest which starts next week. The full programme has 26 events featuring more than 50 writers and performers including [Monique Roffey](#), 2020 Costa Book of the Year winner and [Peter James](#), international crime fiction best selling author. It's all free, except for 2 paid workshops, with a donation option to help support the festival.

You can be front row at LLF21 from the comfort of your own home! The Library is a principal partner and we've detailed the Library highlights in the following pages. This edition's front cover has a still from the rare silent film [The Hound of the Baskervilles](#) which will be shown as part of the festival.

We hope you are continuing to enjoy the range of [online services](#) that are now accessible through your membership so there's plenty of material to keep you entertained including a new subscription to the Idler Academy's online learning courses. Full details are in the following pages and we urge you to make use of these fabulous resources. If you have any difficulties using them please contact us and we'll do our best to help you.

My thanks to Hannah Stone for her review of *Noctuary* by Niall Campbell and to Roger Taylor for his review of *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr.

The next issue of Speaks Volumes will be published in April and I'd be delighted to receive your articles for inclusion by Monday 29th March by email to [gellf@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:gellf@theleedslibrary.org.uk).

With my best wishes and I hope to see you soon!

Fiona Gell, Marketing & Communications Officer





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## Leeds Lit Fest 2021, Tuesday 2nd - Sunday 7th March. Highlights from the Leeds Library

As you know, we are a very proud partners in [Leeds Lit Fest](#) (LLF21). The Library has programmed a series of writers and performers ranging from politics to creative writing to crime fiction to film and theatre. The full programme has 26 events featuring more than 50 writers and performers run on a Pay As You Feel basis and with 2 paid workshops. You can be front row from the comfort of your own sofa!

We've two excellent political writers appearing beginning with [Ian Dunt](#) on Wednesday (7pm). His book *How to Be a Liberal*, is a rallying cry for those who still believe in freedom and reason. In a soaring narrative that stretches from the English Civil War to the 2008 financial crash and the rise of populism, Ian will talk through the epic story of the development of liberal thought. He is an author, political journalist and broadcaster, the editor of politics.co.uk and a host on the Remainiacs podcast.



On Friday (7pm), LBC radio presenter, [Iain Dale](#) examines why we've all become so disrespectful and intolerant in *Why Can't We All Just Get Along*. His book of the same title is part-memoir, part-polemic and looks at the state of public discourse in Britain and the world today. Using experiences from his career in politics and the media, he says it doesn't have to be this way, and suggests how we can all emerge from tribalism and division and become more respectful to each other and those who

govern us. He is an author, broadcaster, political commentator, blogger, podcaster and so much more!

We know crime fiction is a hugely popular genre with readers and we have two exciting authors to tempt you with on Sunday. Join award winning journalist, [Saima Mir](#) (1pm) as she talks about her critically acclaimed, debut crime thriller *The Khan*. Set amongst the British Pakistani community in a northern city, it features an unforgettable female protagonist – a London barrister who is drawn back into her father's gangland world when he's found murdered.



Followed by [Tim Glister](#) (5pm) discussing his debut novel, *Red Corona*, a gripping Cold War spy thriller about the beginning of the surveillance era, spanning 3 countries: Britain where MI5 agent Richard Knox is trying to find out who put his boss in a coma; Russia where a brilliant scientist makes a breakthrough that could change the world and the US where a young CIA recruit is determined to make a difference.

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## Leeds Lit Fest 2021, Tuesday 2nd - Sunday 7th March. Highlights from the Leeds Library



If you are new to **creative writing** or indeed a practised hand then join us for an [overnight creative writing workshop](#) (midnight Saturday – 6.00am Sunday) led by our popular Speaking to the Shelves curator Becky Cherriman. In *Adventures of the Night*, a group of people meet at midnight. Where do they meet, why and what happens when they do? You will answer these questions and others before embodying a character and shaping their path through this collective story. Be prepared to take creative risks, write collaboratively and stay up till dawn.

And because we are all missing going to the **cinema** we have a special **silent film screening** on Saturday (7.30pm) of [The Hound of the Baskervilles](#) with live piano accompaniment from Jonny Best. Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were the basis for scores of silent films. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the very last of them, made in Germany in the dying days of the silent era. An international cast, lavish sets and bravura camerawork combine with the familiar Conan Doyle world of secret passages behind sliding panels, creaking country houses, and swirling mists on dark, mysterious moors. This film was unseen since 1929 and considered long lost - until it was found in Poland in 2009, stored in a parish priest's basement and then restored in 2019. With Jonny Best's atmospheric, improvised piano accompaniment performed especially for Leeds Lit Fest, don't miss this opportunity to watch this rarely shown masterpiece (Saturday 7.30pm).



And our Sherlock Holmes theme for the weekend continues as we close the programme with a **theatre** performance - Don't Go Into The Cellar theatre company perform their [Strictly Sherlock](#) show livestreamed from the Library (Sunday, 7.30pm). Don't miss this unique opportunity to join the king of the detectives as he brings to life *The Sussex Vampire*, *The Creeping Man!* and *The Devils Foot*.

All of these great events and so much more, including ticket registration, can be found at: [www.leedslitfest.co.uk](http://www.leedslitfest.co.uk).



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## Services You Can Access From Home

### New! Digital Academy Courses with The Idler

You can access a range of online learning courses courtesy of the Idler from your home or anywhere. You will need to click on the link to register or copy and paste it into your browser:

<https://www.idler.co.uk/my/join-team/0c7ed1c053b434cbba8ba318ca95bdfd>

To help you register for the service, watch the simple tutorial that has been produced for the benefit of Library Members: <https://youtu.be/oPnaaSrMx4>

### Drama Library

We have an annual subscription to **Drama Online** allowing all Library Members access to over 80 streamed productions from the National Theatre, The Globe Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company as well as a number of live audio recordings from LA Theatre Works. We are providing this service for Members at no additional cost and we hope that it will provide you all with hours of theatrical entertainment at a time when some Members are restricted in visiting the Library to access our audio-visual collections.

To access Drama Online please follow the following instructions:

1. Go to the [www.dramaonlinelibrary.com](http://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com) website.
2. Click on the login button at the top of the screen.
3. Scroll down to the **Library Card Number** box (ignore the Username/ Password boxes) and type in TheLeedsLibraryxxxx. Where the xxx is shown here, replace it with your 4 digit membership number, ignore any "A" letters. Membership numbers with less than 4 digits need to have a zero or zeros in front of them to make them up to 4 digits. For example: 12 needs to be 0012, 123 needs to be 0123 but 1234 is fine. This access is unique to your membership and cannot be used by anyone else.



4. When you have accessed the Leeds Library sponsored page, clicking on the **Video** link will provide access to the theatre performances, whilst clicking on **Audio** will give access to the LA Theatre works plays.

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## Services You Can Access From Home

### eBooks Library

Did you know that we have an eBooks library? Many of you have already signed up and are using the service. Currently we have 615 titles available (including some audiobooks) and we are adding more books regularly, all of which you can download for free.

Most of our selections so far have been informed by your requests and reading habits, as well as some classics, but please let us have your suggestions and we will see what we can do. Recent popular reads have been *I Am A Cat* by Soseki Natsume, *The Thursday Murder Club* by Richard Osman, *Agent Running In The Field* by John Le Carre, *The Anchoress of Chesterfield* by Chris Nickson and *The Mermaid of Black Conch* by Monique Roffey, winner of the 2020 Costa Book Award. Roffey is appearing at [Leeds Lit Fest](#) next week!



We have set a limit of 3 books per Member to ensure that as many of you as possible can borrow and we would ask that once you have read a book, you return it to the collection so that other Members can access it.

To access the eBooks library:

Download the Libby app which is the e-reader (unfortunately, you can't use Kindle): [google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.overdrive.mobile.android.libby&hl=en\\_GB](https://www.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.overdrive.mobile.android.libby&hl=en_GB)

To go straight to our online library click on this link: <https://theleedslibrary.overdrive.com/>

Or go through Libby <https://libbyapp.com/library/theleedslibrary> and follow the prompts to find **The Leeds Library**.

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# The Leeds Library

## Services You Can Access From Home

### eBooks Library, cont'd

Sign in using your email address (as your card number) and your 4-digit membership number as your PIN (\*see below for more help on this), then browse the eBooks library collection and borrow a title.

N.B. If you have a couple or family membership and have only ever provided us with one email address and you want your own eBooks account, you will need to give us a second email address.

\*If you can't remember your membership number, it may be on a sticky label on your door card. Let us know if you need to be reminded of the number or the email address we have for you. Membership numbers with less than 4 digits need to have a zero or zeros in front of them to make them up to 4 digits. For example: 12 needs to be 0012, 123 needs to be 0123 but 1234 is fine. If you have a couple or family membership, you need to include the letter in the membership number also. For example: 12A needs to change to 0012A and 123A needs to be 0123A.



### Members' Forum

Join our online community Forum and stay in touch with each other and exchange news and ideas. We have dozens of threads created by staff and Members. Examples are current reading, book reviews, free resources to do from home, Library memories and our popular Word of the Day. We now have over 130 Members and we would love you to join us there too.

It takes just seconds to register here: <https://theleedslibrary.freeforums.net>

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## Services You Can Access From Home

### PressReader

The excellent PressReader database gives you instant online access to over 7,000 magazines and newspapers straight to whatever device/s you use.

Please contact [counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk) and the Library Services team will send you the link to access this fantastic resource.

### Postal Loans



The Postal Loans service allows you to have up to 10 items (books, DVDs, magazines, talking books) delivered to your door by the Royal Mail. There is a small charge to cover the costs of packaging and postage only.

**These are the charges:** £3.00 for up to 3 items to be posted to you; £6.00 for between 4 and 10 items to be posted to you.

#### **This is how to request a postal loan:**

1. Reserve items from our catalogue via the website in the usual way, ensuring you add a note specifying that your request is for a postal loan: <https://www.theleedslibrary.org.uk/search/>

Or

Email [counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk) with your list of requests.

Instructions on how to log on and make a request can be found on the Search the catalogue page on the website.

N.B. Some items may be on loan, reserved for another Member or offsite, but we will inform you if this is the case to allow you to select another item.

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## Services You Can Access From Home

### Postal Loans, cont'd

2. Once you have selected the items you would like, please make your payment by clicking on the red DONATE button at the top right hand corner of the website home page and using a bank or charge card, adding a note identifying your membership number and name.

3. Your parcel will be sent to you as soon as possible by 2nd class post.

### Click and Collect

From Monday 12 April, our Click and Collect service will resume during Library opening hours. Please contact the Library first before arriving so we can make sure that your items are ready to collect from the entrance foyer. You may also return books to the crate in the foyer.

We are unable to process any book requests at the time of your visit so please contact us in advance with any requests, either by reserving through the catalogue or by email or phone. We will need 48 hours' notice in order to retrieve items for you and get them ready to collect.

We have found that sometimes we have had requests for items which turn out to be on loan, if this happens we will contact you and ask if there is an alternative title you would like instead or perhaps we could recommend books for you based on your borrowing record if you are stuck for ideas.

### Delivery and Collection

If you can't get into the Library yourself and you live in an area where Leeds City Council collects your bins, we can offer you a delivery and collection service. Contact the Library Counter team for more details.





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# The Leeds Library

## Services You Can Access From Home

### Returning Books to the Library

If you are using the Click and Collect service you may return loaned items to the drop box in the foyer where they will be quarantined for 72 hours.

If it is safe for you to do so, you may return any loaned items to the Library during opening hours.

Anyone can return loaned items on your behalf – they do not have to be a Member. Please let us know if you will have a problem returning items to us and we will arrange collection.

If you are unable to get to the Library and would like an extension on your loans at any point, please get in touch and we will arrange that for you.



### Library Opening Hours

From Monday 12 April, the Library will be open:

Monday - Wednesday, Friday, Saturday-  
10am to 4pm.

Thursday-12-6pm.

Sunday- closed.

We will look to extend opening hours from the middle of May.

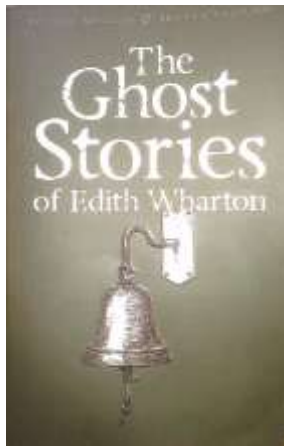


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## Zooming with the Leeds Library Book Club

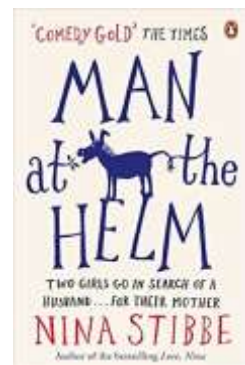
Since the last edition of Speaks we've enjoyed (for the most part!) three more Book Club choices



December is always a good time for ghost stories and rather than go down the traditional route of James, Dickens or Poe, we chose ***The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton*** (Wordsworth Editions, 2008). This collection is rather more about the supernatural than the pure ghost story although there are good examples of the latter as in *Mr Jones* and *Afterward*. Wharton is very good at describing atmosphere and location and builds tension well. Her stories are enjoyable to read but in some the plots are a little thin and the stories are not resolved. She leaves it to the reader to decide what happened and why, as in *The Lady's Maid's Bell*. Some found that frustrating whilst others were happy to draw their own conclusions. Her subjects and themes are wide ranging and the latter includes adultery,

marriage, relationships, the role of women and class. Overall, it is an enjoyable collection to read in its entirety or just to dip in and out of. We particularly enjoyed *The Duchess at Prayer*, *Bewitched* and *Kerfol*.

For a lighthearted read over the Christmas period, we chose ***Man At The Helm*** (2014) by Nina Stibbe as our January read. Nina came to fame with her best selling book *Love, Nina* (2013) which was based on letters written to her sister whilst Nina was a nanny in London to Mary-Kay Wilmers, editor of the London Review of Books. *Man At The Helm* was written first but published afterwards and you can tell from the naivety of some of her writing that she is still finding her way as a writer. It is funny and entertaining but there's a dark side too. It's a story of how three children survive their childhood as best they can. Their father has



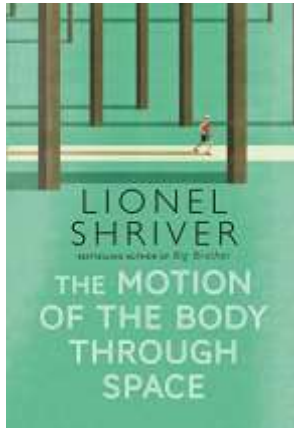
a homosexual affair which their mother finds out about. He leaves and ultimately they divorce. He then later remarries and has another family and minimal contact with his first family. Meanwhile their mother is suffering from depression, drinks a lot and writes bad plays! To make matters worse, they move to an unfriendly rural village. Lizzie and her sister set about trying to find a new man for their mother ostensibly to stop themselves and their brother being taken into care, believing that they need a man at the helm. There's humour throughout as the sisters create a list of potential candidates and work their way through them engineering introductions for their unknowing mother who as an attractive divorcee is seen as a threat to the village's social harmony, with some justification. Do they find their man at the helm? You will have to read the book to find out! We can't guarantee that you will get on with this book - 3 of our readers didn't finish it, one of whom thought it was ghastly - but those that did enjoyed it.



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## Zooming with the Leeds Library Book Club, cont'd



Our February book choice was ***The Motion of the Body Through Space*** by Lionel Shriver (2020). This is hard hitting satire at its best, witty and with some very funny episodes. Shriver's style is sharp and journalistic, and in keeping with her public persona, her views are often controversial. So, be warned, her writing like some of her opinions is not for the fainthearted. Central to the story is a couple in their 60s, Serenata and Remington Alabaster. Serenata is a runner and has exercised all her life sometimes to the point of obsession. Remington has never been a runner until he is dismissed from his job in controversial circumstances after an altercation with his manager, and decides to run a marathon for the first time

ever which progresses to extreme running. At the same time as he embarks upon these quests, Serenata is dealing with the consequences of years of hard running in that her knee joints are in bad shape. She needs an operation but is fighting against the inevitable both physically and mentally. So as Serenata's prowess is on the decline, Remington's is seemingly on the rise. Their relationships with their children, Deacon and Valeria, are strained and uncomprehending and the whole family unit is dysfunctional. Remington's final extreme exercise challenge is climactic for all of them but does allow some resolution and peace. Some of the themes explored are ageing, relationships and the cult of extreme exercise. Shriver does labour the running theme to an extreme but that is to be expected and if you can read through that tedious aspect (to some) of the novel, it is well worth it. As a group we enjoyed the novel and would recommend it with a word of advice to perhaps think twice about taking part in extreme exercise! If you are about to undergo a knee op then some of the details are graphic so perhaps avoid this until a few months after.

Our next Book Club is on Monday 15th March, 5.30pm, ***The Mermaid of Black Conch*** by Monique Roffey (Peepal, 2020). Costa Book of the Year 2020.

We'll Zoom our discussion and if you would like to join us then please email me and I'll send you a Zoom link nearer the time: [gelf@theleedslibrary.org.uk](mailto:gelf@theleedslibrary.org.uk).

Copies of all the Book Club choices are available for free download on our [eBooks Library](#) platform or to borrow from the collection.

You can find out more about what we thought about all the books we have read on the Members' [Forum](#) in the Book Club thread. Please feel free to post your own comments there too if you have read any of the books we have covered.





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## The Leeds Library Reading Group aka The Tuesday Morning Book Club - 1



***Adam Bede*** by George Eliot was our December choice. I had suggested the book because although I had read a lot of George Eliot's work I had not read *Adam Bede*. This was the first major novel written by George Eliot and was written in 1859.

The underlying theme for the book is based on a tale told to Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) by her aunt, of a young woman named Mary Voce who was found guilty of killing her child and her aunt had prayed beside the young woman the night before she went to the gallows. This developed into the book called *Adam Bede*.

Everyone declared that they had enjoyed the book and were pleased they had read it, although for some it was the second time around.

The book is set 60 years previously, in 1799, and so harks back to an idyll of rural life which even then at the time of writing no longer really existed. The descriptions of the countryside, the village and the farm garden were mentioned as wonderful and enchanting and it was remarked that 'no one does English countryside better until D H Lawrence'.

We also liked the characterisation and use of dialect especially Mrs Poyser who really comes to life especially in the scene with the landlord where she tells him off! But there was also great sympathy and wonderful psychological insight into some of the characters such as Arthur. Eliot also makes much use of minor characters like Totty (a little girl) to bring real life into the novel. In fact it is one of the best and most amusing descriptions of a small child in a Victorian novel.

A few minor dislikes: The over moralising tone was not much liked but this would have been far more appropriate in its day and also we all felt Dinah was too good to be true. The ending was universally thought to be really bad and very unrealistic but it was a happy ending which probably pleased Victorian readers.

Altogether a very good read and to be recommended .

By Ann Suter.

**The Tuesday Morning Book Club meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 10.30 am and currently by Zoom. If you wish to join a meeting please email Ann at [suter.pamelaann@gmail.com](mailto:suter.pamelaann@gmail.com) for details.**

The next books are: 2nd March, *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, 6th April, *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen, 4th May, *A Perfect Spy* by John Le Carre and 1st June, *Goldmund and Narsizz* by Herman Hesse.



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# The Leeds Library

## The Leeds Library Reading Group aka The Tuesday Morning Book Club - 2



***New Grub Street*** by George Gissing was our January book choice, a semi autobiographical novel set within the literary world of late Victorian London. At 500 plus pages it is not an easy read but it captures readers who persevere beyond the initial chapters. Given the length, this review can only touch on the plot and some of the characters.

The title references Dr. Johnson's Grub Street, home of 18th century hack writers servicing their political and literary patrons. Fast forward to late 19th century and we find literary production under the impact of modernity: new production methods and outputs, and growing numbers of, as both principal protagonists might view them, semi-educated middle class readers.

The novel can be seen as transitional. It contains some standard Victorian literary themes; poverty, class and the precarious position of women. It was also published in the three volume format that suited lending libraries and readers but which Milvain sees as both old fashioned and robbing authors of sales. The novel, however, lacks any of the cloying sentimentality of some traditional Victorian novels. The writing is unremittingly bleak, offering a realist/naturalist picture of the grinding literary world Gissing himself inhabited. Gissing is thus sometimes characterised as the English Zola.

The two principle characters are deployed as polar opposites, both as writers and personalities. Edmund Reardon is a writer of ability but out of touch with the times. He wishes to be successful but much like Gissing, only under his own terms. His poverty, and thus the need to earn a living, robs him of the freedom from the money grubbing he feels would allow him to produce great literature. In truth he despises the ill-educated who fail to recognise his genius. Even when desperation forces him to write a 'popular' novel it fails because he cannot write to his audience. Unable to stand the enforced poverty (and probably his whinging), his wife Amy, nee Yule, leaves him. Following a short reconciliation Reardon dies.

Jasper Milvain is equally dismissive of his potential readership but he views literature as a market place susceptible to fashion and shifting tastes, one in which a writer quick on his feet and willing to give the readers what they want can make money. Thus, one can see him as a modern literary entrepreneur. He rejects Reardon's literary integrity, preferring financial rewards and the social influence that journalism offers.

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# The Leeds Library

## The Leeds Library Reading Group aka The Tuesday Morning Book Club - 3

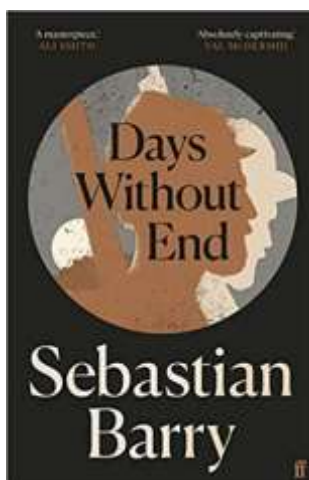
Women have an important place in the novel, though I would personally charge Gissing with using the situation of women in Victorian society to give them somewhat representational roles and of using them as plot devices to highlight the oppositional characters of Reardon and Milvain and the misogyny of both. One allows his wife to starve for his art, the other sees women as financial assets. Both treat women as second order beings.

Milvain is initially attracted to Marian Yule (Amy's cousin) whom he loves but more importantly, he sees her as a financial catch since she is due £5,000 from her grandfather John Yule's will. But her father hates Milvain and, knowing Milvain's character, he uses the financial power he has over his daughter to scuttle the match by reducing the bequest to £1500. Marian breaks off her engagement to Milvain, knowing that want of money would destroy any love in the marriage.

Milvain then transfers his affections to Reardon's widow Amy who has received £10,000, an amount free from any interference from her uncle and they marry. The novel suggests some true affection on Milvain's part but also lingering regret for the loss of his first love.

On a lighter note, readers can get relief from Gissing by listening to the BBC radio sitcom 'Ed Reardon's Week'. Comedian Christopher Douglas has recreated a modern Grub Street with Reardon as a divorced, pipe-smoking, hack writer version of Victor Meldrew who rails against the world. He fights but constantly loses to his nemesis Jaz Milvain a chancer film and literature producer. Milvain is, of course, married to Reardon's ex wife!

By John Thackray.



For February we read ***Days Without End*** by Sebastian Barry, a novel set in nineteenth century North America during the Indian wars and the Civil War. It is narrated by and follows the contrasting experiences of Thomas McNulty, a refugee from the famine in Ireland, and his friend and gay partner, John Cole, as they dance in drag with miners in the makeshift theatre of a mining settlement and then become soldiers sent out to fight Indians in the West and Confederates in the South.

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## **The Leeds Library Reading Group aka The Tuesday Morning Book Club - 4**

Barry does not spare his readers some horrifyingly vivid accounts of the brutality of these conflicts which, on occasion, descend into orgies of violent destruction. Equally chilling is the way in which a cycle of revenge and retribution is shown to warp the characters of even decent men. However, a sense of humanity is maintained throughout through the reflections and tone of the narrator and as themes of friendship, comradeship and loyalty emerge as well as a sense of conflicting loyalties and betrayal.

There are elements of romance as well as realism. The love between the two men is understated but enduring; the love they both feel for the young Indian girl, who becomes a kind of daughter to them is made manifest in the action taken to protect her. The multi-ethnic agrarian community they establish in Tennessee is a dream-like alternative to the ethnic cleansing of the Indian wars and the racism of the Confederacy in the drive to shape the identity of nineteenth century America.

The fluidity of gender identity is explored as Thomas manages to sustain his role as a hyper-masculine trooper but also experiences a growing wish to identify, behave and dress as a woman; interestingly, a similar tendency is discovered in a group of Sioux braves. There is a touch of humour, too, in the portrayal of Thomas and John Cole as stunningly attractive female impersonators.

As usual, our group expressed a variety of opinions. Everyone found the narrative drive compelling, the representation of war convincing and the relationship between the two male characters quite moving. Views diverged, in the main, over the role of the narrator and the narrative voice. Some people responded positively to the combination of the vernacular and the lyrical in the narrator's style; others found some of the figurative language excessively high-flown, even false or contrived, and sensed a discrepancy between the character and his language which weakened the novel as a whole.

Nevertheless, the majority felt the book had been well-worth reading and were enthusiastic about it. Interest was expressed in the sequel, *A Thousand Moons*, written from the point of view of the young Indian girl the men adopt and which one of the group had been reading. However, another member of the group who had just read two other novels by Barry announced that she'd now had enough.

By Bryn Moore.



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# The Leeds Library

## Book Reviews

### Noctuary by Niall Campbell, Bloodaxe Books, 2019, 61pp. Reviewed by Hannah Stone.

Hannah is the host for the Library's popular Nowt But Verse monthly lunchtime poetry chat show currently run on Zoom. Niall was our guest in December.



Niall Campbell's second collection, *Noctuary*, was nominated for the Forward prize for best collection of 2019, a fitting tribute to the power and resonance of this tender and endearing volume. Shaping a collection round a meta-narrative (in this case, the keeping of a night journal whilst awake with a new baby) presents a poet with opportunities and constraints. The inferred identity of the narrator is not absolute: while the voice of the young father – as narrator of the poem or as addressee – percolates through the collection, there are other voices, too. Campbell always has an eye to the community which surrounds him, to his Hebridean roots, explored in his first collection *Moontide*. He is concerned to go 'back to addressing the other/larger, smaller audience of the evening,/and here is what I said.'

A recurring theme is the unknowability of the future. The seismic changes parenthood presents are welcomed, if not always understood: 'let me tell you/the brief long happiness I've known.' Only in his new role as father does Campbell find completeness: once 'a swinging gate,/a freed skiff- then his head dropped in the groove/of my neck, true as a keystone, and I fixed.' In a rarely didactic mood, he tells us: 'Be ready, change will come. Be brave,/I know that you'll be good at this.'

In our discussion in December, Campbell confirmed the influence of Don Patterson's *Landing Lights* and I also detected echoes of Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight* in the many poems which talk about snow. Never instructive or hectoring, Campbell none-the-less persuades his reader there is space for them to join him on the necessary and urgent journeys pacing a quiet dark room, baby on shoulder. He articulates the poet's sense of responsibility for being an observer: 'if anything I stood for nothing/ but a desire to be there, present in the world.'

Guests for this year's **Nowt But Verse** have been Ruth Kelsey and Sharena Lee Satti. In March, we welcome Canadian 'zoom poetry tourist' [Jeff Cottrill](#) (right), followed by Syrian born Amir Darwish and in May, well known chronicler of the Otley Run, Joe Williams.



Nowt But Verse takes place on the third Friday of the month and tickets can be booked through the Library's [website](#).

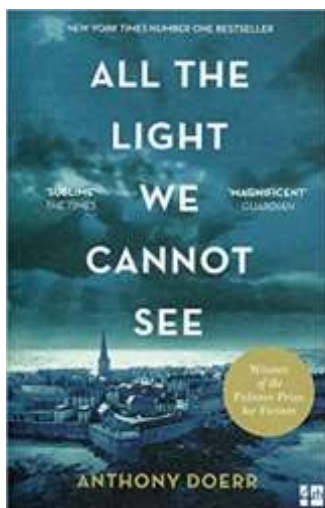


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## Book Reviews

**All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr, 4th Estate/Harper Collins, 2014, 544 pp. Reviewed by Roger Taylor.**



I don't often read books recommended in magazines, but on talking about this book to someone else who recommended it, I gave it a try and I am very pleased I did.

A novel ranging across Europe during the latter part of the Second World War, but not what you have come to expect. There are two main characters, a blind French girl, a clever German boy, a number of second level characters, a model town built by the girl's locksmith father and a diamond. The girl and the boy are only together for less than a day, but their lives are intertwined.

So the war starts and the German invasion of France proceeds, with Paris under threat. The girl is introduced to us, living with her father in an apartment. He works at a museum, as a locksmith, in charge of all the keys; she knows the museum and the people there; he builds the model of their neighbourhood so she can learn her way around. The boy is at school in industrial Germany, he is selected to go to what is basically a boarding school to create the leaders of the future Germany, with suitable indoctrination. He has an enquiring mind and his talent for radio and electronics is spotted and developed, leading to work in radio direction finding. The boy's laboratory work comes to an end and he is sent into the Wehrmacht, hunting clandestine broadcasters on the Russian and western fronts.

The girl and her father leave Paris, he with a responsibility given to him by the Museum, one of four of these things, only one of which is genuine, but no one knows which one. The four things are being pursued by a German Sergeant Major who has a personal interest in finding the genuine item.

The writing is well paced, some chapters very short, one or two pages, as the intertwined stories of the characters develop. It is the sort of book you keep reading, as you slowly see what might happen as the characters and events merge together, and see how things might end up. I did not get it quite right – I cannot say why as it would give too much away – all I can say is read this quite remarkable book; you will enjoy its unique approach to the Second World War from the other side of the story.



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