

Writing from

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Jayd Green

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no.

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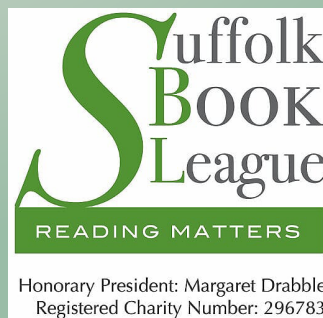
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Suffolk Book League



BookTalk

FEBRUARY 2019

Created by John Ellison,
Keith Jones and Jeff Taylor

about us

Suffolk Book League is a registered charity that has encouraged a love of reading since 1982 and continues to support a range of local initiatives across the county.

Aside from bringing a range of popular and distinguished writers to Suffolk, we have held short story competitions, donated books to hospital and hospice libraries, supported literacy groups and partner events, including the Suffolk Libraries School Book Mastermind competition.

Past speakers include Terry Pratchett, Doris Lessing, Sarah Waters, Hilary Mantel and Wendy Cope.

If you would like to be part of the next issue of BookTalk, or just fancy a chat, please send your contributions, thoughts, ramblings and comments to:

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from the chair

Welcome to Book Talk number 171. Fittingly for the beginning of the year we bring you a mixture of pieces that look back into the past and forward into the future. We have a nostalgic piece about the beginning of our organisation as well as reviews of meetings you may have attended in the last year including one of the Toby Litt event, by Cheyenne Dunnett who is a student at One Sixth Form College in Ipswich. It is always a particular pleasure to have young people at our meetings, and we offer free entry to students to encourage this. Looking forward we give you a preview of the year ahead.

In addition to the SBL programme we have the NAP prize to look forward to. The New Angle Prize, the biennial prize for books set in East Anglia, is celebrated with a show case evening at the Ipswich Institute with the shortlisted authors and a prize giving dinner. Your committee have been helping with the judging to determine the long list and we look

forward with much anticipation to the announcement of the shortlist in February.

We have been working with a web designer for some months and, like many of you, we very much look forward to having an improved website. One of the first ways we will use the new website is to launch our Flash Fiction competition. Most of all, we look forward to seeing you all at future meetings.

Jacquie

booktalk

Over the past couple of years we have tried to give BookTalk a new look, which we hope you find pleasing. Our need now is to keep it filled with material which you will find rewarding and stimulating. Our magazine gives us the opportunity to complement the Facebook and Twitter pages we use, and to include reviews, more detailed information and other suggestions for the pleasure of reading books. That after all is what we all share.

So send us contributions. Tell us what books you have liked, whether new publications or old, and why. Our speakers often fascinate us with their favourite reading, and knowing what our members enjoy helps us to form our programme. Share with us your views about possible visitors we might approach. One of the big differences between now and the time when the Suffolk Book League was founded is the rise of Literary Festivals. We cannot but welcome these, but they make it more difficult to attract authors to visit such small scale and intimate

programmes as we can run and pay for. But we are always ready to have a go.

Write us letters – preferably constructive ones (any negative views are best conveyed in conversations!). We will not promise to print everything we are sent, for that is the unanswerable privilege of an editor. We have the right to hold things in reserve where space is tight. But it is far better to have a stock of contributions than have a bare cupboard. And what our members write must anyway be of high interest to us.

Material sent by email is the easiest to deal with. If you send written or typed manuscripts by post we will cope but please include your address and sign your contribution. Email and postal address details are on the inside front cover.

We look forward to hearing from you!

toby litt

BY CHEYENNE
DUNNETT

On Monday, 10th September, Toby Litt visited Ipswich Institute. Despite the time of year – children heading back to school, chilly evenings, darker nights – the venue was still packed, which is indeed telling of what an impressive speaker Litt promised to be. The main topic in question at this event was Toby's most recent publication, *Wrestliana*, which came around after the writer's father enquired after more information on their ancestor, William Litt, who was a champion Cumberland wrestler several generations back. As Toby became engrossed in research, however, more ambiguities of character started to arise, and what could be described as uncomfortable truths began to surface. As well as wrestling, William Litt was a successfully published poet and novelist – which is perhaps where Toby himself got his literary talent – and was almost definitely a smuggler, too.



This story, lively enough on the page, was brought into even more vivid detail through Toby's talk; although Toby Litt is no doubt a very talented writer of prestigious and extremely varied texts, it just so happens that he is a very eloquent and humble speaker, too. It was obvious that the audience felt comfortable from the very beginning; the company was pleasant, and therefore one could engage fully with the interesting discussion of masculinity and competition before them. In the space of just a single evening, Toby Litt was able to inspire readers and young writers alike to explore gender, ancestry, sport, and literature: a great mixture brought together by the wise words of a great man.

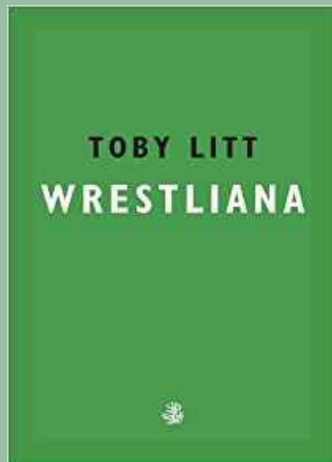
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toby litt

BY JANET BAYLISS

We were grateful to Toby Litt, author of a good many books, fiction and non-fiction, for coming to speak in place of Sarah Perry. His first-published book – short stories – was *Adventures in Capitalism*, beginning, you will note, with an 'A'. His next was *Beatniks*. Since then his titles have worked their way steadily through the alphabet.

Toby was raised in Ampthill, Bedfordshire, but has Cumberland ancestral connections. A great-great-grandfather was William Litt (1785–1850), also a writer, and known particularly for his pioneer history of wrestling. This was entitled *Wrestliana*, first published in 1823, and still in print today. William Litt was famous during his life-time for his own wrestling exploits. He is said to have won more than two hundred bouts. Toby passed round to us the first edition (1825) of another book by his forebear, a novel called *Henry and Mary*. William Litt departed for Canada in the late 1820s, wishing, it is thought, to escape creditors.



Toby's own latest book repeats his ancestor's title of *Wrestliana*. It is a family memoir with a focus on Cumberland wrestling, a sport conducted according to long-established local rules, an explosive, hands-on affair. Toby has also tried in this book to explore what it is like to be a man, a subject which he felt to be deserving of more attention than it has received.

During a wide-ranging talk, Toby went into the technical aspects of Cumberland wrestling and spoke a little about how he came to research his book, and how this affected his relationship with his father.

All in all, I found this to be a different, thought-provoking evening. Thank you to Galley Beggar Press, Toby's current publisher, for suggesting he might be free at short notice.

toby litt's recommended reads

In researching and writing my family memoir, *Wrestliana*, I had to do a lot of thinking about masculinity. Sometimes it helped to see where men had really gone off the edge in hyping up their machismo. Here are five seriously (and sometimes ludicrously) macho books.

On Walking In Ice

by Werner Herzog

Herzog is one of the contemporary artists I admire most. This book is an 80-page account of a walk he took from Munich to Paris in the winter of 1974 in order – as he magically saw it – to keep the German film critic Lotte Eisner alive. This is a strange, obsessive book. These days Herzog runs an annual 'Rogue Film School'. Top of the reading list is –

The Peregrine

by J. A. Baker

This is a masculine book about trying desperately to escape from masculinity, by becoming something else. In it, a lone man pursues a peregrine falcon across the Essex countryside, watching it hunt, learning from it. The writing isn't so much Nature Writing as Life Writing – an attempt to get at Life, at Livingness itself. Astonishing.

Rogue Male

by Geoffrey Household

This is the only book here that isn't non-fiction. But it follows directly on from *The Peregrine*. In *Rogue Male* the lone man isn't pursuer but pursued. After a failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler, a British aristocrat is hunted like a fox by vengeful Nazis. That's a gross caricature of an immensely subtle, and totally gripping, character study of duty, individualism, masculinity and the will to survive.

Haunts of the Black Masseur: The Swimmer as Hero

by Charles Sprawson

This also is a strange, obsessive book. Sprawson seems to have collected every last scrap of evidence regarding writing and swimming and the links between them. Some of it, for example, Byron's escapades, are famous. Other swimmers are dragged out of obscurity. Most are male and most are trying to immerse their masculinity in a different element, one worthy of their time.

Klaus Kinski Uncut: The Autobiography of Klaus Kinski

by Klaus Kinski

One of my favourite films of all time is *My Best Fiend*, Werner Herzog's documentary about his insane relationship with Klaus Kinski. You watch it and wonder, is Herzog exaggerating? Could anyone be as hyperbolically self-regarding as the great German actor Klaus Kinski? And then you read Kinski's own version, and you wonder how either of them survived in the same room together for more than five minutes. Machismo doesn't get more intense.

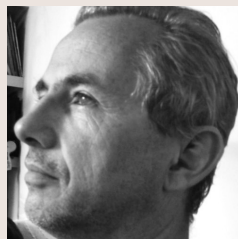
david hayden

BY JACQUIE KNOTT

We invited David when I first fell hard for his short story collection *Darker With The Lights On*. His writing has been described as 'strange', 'disturbing' and 'exquisitely weird'. He has been short listed for the The Republic of Consciousness Prize and The RTE short story prize, so I am clearly not the only person who thinks he is as wonderful as he is weird.

He started by reading us his story 'How to Read a Picture Book'. We meet an American, Jewish, cigar-smoking squirrel who instructs his class on the importance of perspective, point of view and setting; like a much more streetwise Tufty, giving cultural rather than road crossing advice.

David talked to us about his publishing work as well as his writing. He is currently working on a novel but mostly continues to write short stories, which he said 'inhabit a different space'. He described sometimes finishing a story in one sitting and knowing it is right and other times going back to the same story for as long as eight years.



It was one of those joyful Book League evenings where it felt like we had been joined by a fellow reader in our ongoing conversation about books. He urged an audience member to add V. S. Pritchett to his list of the greatest short story writers along with Chekhov and Guy de Maupassant, and to remember that Nikolai Leskov was a master of the short story before Chekhov. He met with another audience member's clear approval when talking about slow reading Elizabeth Bowen to see how she did it. It must have been particularly resonant for other short story writers, several of whom I spotted in the room, when he was talking about the short story as, as Karen Traviss calls it, 'A Slice at a Time', the success of which depends on starting and stopping that slice in the right space. My big surprise of the evening was when I asked him what he wished he had written and he said the far from short *Middlemarch*. We did let him out to catch his train but I have invited him back to launch his intended novel.

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lestyn edward

BY SUE BLYTHING-SMITH

Between his shows in Sheffield and the Café de Paris, lestyn Edwards described to us farcical but moving anecdotes from his best-selling memoir *My Tutu Went AWOL!* We might have expected a quieter, more literary affair, but, as lestyn explained, at festivals and 'book events', by public demand, he dances ballet and sings opera as 'Madam Galina', whilst sharing excerpts from his book. The audience sat enthralled, as, wearing his tutu, he moved between anecdotes and songs in a vaudeville version of his memoir.

Called by the *Ipswich Star* the 'adopted son of East Anglia', lestyn explained how he fell in love with Aldeburgh whilst on holiday. He lives today in nearby Thorpeness. He amused us with tales of Aldeburgh 'types', and various Suffolk references which might be missed by other audiences. He began touring with his father when he was four and went on to study singing and piano.



He first introduced Madam Galina, whom he based on ballerina divas, at The Guildhall Rag Week and was promptly asked to leave. His book explores how he was employed by Combined Services Entertainment (CSE), his role being the only drag act ever taken out to entertain the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. With a wry smile he described his flight, 'not on the Trident but on a Tristar', and his landing at Basra. There he was told: 'your security is of paramount importance to us, but we really can only guarantee it up to ninety per cent.' Fearfully he realised that he had landed in a 'real, contemporary war zone – Iraq – and in it, me, tutu, Swan Queen tiara, on an open desert road'. Musings, gags, songs and laughter followed as he wove his story. You can buy his book, listen to the audio version and follow him on Twitter at @lestynEdwards

charlotte peacock

BY SUE BLYTHING-SMITH

Charlotte Peacock enthusiastically explained how she was 'intrigued by Nan Shepherd', of whom little is known and nothing much written. Shepherd was born in 1893 she is the first woman to have her portrait on the Scottish five pound bank note. Charlotte describes how 'everyone says the same few things about her'. Shepherd was involved in The Scottish Literary Renaissance, helped to establish the Scottish PEN and the Saltire Society, lectured on Hugh MacDiarmid, taught at the Aberdeen College of Education and edited the alumni magazine.

However, it was for her novels and poetry that she is most well-known. In them she writes in local dialect and draws on the same environment she has 'wandered and views she has seen from her cottage for all of her life', she describes the landscape and weather of the Cairngorms. She wrote stories about strong, uneducated country women living in 'small Scottish rural communities, not parochial but



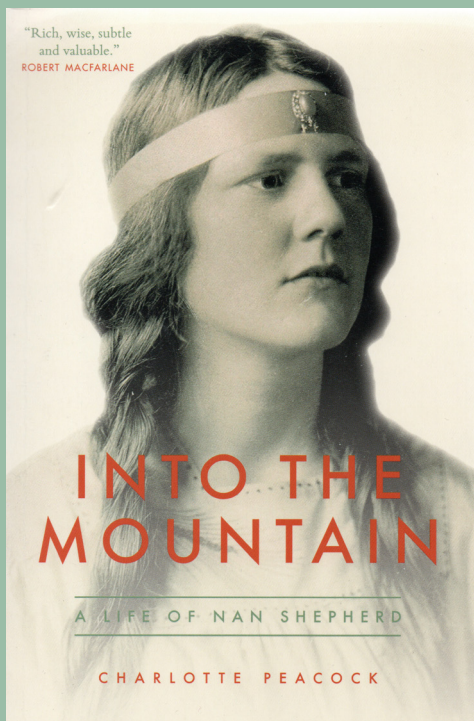
universal'. Charlotte describes how her characterisations involve 'heavily layered, relationships with people, a group of women, which on another level explore what is the truth, what is fiction, the lies we tell, she depicts hard Scottish life with some humour. She did not live long enough to see popularity'.

Nan Shepherd has variously been described as a 'listener' not a 'talker' and Charlotte wanted to 'satisfy her curiosity about the woman and her life whilst being respectful of her wish for secrecy' hence, she spent some 18 months researching and keeping in touch with Nan's executor in order to write *Into the Mountain: A Life of Nan Shepherd*. Charlotte was given 'very strict guidelines' she had to refrain from hypothesising as she was 'commissioned to write a literary biography'.

Charlotte found Nan to be a 'highly intelligent, scary woman, she would have loathed all the attention

being made about her being on the bank note'. She was 'passionate about other people's work, but less confident about her own'. She was a woman who was unafraid to walk and sleep in the hills with only the sounds of the environment for company, someone living in a period of immense change, where women had been confined but she in many ways escaped social pressure and found a form of spirituality in the Cairngorms.

Stuart Kelly (2017) writing in *The Scotsman* suggests that Charlotte has done an 'immense service in writing the first full biography of Shepherd' and describes how writers such as Robert Macfarlane and Amy Liptrot have been 'eloquent about the work' but he asks 'what of the life?' In Charlotte's lengthy book are unpublished poems and letters which reveal a little of her very private life. Much is made of Shepherd having written 3 autobiographical novels and a collection of poems in the mid-1930s when she was compared to being a Scottish Virginia Woolf or Thomas Hardy, surprisingly published nothing further for 30 years, identifying a number of possible reasons why her manuscript for *The Living Mountain* which encapsulates her approach to the mountain landscape, lay dormant for so long.



Charlotte Peacock's recommended reads

The Living Mountain

by Nan Shepherd

The Living Mountain, Nan Shepherd's hymn to the Cairngorms. Written in the 1940s but not published until 1977, it's one of those rare books that bears re-reading. At just over 100 pages long, it's slim. But each time you open it, you find some new shift of perspective.

The Weatherhouse

by Nan Shepherd

Of Shepherd's fiction, my favourite is *The Weatherhouse*. First published in 1930 it's her most ambitious and complex novel. On the surface, the book's a portrait of a small, rural Scottish community coming to terms with the enormity of war. Dig deeper and you'll find yourself looking through a kaleidoscopic lens at human nature and the complicated relationship between 'truth' and fiction.

The Glass Essay

by Anne Carson

Another favourite of mine is Anne Carson's 'The Glass Essay'. You'll find

it in her 1995 collection *Glass, Irony and God*. A 36-page poem about love lost, it weaves a wintry landscape with *Wuthering Heights* and conversations with the speaker's mother. Don't be fooled by its achingly deadpan delivery; peel back the layers. This one's for re-reading, too.

Selected Poems

by Thom Gunn

Thom Gunn's poetry draws me back time and again. Described as an Elizabethan poet in modern dress, his style is plain, direct. San Francisco from its druggy sixties through to the AIDS-ridden eighties provides the backdrop for his poems which cover nature, literature, friendship, love and death. His *Selected Poems*, published in 2007, would be a good place to start.

The Vanishing Princess

by Jenny Diski

By my bed at the moment is *The Vanishing Princess*, Jenny Diski's only collection of short stories first published in 1995. I've been a fan of Diski's work since I was introduced to it at university. What are the rules governing femininity? I'm finding out, from tales as darkly witty, subversive and intelligent as her other writing.

IO

melmoth

REVIEWED BY

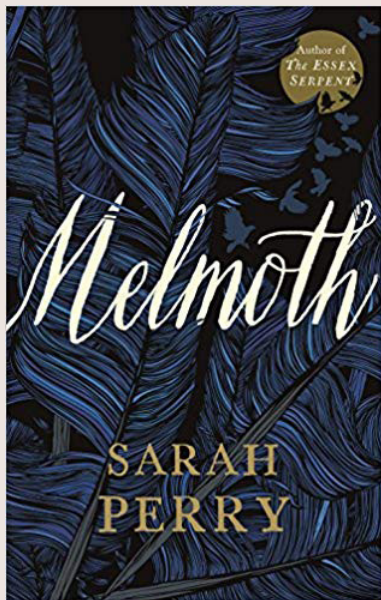
KEITH JONES

This is Sarah Perry's third novel, in which she follows *The Essex Serpent* with another supernatural tale. The title is inherited from a work by the eccentric Church of Ireland parson, Charles Maturin. His Gothic-Romance novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*, tells of one who has sold his soul to the devil and wanders the world trying to tempt various people to take over his Satanic bargain. This baggy and episodic work was admired long after its publication in 1820, and echoes of the damned outsider can be later found in the character of Melmotte in Trollope's *The Way we Live Now* (1875) and in the pseudonym taken by Oscar Wilde on his release from prison. Now, however, Sarah Perry has turned Melmoth into a woman, who has for many centuries preyed on various despairing and wretched people up to our own day. Ingeniously, she gives her an origin in



one of the women who witnessed the Resurrection of Christ; but a sceptic, who denied the miracle and ridiculed the women who said they had seen the Lord. So this Melmoth too is a demon of negativity, a denier, seeking like Maturin's original to draw vulnerable people into her power and imprison them in a despair like her own. She is the obverse of the Gospel of hope.

Melmoth is drawn to Helen Franklin, a colourless and lonely scholar working in the Czech National Library in Prague. Near her desk sits a man with a painful past, who has already become obsessed with Melmoth, and possesses a dossier of many previous



appearances. Through her friendship with this man Helen's life becomes contaminated in turn with the elusive presence of the evil demon. Hints of Melmoth now multiply. Helen becomes a haunted being. Will Helen succumb? Will the lonely Melmoth find in her the wretched companion she has sought for so long?

Through this dossier, we read the records of others in the past who have been solicited in their despair by Melmoth's black presence. Sarah Perry adapts Maturin's scheme to take us on a tour of human misery. We read the witness of an English Protestant martyr in the sixteenth century as she prepares

to be burnt, of a German boy in the anti-Semitic atmosphere of German occupied Prague, of the victim of an acid attack, of two young Turks who connive all too easily in the horrors of the Armenian genocide in Turkey during the early 20th century. This is therefore not the usual ghost story, but a meditation on the horrors that haunt human history. Is there any hope at all when we humans are so cruel?

For me it was this rather than the spooky episodes that fascinated. The encounters with Melmoth are conveyed in the present tense, which is vivid but also hectoring: I wanted to resist such a design on me. The first word of the novel is "Look!", and such invocations I found tiresome. Another distraction for me was that, as in *The Essex Serpent*, she employed terms which I suspect of being anachronisms in the language of some of the historical documents. But these gripes are nugatory. The real question put to us as we read of such suffering is whether such suffering might not after all justify the despair to which Melmoth invites us. I was gripped.

Sarah Perry having found other engagements too attractive for her to fulfil her commitment to visit the Suffolk Book League last year, I was prepared to be a curmudgeonly detractor of her novel. She largely overcame my resentment.

fiction in a corner of essex

BY BERYL BROWN

It may be surprising to learn that a small area of Essex, in essence from Colchester eastwards to the coast, and from Nayland south to the Blackwater Estuary, provides an abundance of fiction. The area's appeal to writers has extended across the centuries and genres to include classicists, historical and romantic novelists, and supernatural, detective and crime story writers. Much of their inspiration sprang from a common source: the waters of Essex.

Harwich, at the mouth of the Stour, is the setting chosen by contemporary author Kate Worsley for her debut novel, *She Rises*. The book is set in the 18th century, when the town was a busy and important seaport. Worsley's descriptions evoke the setting, still in evidence to anyone walking the unlit narrow streets and alleyways of the Old Town on a dark night, of rollicking sailors and marauding press-gangs. The



Beaumont Quay. Photo by Beryl Brown

story follows Lou, a young housemaid discovering life in a rumbustious naval port, and 15 year-old Luke, press-ganged on to the warship, 'Essex'. Worsley spares none of the earthy language and brutality of their lives.

Upstream at Mistley, Matthew Hopkins, the Witch-Finder General, whose home was The Thorn Inn, was a great exponent of the power of water. His use of the Ducking Pond, now Mistley Pond, to determine the fate of the women he tried, is infamous. Syd Moore's novel, *Witch Hunt*, blends the horror of the Essex Witch Trials with the



Landermere. Photo by Beryl Brown

present-day life of a recently bereaved young woman.

Half a mile up-river from The Thorn, in the centre of Manningtree, the metal statue of the 'roasted Manningtree Ox with a pudding in his belly', as Falstaff was labelled in *Henry IV Part 1*, looks down on the High Street of England's smallest town. It is thought that the reference comes from the ox roasted at the annual medieval fair in Manningtree.

Southeast of Manningtree, the village of Thorpe-le-Soken is the location of 'Comarques', a house once home to prolific writer Arnold Bennett. He moved there in 1913 to be near his yacht, moored on the Blackwater. The house and Bennett family are used, incognito, in *Muscovy Ducks*, a short story set in the Potteries. Bennett set his controversial novel, *The Lion's Share*, around Thorpe. The serialisation was rejected by Strand Magazine because the book is a proponent of Women's Suffrage.

A crow, flying from Thorpe to the Blackwater, would pass over Mersea Island. Perhaps, like viewers of ITV's *The Liar*, the bird would be intrigued

by the beauty and intricacy of the Essex salt flats. The unpredictability of the seascape, and the mystique of The Strood tidal causeway – sometimes there, sometimes not – was chosen by James Henry as the opening scene of his crime story, *Blackwater*. Set in the 1980s, a pair of smugglers become disorientated at sea and are marooned overnight on the island.

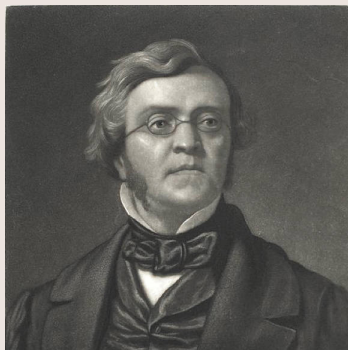
An earlier writer who found the salt flats and marshes inspirational was Sabine Baring-Gould, who lived in East Mersea. In 1880 he wrote an historical romance, *Mehalah - A Story of the Salt Marshes* featuring a protagonist who has been likened to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

The Liar's opening credits were filmed at Tollesbury, where 'Golden Age of Detective Fiction' writer Margery Allingham used the sail lofts for scenes in her final novel, *Cargo of Eagles*. The book, featuring her renowned detective, Albert Campion, was completed posthumously by her husband. The couple's home was in Tolleshunt D'Arcy.

From Tollesbury to Mersea and the Stour Estuary, authors like Allingham, Baring-Gould and Worsley have created atmospheric scenes and remarkable stories inspired by the waters of Essex.

vanity fair

REVIEWED BY
JOHN ELLISON



This 1848-published rogueish novel by William Makepeace Thackeray, exposes to bright view, in a benign, irreverent manner, the changing lives and fortunes of a mixture of wealthy, less wealthy and would-be wealthy, English characters against the backcloth of Napoleon's escape from Elba, the Battle of Waterloo and the years following. It is (so I felt from the start), deliciously alive, and stays that way, despite its considerable length.

The reader first witnesses the departure for ever from Miss Pinkerton's residential academy for young ladies in Chiswick of 'guileless and good-natured' Miss Amelia Sedley, and leading character-to-be, half-pupil, half-apprentice teacher, Miss Rebecca ('Becky') Sharp. Vitality springs from vividly rendered contrasts. Miss Pinkerton, 'a pompous old Minerva of a woman', treats Amelia, a child

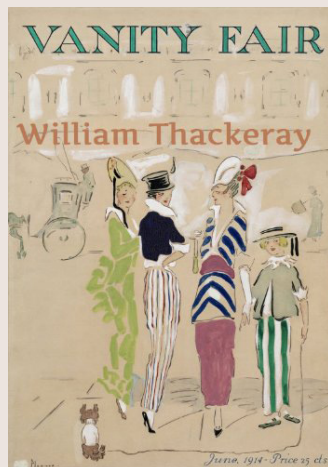
of 'a polished and refined circle', as deserving of respect, compliments and a copy of Dr. Samuel Johnson's Dictionary; while Rebecca, of bohemian parentage, but Amelia's friend, deserves only a place somewhere as a governess. Even Miss Pinkerton's less genteel and more warm-hearted sister is given the servant treatment.

Within a few pages, Rebecca bites back. During her curt parting from Miss Pinkerton she deploys accent-free French demurely in the face of self-conscious ignorance of that language. Rebecca completes her farewells by hurling out of the carriage window the Johnson's Dictionary previously given her – against express orders - by Miss Pinkerton's sister. Inside the carriage Rebecca, to Amelia's shock, rejects Miss Pinkerton and the academy by declaiming: 'Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte'.

Inserted into the narrative

are the author's many worldly commentaries, sometimes brief, about the behaviour of his characters. He displays, variously, sympathy, archness, irony, coyness, scorn, and even eloquently severe disapproval of despicable conduct. But a reader unimpressed by these interventions (or by sporadic narrative slowness), and not consoled by Thackeray's brilliant and agile resourcefulness with words, is free to speed up the reading pace.

Rebecca Sharp, orphaned, able and clever, having only her exceptional talents and beauty as capital, is determined to rise to wealth and status. She flatters, flirts, deceives, in a world where women without personal wealth form an under-class. Though she learns to behave with increasing sophistication, she does not shrink from making enemies. After her wonderfully exhibited first experience of the rough end of the landed gentry spectrum represented by Sir Pitt Crawley and his household, she is described as having 'no reverence except for prosperity, and no eye for anything beyond success'. Uncomfortable childhood experiences have marked her. Her plans run into difficulties. The husband she marries secretly 'has a large capital of debts', but, she thinks to herself, she might make something of him if he were a little brainier. She has no concern about the impact on others of not paying the couple's debts, and when she gives birth to a son, she does not dote on him.



The children of rich parents in *Vanity Fair* risk severe financial penalties if they marry the wrong person, and Amelia and Rebecca both do that, not long before their army officer husbands, neither much of a catch, fight at Waterloo. Amelia's husband dies, Rebecca's survives, only to be sidelined by her.

While selfishness, greed, ruthlessness, hypocrisy and social climbing reign, this is offset to a degree: notably by the kindness and naivete of Amelia and that of her husband's army officer friend and her admirer-for-ever, the lisping and ungainly William Dobbin.

So, on to an eventual ending with smiles and without just deserts. *Vanity Fair*, after one hundred and seventy years, retains a remarkable ability to stimulate, instruct and entertain.

2018 university of suffolk dissertation in english prize

The 2018 University of Suffolk Dissertation in English Prize, sponsored by the Suffolk Book League, was awarded to Jayd Amber Green.

Following her degree in English, attained at the University of Suffolk she is now undertaking an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) at the University of East Anglia. She reads her poetry at various festivals and events. Jayd has kindly provided BookTalk with an abstract for her dissertation and one of her poems. 'The Ecological Burden-and-Beauty Paradox, Langston Hughes's Poetry, and Postcolonial Ecocriticism'.

The aim of my dissertation is to provide a close reading of Langston Hughes's poetry with a sustained combined ecocritical and postcolonial approach. Chapter One compares the poems 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' (1921), first published in *Crisis* magazine, and 'Magnolia Flowers' (1926), from Hughes's collection *The Weary Blues*, addressing how Kimberley Ruffin's 'burden-and-beauty paradox' (2010) applies. This exploration asserts that the stationary environments in the poems, and the static nature of the paradox, fail to incite political change

and therefore sacrifice the goals of a combined ecocritical and postcolonial approach. It is argued that 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' attempts to create new cultural traditions for African-Americans, rather than transform the previous, whereas in 'Magnolia Flowers' there is no attempt to transform cultural traditions, due to the fear and anxiety induced by the setting of the poem, the unlocatable ecological beauty and the speaker's feelings of powerlessness. Chapter Two discusses the poems in the 'Sea and Land' section of Hughes's *Selected Poems* (1959). The exploration of transitional spaces is analysed with the theory of reclamation ecopoetics (Lynes, 2015), in order to assert that in these poems, the transitional spaces allow for more radical ideas and goals, and as such, suggest a more politicised approach to the environment. The dissertation argues that Hughes reclaims certain spaces, such as the sea, and claims his own personal agency, in order to appreciate transitional environments as a chance to configure cultural traditions. The final assertion is that, rather than being applied as separate critical concepts, postcolonial and ecocritical theories should be linked in the interpretation of literature.

astronomy

BY JAYD GREEN

When I think of how I love you,
I cannot measure in numbers written
and lost
on scraps of yellowed and curling
paper,
but think instead of the infinite colours
of planets
more than miles ahead.

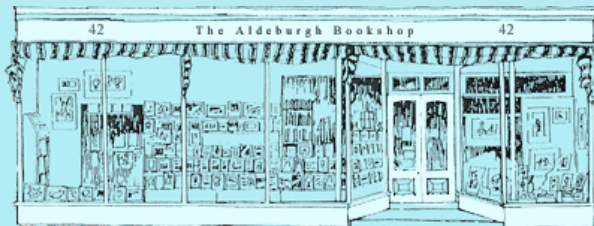
They spin in purple
emanate the views of untouched eyes
bathing themselves in the ink blank
space.
They span more of the distance than
anyone could ever paint.

Flashes of empty ivory and every
pigment of the sun,
and this love is larger than any world I
could ever see.
My spirit lifts outside me a little,
and when I think of losing you,
it's less of a hole,
and more the absence of the moon.

But you're close enough to touch.
Your skin feels delicious on my skin.
The temperature of our adoration
that bursts from us at times,
like the spring of popped catkins
or our bodies merging ribs and all.

And when I think of how I love you
I think not of rulers or equations,
but instead of tangents and sentences
that fall like dust
dropping from the lines of the page.

The Aldeburgh Bookshop



aldeburgh bookshop

2019 marks the 70th Anniversary of the Aldeburgh Bookshop and we thank Mary and John James for the following information.

'Founded by Christopher Rowan Robinson, the bookshop has always been on its current site in the High Street. It was formerly W. Hill, Drapers, the first and only department store in Aldeburgh. Other previous owners include John Whitmarsh, the Whateley Smiths, Cowans, Edwards and Cattericks. John and Mary James bought the shop in 2000. Before that the building may even have been the site of the thatched cottage belonging to George Crabbe's family until 1767 when this and several other streets were washed away in a storm.

Interesting documents from the archive at the Red House have



Benjamin Britten at The Red House, Aldeburgh
February 1976. Photo by Nigel Luckhurst.
(Ref. PH/1/398)

recently been catalogued, revealing Benjamin Britten's excellent habit of shopping locally. An invoice to Britten from 1949 shows that he was one of the first customers of the bookshop: he continued to use the shop until his death in 1976. The bookshop

receipts record Britten buying books that underpin his creative work. In February 1971, for instance, he buys Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (for 20p), and the next month follows this up with a collection of Thomas Mann's letters: it was to be another two years before the opera of *Death in Venice* was completed, but the Bookshop had provided him with raw material for this major work.

Works on Suffolk subjects are particularly popular with Britten buying tales of smugglers or the biography of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, probably as presents. And in one telling transaction we see Britten buying E. M. Forster's posthumously published novel *Maurice* in November 1971. It had been published that year, after nearly six decades in which Forster kept it to one side, feeling for much of that time that its gay love story was not yet acceptable to the public and in the knowledge that its subject invited severe legal sanction. To have been able to buy, here in Aldeburgh, a novel by his old friend that was openly about his own sexuality was, perhaps, a poignant moment. Certainly, as in many other ways, Britten's life in Aldeburgh was evidently enriched by what he bought here, at his local bookshop.'

Images kindly provided by the Britten-Pears Foundation. For more information on The Red House Aldeburgh please visit www.brittenpears.org.

In account with			
THE ALDEBURGH BOOKSHOP			
P. J. & N. WHITMARSH			
BOOKS	42 HIGH STREET		
STATIONERY	ALDEBURGH		
ART MATERIALS	SUFFOLK		
	Tel. Aldeburgh 389		
31st December, 19	63	
B. Britten Esq., C.H.			
Dec. 17.	Wilfrid Owen Poems	1	1
18	Colourful British Isles	12	6
	Constable	5	6
	English Painting	18	0
	Changing Face of Childhood	1	15
	20 Festival Calendars 7/6	7	10
20	Swarm in May	5	6
	Musical Instruments	10	6
	Oswald Bastable	15	0
21	Radcliffe	1	0
24	Silver Necks	10	6
	Age of Illusion	1	5
	Whitaker's	1	5
	Earth Owl	15	0
	3 - Tribute to Benjamin Britten	6	6
	12 sheets Christmas paper 3d.	3	0
	4 " " " 2d.		5
	2 tags 2d.		1
	Cards		9
	Tape		1
30	Sellotape	6	4
	"	2	11
		£ 25	11
			-

Invoice for Benjamin Britten's Christmas shopping at the Aldeburgh Bookshop in December 1963. (Ref. BBF/1963)

nostalgic notes

BY JOHN ELLISON

June 1982 was the month when Argentina accepted defeat in the Falklands war, when 'acting' President Reagan made a visit to Britain, and when the Labour Party's executive committee decided that a future Labour government would not permit the stationing of cruise missiles. It was also the month when the Ipswich and Suffolk Book League, a title nicely shortened since, was begun. Its public launch took place with the help both of Angus Wilson (lately knighted), our first president, and of Margaret Drabble, our current president.

Membership grew quickly, totaling 150 by December. Early programmes featured both strictly League events and other Suffolk literary events.

In December 1982 Angus Wilson launched his book *East Anglia in Verse and Prose* at the Angel Hotel in Bury St. Edmunds (tickets £2.50 apiece). In January 1983 Margaret

Drabble spoke at Copleston High School about her work, and in March Malcolm Bradbury did the same at the Corn Exchange in Ipswich. Both events were free to League members.

In April came a literary dinner staged at the Marlborough Hotel in Ipswich – tickets £12 apiece with a 10% discount for members. Crime authors P. D. James and H. R. F. Keating contributed to 'The Art of the Detective Story'. In the chair to ensure fair play, while hearing about literary skills centred on foul play, was a county court judge. Anticipating this event, joint editors of Book Talk, Dick Tucker and Peter Labdon, commented: 'It should be an arresting occasion (Sorry!).'

P. D. James and 'Harry' Keating were both prolific writers, with Keating a short way ahead of James in the numbers competition. P. D. James lived until 2014. Her final work was *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011). Keating died in that year. His swan song was *A Small case For Inspector Ghote?* (2009).

Angus Wilson's last novel was *Setting the World on Fire* (1980). He died in 1991.

The League has come a long way since 1982, and continues to flourish. Long live Margaret Drabble!

suffolk book league events

february to april 2019



Zoë Gilbert

Thursday 21 February

Zoë Gilbert is a fiction writer based in London. In 2014 she won the Costa Short Story Award. Her work has appeared in many anthologies and journals. Her debut novel *Folk* was published in hardback by Bloomsbury in February 2018, the paperback version will be published on the 7 February 2019. Zoe lives in South London, where the local woods, both real and ghostly, are inspiring her next novel.



Linda Davies

Wednesday 12 March

Linda Davies has been an investment banker, has lived in Peru and the Middle East and was kidnapped in Iran. Her fiction for adults includes *Nest of Vipers*, *Wilderness of Mirrors*, *Into The Fire*, *Something Wild* and *Final Settlement*. Her books for young adults include the Djinn series of four novels.



Melissa Harrison

Thursday 4 April

Melissa Harrison's third novel, *All Among The Barley*, was published to critical acclaim in 2018. Her second, *At Hawthorn Time*, was shortlisted for the Costa Novel of the Year award, longlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize

for Fiction and was a Book of the Year in The Telegraph. Her first novel, *Clay*, won the Portsmouth First Fiction award.

If you would like to reserve a seat please email the SBL Membership Secretary on tickets@sbl.org who will then be in touch. You will pay for reserved tickets on the door and seats must be claimed fifteen minutes before the start of an event.

These events will be held at the Ipswich Institute Reading Room 15 Tavern Street, Ipswich IP1 3AA

Doors open - 7pm. Event starts 7.30pm. £4 for members £8 for non-members

The Melissa Harrison event will follow the Suffolk Book League AGM which is for members only. Doors will be open to members at 6.30pm. The AGM will begin at 7.00 pm. The speaker event will start as usual at 7.30pm.

quiz:

salinger by latymer

The author J. D. Salinger was born on 1 January 1919. Let's celebrate that anniversary with a challenging and appropriately themed quiz.

1. Franny's boyfriend is asked about which Bohemian poet in a station waiting room?
2. The Glass children appear on which radio show named after a Telemachus quote?
3. What was the name of the 1949 film adapted from a Salinger short story?
4. Whose poem published in 1796 inspired the title of a Salinger story?
5. Which of Holden Caulfield's teachers takes him to the Natural History Museum?
6. Salinger wrote about Marx Brothers and Mickey Rooney films at which US college?
7. In which English county were both Salinger and his 'Sergeant X' stationed?
8. Who illustrated the front cover of the 1953 *The Catcher in the Rye* US paperback?
9. What English town links Henry James, E. F. Benson and a Salinger title?
10. Which of Salinger's *Nine Stories* concerns a hyper intelligent 10-year-old boy?
11. After the Liberation of Paris, which war correspondent did Salinger meet in the Ritz?
12. In 1961, which author reviewed *Franny and Zooey* for the *New York Times*?
13. Salinger attended the funeral of which Algonquin Round Table member in 1951?

Take the initial letter of each answer and rearrange those thirteen letters to form the name of an influential poet greatly admired by Salinger.

Please send your anagram answers with your name and address on a sheet of paper to BookTalk Editor, 85 Cliff Lane Ipswich IP3 0PD by the 1st April or email booktalk@sbl.org.uk by the same date.

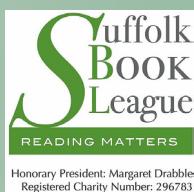
answers to quiz from issue 170: trainspotting by latymer

Congratulations to our winner Beryl Brown,
who wins a £10 Waterstone gift card

Here are the answers to the Trainspotting quiz by Latymer

1. Which actress starred in two separate train films with Charters and Caldicott?
 - Margaret **Lockwood** in *The Lady Vanishes* and *Night Train to Munich*
2. What adverb describes how the train halted at a Cotswold station in a 16 line poem?
 - The express train drew up **unwontedly** in 'Adlestrop' by Edward Thomas
3. Which county links a Pulitzer Prize winning novel to a railway poem?
 - **Middlesex** is a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides and a poem by Betjeman
4. Which river was Charles Dickens crossing when he nearly died in a train crash?
 - The Staplehurst rail crash happened over the **Beult** viaduct
5. Who wrote a number of railway books in his vicarage just outside Wisbech?
 - Rev. W. **Awdry** lived in the parish of Emneth
6. Which author's 1953 non-fiction book inspired *The Titfield Thunderbolt*?
 - *Railway Adventure* by L. T. C. **Rolt**
7. From which London station does Richard Hannay depart after bribing the milkman?
 - His journey begins at **St Pancras**
8. At which fictional junction is Ferdinand Lopez crushed by an express train?
 - Trollope's Lopez throws himself in front of a train at **Tenway** Junction
9. What is the final city mentioned in Auden's 'Night Mail'?
 - 'Asleep in granite **Aberdeen**'
10. Which 1904 born novelist had a middle name synonymous with railway timetables?
 - Bradshaw was a middle name of Christopher **Isherwood**
11. In which author's book does the protagonist drop a red bag before dying under a train?
 - *Anna Karenina* by Leo **Tolstoy**
12. Wordsworth's railway protest sonnet mentions which hill in the Lake District?
 - His 1844 poem names **Orrest Head**
13. Who wrote a train related book that begins with Peter's tenth birthday?
 - *The Railway Children* by Edith **Nesbit**

All being well, we can rearrange those initial letters to form the two word name of a 1932 Orient Express style novel by Graham Greene: **Stamboul Train**.



Issue 171

Designed by David Hill
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