

Writing from

Janet Bayliss  
Charlotte Clark  
John Clough

John Ellison  
Keith Jones  
Kay McElhinney

Brian Morron  
Jeff Taylor

no.

**I70**

The journal of

# Suffolk Book League

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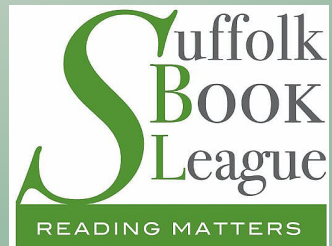
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Honorary President: Margaret Drabble  
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# BookTalk

SUMMER 2018

Created by John Ellison,  
Keith Jones and Jeff Taylor

# about us

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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:

**The Editor, BookTalk**  
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**IP3 0PD**

or email the editor at [booktalk@sbl.org.uk](mailto:booktalk@sbl.org.uk)

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# from the chair

Welcome to our summer edition of BookTalk. We are pleased to say that it is something of a bumper edition. We have contributions from members, including our previous editor, and also from speakers we have had so far this year.

I hope you will agree that we kept up a varied and enjoyable programme too, and that this year's programme looks just as exciting. I am looking forward to hearing and meeting people who are familiar to me, and others who are currently strangers, and I'm sure you are too. Thank you all as ever for your support. Please do consider writing for this magazine, we would love to have lots of the voices of our members. Also please do enter the quiz and give Jean some more competition! In this issue, the subject is the brilliant Muriel Spark.

While things are quieter in terms of meetings in the summer, it is a busy time for your committee who are in the midst of preparing the programme for next year. We are half way there at the moment, so if anyone has some good ideas for writers they would really like to visit us now is the time to share them.

Two members have suggested that we should host a short story competition, perhaps a Flash Fiction competition. For those not familiar with the term, Flash Fiction is ultra-short stories which are less than one page long. Hopefully, our next issue will feature some entries.

I hope you have a great summer with lots of good reading.

Jacquie

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# highlights

SUFFOLK BOOK LEAGUE EVENTS  
YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED

# david hempworth

BY JEFF TAYLOR



Music journalist David Hempworth brought in a good crowd due, I imagine, to the fact that a couple of weeks earlier he had appeared

on "The Old Grey Whistle Test, For One Night Only", a live three-hour tribute to the show produced by the BBC. Hempworth was a presenter of that show in the early 1980s.

He described his career in journalism which began in the 1970s with contributions to the magazines NME and Sounds and led to him becoming the editor of Smash Hits. Soon after he launched the popular magazine Just Seventeen and during the 1980s and 90s launched several other magazines including Q, Empire, Mojo, Heat and The Word. He described the time when he co-presented the BBC broadcast of Live Aid and Bob Geldof told viewers to send in their "f\*\*\*\*\* money".

He spoke mainly about his third

book *Uncommon People, The Rise and Fall of the Rock Stars* which had been published in hardback in 2017 and his book *1971 – Never a Dull Moment: Rock's Golden Year* published a year earlier.

Taking a rock star's approach to the hand-held microphone he ranged over a variety of topics including why rock stars "marry-up", how musical eras usually last forty years, what rock stardom does to people including Kurt Cobain's suicide and how Janis Ian turned her "negatives into positives". Along the way he described how when Mick Jagger walks into a room "everything stops" while Paul McCartney mostly doesn't say anything but just puts his "thumb up". He had many generous words to say about David Bowie and Randy Newman who he described as "very a nice bloke."

The tone of the evening maybe gleamed from his description of the chapter sizes in *Uncommon People* as "short enough for a man to read before he goes to sleep".

Given the scenario, by a member of the audience, of being cast away on a desert island with only the opportunity of listening to the back-catalogue of one rock star or group, he chose "the underrated Beatles". His next book, out in November, is *Nothing is Real: The Beatles Were Underrated And Other Sweeping Statements About Pop*.

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# Amanda Hodgkinson

BY JEFF TAYLOR

Amanda Hodgkinson, lecturer in English at the University of Suffolk, generously agreed to be a last-minute replacement when the poet Helen Mort had to cancel due to illness.

Dr Hodgkinson, as she is properly titled, was born in Somerset but grew up in a village on the estuary of the River Blackwater in Essex. As a teenager she moved to Bury St Edmunds then Stowmarket. Leaving school at seventeen she joined a rock band but eventually did "more sensible stuff" which led, in her early thirties, to an MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. Her first novel the award winning *22 Britannia Road* (2011) was started there but then delayed when the family moved to France and house renovation got in the way. She described getting an orange cement mixer as a birthday present. However, "laying tiles didn't do any harm as *Britannia Road* needed a long gestation".

*22 Britannia Road* is set mostly in Poland during the Second World War and in Ipswich after its end where

Photo by Serge Assier



a Polish family tries to get back to their previous life. It has been described as "a story of the ability of war to ruin peace and family

- the main values in life which are so difficult to get back." Amanda related how she had always been interested in war stories as a child particularly those involving family experiences told to her by her mother. She recounted how she sent the first ten pages of her manuscript to an agent, even though the agent said she wasn't taking on any more clients. Almost immediately the agent asked her to send another fifty pages and within the hour asked for the entire manuscript. She soon called to say she loved it and after "three months of fiddling" it went to auction with five publishers fighting over it.

Amanda also described the writing of her second novel *Spilt Milk* (2015), set in Suffolk, which traces the lives of two sisters from before the First World War to the 1960s. She admitted that she doesn't plan like other writers not wanting to "know where I'm going until to the end". For her next novel she is "researching into corsetry" and looking at "the expectations of change through generations".

# amanda hodgkinson's six favourite reads

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## ***Tinkers*** by Paul Harding

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This won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and its win was well deserved. It is a gem of a book, small and perfectly written, a tender and poignant meditation on time and life and family. .

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## ***The Stone Diaries*** by Carol Shields

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This is the story of Daisy Goodwill and her life as daughter, wife, mother and lover, widow and grandmother. Carol Shields writes of love and family with humour, sensitivity and emotional intelligence. The writing is complex and layered and is a joy to read in the way very good writing always is.

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## ***Lolita*** by Vladimir Nabokov

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This novel probably needs no introduction. As controversial as ever, it is also a triumph of Nabokov's writing skills. In Humbert Humbert, Nabokov has produced the most infamous unreliable narrator I can think of. Nabokov's prose gives a master class in how to write an unforgettable, terrifying novel.

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## ***Housekeeping*** by Marilynne Robinson

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I am huge fan of Robinson's novels and her thoughtful, delicate essays too but this story of two orphaned sisters whose enigmatic and mysterious

# 5

aunt comes to care for them both is an exceptional novel and a book I would like the whole world to read! A lush, poetic telling of a world full of longing and love and the mystery of family. Set beside a vast lake in north west America, the novel is a fluid place of memory and identity. Mysterious, evocative and subtle, this is a book to be read slowly, lingering over each exquisite sentence and scene.

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## ***Let us Now Praise Famous Men*** by James Agee and Walker Evans

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In 1936, James Agee, a Hollywood scriptwriter and Walker Evans photographer, set out together to write about, and photograph, the poverty-stricken white cotton farmers in the American South. They settled on talking to three tenant farming families. The article was never published but this powerful book came out of their travels. Agee's intense prose and singular voice document the most minute details of life for these families while Evans' iconic photography combine with his writing to create an emotional, furious yet tender book in which life, art and twentieth century history come together.

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## ***All That I Am*** by Anna Funder

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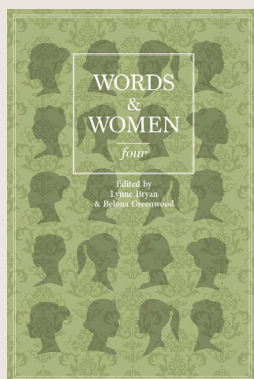
This is a powerful novel about German resistance in the Second World War. It is a heart-breaking story of love, loss and betrayal and a deeply emotional novel based on real people's lives. Beautifully pieced together, the novel follows different characters lives, recreating a historical world which feels chillingly real.

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# word & women

BY JANET BAYLISS



This was a fascinating evening with a difference as we rarely have anyone from a literary agency come to speak, and in this case we had 3 speakers. Bel Greenwood

and Lynne Bryan (the organisers of Words and Women) brought along one of their authors - Deborah Amander, who read out her short story, *The Wife*, which is published in their latest anthology: *Words and Women: Four*.

Bel and Lynne explained that Words and Women was set up in 2011, in part at least to mark International Women's Day in Norwich and have been very busy ever since. They noted how women writers are still discriminated against (especially women script writers in films and television), and how they work to support women writers living in the

East of England. They hold an annual prose competition, and as a result have published several anthologies of women's writing in the East of England. They have also been involved with "Rural Writes", a partnership with Norfolk Library and Information Service, whereby women of all ages and backgrounds from Gorleston, Watton and Swaffham were invited to attend 10 weeks of life-writing classes in their local libraries, led by two professional writers. The results were *Gull Stones and Cuckoos*, an anthology of compelling and compassionate stories celebrating local rural life. Deborah read the whole of her story which deals with one female character's observations of two apparently dysfunctional marriages, and which has a sudden denouement, which is unexpected but also brings some closure, which in my opinion is a mark of all the best stories.

Lynne and Bel also explained their problems with keeping Words and Women going, which have become so acute that they have decided to rest the project for a while, ironically enough, in the year of the centenary of the arrival of women's suffrage. Although they have been very successful in securing project funding for their work, long term capital and revenue moneys have proved more difficult to find, added to which the

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## *women and words continued...*

project has snowballed and now takes up huge amounts of the limited time of those involved. Bel and Lynne were asked about their relationship with the Writers' Centre in Norwich, which they described as supportive, but limited, particularly from a financial point of view. Deborah paid tribute to the way

that Words and Women had helped to develop both herself and other female writers, and I do hope that the organisers of this worthy enterprise find a way forward, to continue to provide a voice for would-be women writers in East Anglia and associated areas.

## suggested reads

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### ***Bel Greenwood***

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A book of poetry by the compelling and profound Denise Riley, *Say Something Back*, navigating the loss of her son, the incomparable Penelope Fitzgerald's the acutely observed *The Bookshop* (now turned into a film although I cannot imagine how they can turn the queen of nuance into cinema, and the short stories of Karen Russell - *Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves* which are wild, big and a stomp through dangerous marshes.

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### ***Lynne Bryan***

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Rachel Cusk's *Transit*, the two volumes of Deborah Levy's living memoir - *Things I Don't Want To Know* and *The Cost of Living* (I'm counting this selection as one book as they're by the same author and flow from one to the

other) and Hisham Matar's *The Return*. *Transit* is a brilliant new way of writing a novel, the narrator is almost absent, reporting the stories of others. Levy's memoir is great about what it means to be a woman and a creative woman today. Matar's *The Return* is a very moving and gripping memoir about a brave father who goes missing and his son's brave search for him.

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### ***Deborah Arnander***

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James Salter's short story collection, *Last Night*, which contains the most beautiful but unshowy prose and some very interesting thoughts about love from a male writer who I think wrote exceptionally well about women; Janet Bowles' collection *Everything is Nice*, which is strange and original and should be much better known; and *Charlotte* by Daniel Foerkinos, which is well translated from French, and is a moving and interestingly written tribute to a brilliant young woman artist who was killed in Auschwitz but lived her short life with extraordinary intensity and determination.



# ROSS rasin

BY KEITH JONES

Here was an exceptional opportunity for us to engage with an articulate and accessible writer of novels. Of these, Rasin has written three in the past ten years, as well as a recent book on how to write effectively. Especially for any who know the special quality of his books, what he said about the experience of writing them was most illuminating.

On completing a book, he said, he feels an immediate need to move on. The intense world he has created has to be left behind for new adventures to start. Rasin is a brave explorer, drawn to the unknown and unsuspected experiences of apparently very ordinary people. Those subjects include a dysfunctional country lad (*God's Own Country*, 2008), a Glaswegian tipping into destitution (*Waterline*, 2011), and a gay footballer (*A Natural*, 2017): oddities whom we might easily think of simply as examples of humanity at its most forlorn.

So far he has presented us with youngish men; males perhaps too little in touch with their more tender side. This is a kind of existence that

novels rarely explore. These men live in localities and speak with the accents of places far from us (well north of the M4 or even the M5), and they are also alienated even from themselves. No wonder publishers were unsure when they first approached these works. But in Rasin's stories the hidden possibilities of these bleak lives are conveyed through writing which is vivid and sometimes very funny. In writing *God's Own Country* he even managed to devise a version of rural North Yorkshire dialect to convey the hidden inner life of Sam: and thereby uncovered the unlikely imaginative world that is at odds with his criminal behaviour. In depicting a Glaswegian, Rasin could take no such liberties (being himself a man from Keighley presuming to explore a Scottish culture) so he took great pains to get the idiom right.

And when it came to describing the most obscure and secret world of all, that of professional football, he had to be still more daring. For "*A Natural*" takes us into the repressed, barely articulate, ruthless world which is also as near to us as a local stadium (though it's definitely not Ipswich Town). In each case he conveys a tender mercifulness to the fallible human beings whose consciousness he helps us to share. Our sympathies are

*women and words continued..*

enlarged. "What do footballers think of this book?" we asked. "They'll never have heard of it", he said.

Ross Raisin spoke easily and conversationally with us. That we were so few that evening was no barrier to high enjoyment. We learnt of his commitment to enabling young writers

to find their voices. His involvement with "First Story", a charity sending professional writers into schools to encourage literary creativity, obviously means a lot to him as it would to any member of the Suffolk Book League. That desire to unlock the imagination fits the theme of his books.

## ross rasin's recommended reads

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### *The Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing

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A thumping tragic masterpiece, which lays bare the atmosphere of 1940s Southern Rhodesia. If you want to get a better understanding of modern-day Zimbabwe, this novel is a good place to start.

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### *Breath* by Tim Winton

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I can't remember the last time I was so compelled by a novel with so unforced a plot. It is a novel about surfing, in essence, and it is captivating.

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### *Mrs Bridge* by Evan S. Connell

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I saw that Emma Healey recommend this too [in issue 169 of BookTalk] and I'm going to second it, because it is probably my favourite novel. Absurdly mundane, existentially tragic, very funny.

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### *The Adulterants* by Joe Dunthorne

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One of the only novels that I have laughed at loud at.

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### *Walk the Blue Fields* by Claire Keegan

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A beautifully subtle collection of stories of rural Ireland. There is a superb tension, held in these narratives, between the way the characters express themselves outwardly, and what is really going inside them.



# literature

REVIEWS, RECENT READS  
AND SOMETIMES MORE

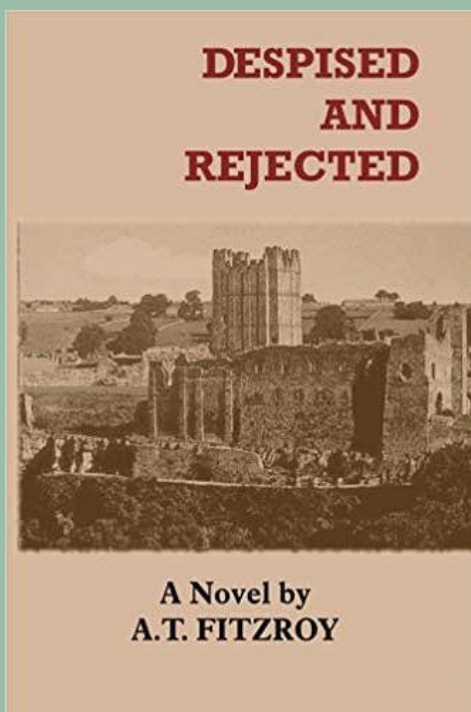
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# despised & rejected

REVIEW BY JOHN ELLISON

The novel *Despised and Rejected* was originally published in May 1918 under the pretended author name of A. T. Fitzroy. Re-published in 1988, its author pseudonym was retained. This year, with familiar elegance, Persephone Books has put it out again, and without front cover author disguise. Rose Allatini now emerges completely from the shadows, exactly a century after her book went on sale for some months before its court-ordered suppression in October 1918 for 'prejudicing military recruiting and discipline'. She had written a radical, dissenting book.

Readers of *Despised and Rejected* that summer may have been struck by the clash between the harsh-sounding title and the leisured and affluent lives of the characters displayed in the scene-setting early chapters. The narrative opens in a private hotel in a small town not too far from London where an amateur



about to take place. A tennis party and a fancy dress ball come later. Some way into the story war quietly arrives to disturb the gaiety of this privileged little world, and gaiety never returns.

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The two central and youthful characters are Dennis Blackwood, a composer, and the vivacious and exotic Antoinette de Courcy. Neither fits perfectly into the stereotypical local society. Dennis's father, we learn, wishes his sons to be 'manly' and Dennis is a worry to his mother because he is not. He is soon tortured by falling in love with another young man of independent spirit – fearfully running away from that situation. Agonised, he questions his feelings. '...what had nature been about, in giving him the soul of a woman in the body of a man?' Antoinette, for her part, is temporarily besotted by an older woman who goes for solitary walks 'with a masculine-looking walking stick'. Might the solution be marriage between Dennis and Antoinette?

In the book Dennis Blackwood dismisses the alleged purity of Britain's war objectives. He is determined not to fight whatever the consequences for himself. During his appeal against his conscription he states in reply to a question: '...as to the comparison of the respective war-aims of the Allies and of Germany – who can say at this stage that England is only fighting to avenge Belgium, and with no view to the conquest of enemy territory or the extension of power? What about the conquest of German colonies in East Africa?'

This anti-war advertisement put publisher Charles Daniel, but not the author herself, in the dock in the City of London's Mansion House court. The presiding alderman, while declaring the book 'morally unhealthy', convicted Daniel of breaches of the Defence of the Realm Act, fining him heavily. A month later, the 'war to end wars' ended.

Conscientious objectors, such as the fictional Dennis, who faced the punishment of repeated jail sentences and hard labour in response to their ethical decisions to refuse conscription, and even non-combatant service, are the book's heroes. Alongside this, understanding and acceptance are implicitly invited for those who do not happen to be heterosexual. Rose Allatini, we are told, went on to write many less remembered novels featuring heterosexual, spiritually flavoured romance. She died in 1980, aged 90.

Despised and Rejected makes effortless and satisfying reading, and though itself despised and rejected at the Mansion House court in October 1918, deserves to be admired and respected a hundred years later.

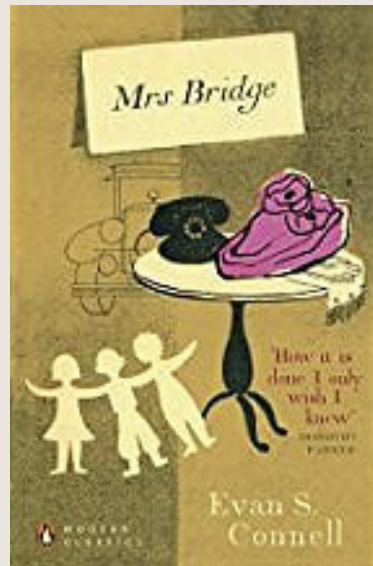


# evan s connel: mr & mrs bridge

REVIEW BY

BRIAN MORRON

At her recent visit, Emma Healy enthusiastically recommended these novels by the American writer Evan S Connell. Since 2012 they have been available as Penguin Modern Classics but when I first came across them in the mid-1980s they were in American editions only. Inside my paperback copy of *Mrs Bridge*, published in 1981, someone had scribbled, "Brilliant and satisfying. A masterpiece." I remember wondering how it was that someone who had enjoyed the book so much had so very soon afterwards ceased to own it. Had they been on a mission to pass it on to others hoping they would follow suit? Well, if so, I'm sorry – I kept my copy of *Mrs Bridge*. But if, as I hope, you go out and find your own copy that might make up for my selfishness.



Because *Mrs Bridge* is, indeed, a masterpiece, as is *Mr Bridge* written 11 years later.

*Mrs Bridge* is not an obvious heroine. She lives a generally uneventful, unfulfilled life in 1930s Kansas City with her successful lawyer husband, two daughters, a son, servants and a secure position in

Republican-supporting middle-class society. She is frequently bewildered by life and by those around her. She is trapped in a loveless marriage to a man who is insensitive, if not deliberately cruel.

Connell writes with wit, detachment and subtlety. Its 117 short episodes (hardly chapters) combine to produce – almost by sleight of hand – a perfectly realised life portrait. That great wit Dorothy Parker wrote: “How it is done, I only wish I knew.”

Take the opening paragraph of Mrs Bridge.

“Her first name was India – she was never able to get used to it. It seemed to her that her parents must have been thinking of someone else when they named her. Or were they hoping for another sort of daughter? As a child she was often on the point of enquiring, but time passed, and she never did.”

She is used to being casually put down. When a school friend of her daughter tells her that the Activities Committee for the sorority dance would like her to be a chaperone, she replies: “Why, how nice. That is quite a surprise.” The girl expresses her relief because, “I already called up most of the mothers.”

Almost every page brings a wry smile. “The Low-pressure Salesman” is a hilarious encounter showing Mrs

Bridge at her big-hearted best. But Connell doesn’t shy away from the unthinking racism and anti-Semitism which was standard in 1930s middle-class America – as in Britain.

We feel for Mrs Bridge: a simple soul stuck with the unsympathetic Mr Bridge. He is a man for whom the word patronising might have been invented. But if you go on to read Mr Bridge, you will find that he, too, is trapped. Once again, Connell sets it up in a poignant opening paragraph:

“Often he thought: my life did not begin until I knew her. She would like to hear this, he was sure, but he did not know how to tell her.”

Mr Bridge works hard to build up his law practice and sees his children only on a Sunday at the breakfast table, where he is said to greet them “pleasantly” and they to respond “deferentially” but also “a little wistfully, because they miss him.” Connell continues: “Sensing this, he would redouble his efforts at the office in order to give them everything they wanted.”

The world of Mrs and Mr Bridge might not be ours but we can surely recognise these people. And, as a member of the SBL, you must read the chapter in Mrs Bridge entitled Joseph Conrad. You’ll rarely find a more eloquent claim for the importance of reading.

# michael ondaatje: warlight

REVIEW BY JEFF TAYLOR

Suffolk's rich literary heritage has been made significantly more prosperous by the publication of Michael Ondaatje's new novel *Warlight* which is set partly in the county. Ondaatje, a Sri Lankan-born Canadian poet, novelist, editor and filmmaker is best known for his novel *The English Patient* published just over twenty-five years ago. I have a feeling that more people saw the film version, starring Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche, than read the book so hopefully this time the book will be read more widely before the inevitable film is produced. I read somewhere that *Warlight* is the B-side and *The English Patient* the A but having read both I think a double A would be more appropriate. On the other-hand it has been compared to the author's last novel *The Cat's Table* published in 2011 which I have yet to read.

*Warlight*, the author's eighth work of prose, is divided in two with part one set in London in 1945 and part two, about fifteen years later, mostly in the Saints area of North Suffolk. The narrator is 14-year old Nathaniel,

who in the first part, when his parents disappear, is left in London with his sister Rachel in the care of various mysterious characters. In the second part Nathaniel pieces together the lives of his now dead mother and a man, the strangely named Marsh Felon.

This is a thriller, cloaked by perceptions of memory, which kept me hooked until the last page. I was lucky enough to attend the launch of *Warlight* at The Cut Halesworth on June 12th where Ondaatje was interviewed by writer Blake Morrison and Ralph Fiennes did a long reading from the book. The author was reticent about why he had called the book *Warlight*, like an artist not wanting to interpret their own painting. For my own part it clearly reflects one aspect of the novel and that is those things done during war which afterwards certain people don't want brought out into the light. Less clear is the two-part nature of the novel where the landscape of London and Suffolk seem to represent war and light. It is certainly a novel to be read again.

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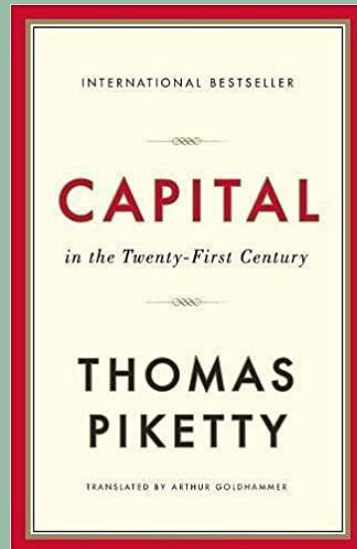
# capital in the 21st century

REVIEW BY JOHN CLOUGH

This book has over six hundred pages, and never would I have thought it could be so easy to read.

Thomas Piketty paints a vast and meticulously researched picture of the inevitable growth of inherited wealth compared with the gradual rise of incomes. This has continued in the west for more than two hundred years. Only a cataclysm such as two world wars and a depression could interrupt the remorseless pattern, by the destruction of enormous quantities of physical and financial capital over a period of thirty years, followed by another thirty years of recovery.

Piketty is supported by a wealth of evidence. He starts by quoting extensively from Balzac and Jane Austen to show that however talented and successful you may be in your work, you would still be much better off marrying into a rich family. With echoes from Malthus (there are echoes from



Marx too) Piketty's simple arithmetic compares exponential growth of invested money with linear rise of income.

In these days of unaffordable houses and fat cats with yachts it's enough to make you despair. Piketty's solution would be to put a tax on wealth, but he acknowledges that the ability of capital to move across the world in the blink of an eye prevents this. The next best thing would be a tax on property, which can't be concealed or exported. It's a convincing analysis, but it will be hard political work to make it happen.

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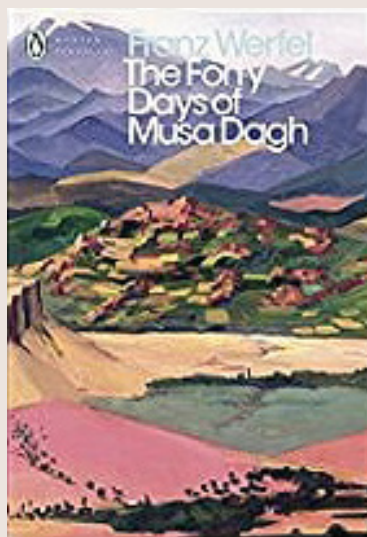
# the forty days of musa dagh

REVIEW BY

KAY MCELHINNEY

This review is probably going to blow the SBL's reputation for being up-to-the-minute, as the book was published in 1933. I was first alerted to it by a piece in the *London Review of Books* and although I'm not keen on battle scenes\* or 'faction' I was interested in its subject matter and that it is a real story. The background to the book is the contested Armenian Massacre/Genocide of 1915; I'd just re-read Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*, which is set in a city on the Turkish/Russian border that was emptied of its Armenian population in 1915 and had recently visited the Van district of Isfahan with its Armenian Cathedral and museum.

Musa Dagh is a mountain in the area north of Aleppo, but now in Turkey. In 1915 of course, all of the Middle East was part of the dying Ottoman Empire; at war with the



Allies, with the feeble Sultan rarely stirring from his French-style palace at Dolmabahce and the Young Turks effectively ruling. When the attacks on the Armenians start to happen and the populations of the Armenian villages below the mountain hear of the forced marches to Mesopotamia, they decide to resist. Their leader is an expat, back from Paris with his French family to spend the summer in his family home

while he takes over the family import/export business; like all male Ottoman citizens he has done his National Service and he organises the villages' retreat to the mountain stronghold. The novel manages to bring in details about their way of life and traditions as well as the political situation (as a German pastor tries to argue with the government about the treatment of the Armenians) and also the way the Empire was organised as its forces try to deal with the situation.

Spoiler alert: there is a happy ending – they are rescued by Allied ships which come over from Cyprus and are taken to Egypt. (I should think there is another book to be written about what happened to them afterwards). The book is well-written, manages to bring a large cast of varied characters to life and is really interesting about the period and place.

Surprisingly enough, it's written by a German who had never lived in Armenia. Franz Werfel was the second husband of Alma Mahler (she managed to squeeze him in between

Mahler and Walter Gropius) and while he was on holiday in the Middle East he asked about some orphan children he saw working in a carpet factory in Damascus – the book was the result. It is credited with bringing the massacre to the attention of the world and sold incredibly well when it appeared. Given the continuing controversy about what actually happened in 1915 it is still relevant.

\*apart from War and Peace - our book group decided one year, as many people do, to read Tolstoy's novel in our summer holidays. Unlike most people, we did. Another year we did The Magic Mountain. We believe in suffering for other people's art, our book group.

# nostalgic notes

BY JOHN ELLISON

Thirty six years ago, in June 1982, the Ipswich and Suffolk Book League, a title nicely shortened since, started up publicly 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 East Anglia in Verse and Prose at the Angel Hotel in Bury St. Edmunds (tickets £2.50 apiece). In January 1983 Margaret Drabble spoke about her work at Copleston High School 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 novel 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.

Long live Margaret Drabble!

# what i've been reading lately

BY KEITH JONES

This has been a year for re-visiting books I have enjoyed before and wondering if they still worked for me. Some were better than ever: Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* in the Penguin translation by David McDuff was much lighter and more satirical than I remembered, perhaps because of the virtues of this version. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, revisited yet again, reminded me why it has always been such a favourite, and Anthony Trollope's *Dr Wortle's School*, another old friend, showed how good Trollope was right to the end of his life.

Of first time readings,

Catherine Fox's *Realms of Glory*, the finale of her clerical trilogy, was witty and penetrating. I cannot tell if she amuses anyone not familiar with the inner turmoils and joys of the Church of England, and I am rather glad she has not written a tetralogy. Isabel Ashdown's *Hurry up and Wait* seemed tighter and so better than her *Flight*, but raised for me the problem of with-holding information from the reader from no motive but to mystify. Jordan Peterson's *Twelve Rules for Living* is a vigorous re-statement of a stoic way of life, clearly by somebody who has no time for nonsense from sappy weaklings. I suspect some of it of being nonsense, but the company of an Alpha Male is invigorating for a time, especially when you feel he is on your side.





# events

IN THE COMMUNITY

# skullduggery in stowmarket

BY JEFF TAYLOR

Stowmarket's first crime literature festiver, which took place in the last weekend of April. Among the authors appearing, Pauline Manders and Jacqueline Beard are particularly inspired by Suffolk. Janet Bayliss was there to hear what they said.

Pauline Manders spoke about her seven novels in the Utterly Criminal series. Andy Deane, a local actor, read from several of the novels, which he has recorded in audio form.

Pauline explained that she has to be interested enough in the subject matter of her books to write about it and explained her background in medicine. Her interest in crime fiction came early. Having trained at the University of London in the early 1970s, she worked as an NHS consultant in ear, nose and throat in East Anglia until retiring about 8 years ago. Since then, she has pursued a wide range of



(including rebuilding classic cars), which have influenced her novels.

She noted how the structure of a classic crime novel can parallel the process of assessment, investigation

and diagnosis in medicine. Her training in the medical, forensic way of thinking has informed the development of her plots, and sometimes she will move backwards, starting with something that could be a possible murder weapon or otherwise pivotal in a narrative, and seeing how it could be used as a device in a plot (it could be something as unlikely as a dust cloud or knotweed). Knotweed was the driver for a sub-plot in *Utterly Knotted*.

She often uses the same characters and local places as locations e.g. Tunstall – as in her book *Utterly Crushed*. She writes about what she knows e.g. apprenticeships and an apprenticeship with the relationship between trainer and trainee became incorporated into one of her stories, along with carpentry. She has used the books to give vent to a rebellious streak, following years of following strict codes of practice as a doctor. She finds Suffolk particularly rich in landscapes and commented about how the landscapes and festivals of Suffolk provide useful local colour.

Pauline described some of the characters in her books and how her training as a doctor and natural interest in people contribute towards the development of such characters. She made a very interesting observation about how meeting people in her professional role meant that they were

often under stress and were different to how they were in everyday life. However, she did not wish to fictionalise real crime, due to the devastating impact that it has on real lives.

Jacqueline Beard lives and works in Cheltenham in Gloucestershire but has Suffolk connections and Suffolk is in her blood (literally as she found out after taking a DNA test).

She became interested in genealogy via her father and has now built up a substantial collection of research via online sources and has learnt to transcribe old wills. She now has a network of up to 50,000 people via her family tree and has found that a good way to research people who were too poor to leave wills (or did not leave a will for some other reason) is through reports in old newspapers. Reading these led to her writing about crime.

She has had a background in the RAF, following her father and she also worked as an estate agent at some stage. Her family originally came from Suffolk, with the furthest back ancestor she has traced being an Edmund Bird living in Claydon in the sixteenth century. While researching a later ancestor – one Alfred Bird, she came across one of the stories that was the inspiration for part of

Vote for Murder: the story of Mary Cage who was executed for murdering her husband in 1850, with rumours abounding that she had poisoned him with arsenic and also possibly one of her children. She did not confess to poisoning her husband and went to her death refusing to admit this. Jacqueline combined this with the story of two suffragists who were related by Millicent Garrett Fawcett by marriage and who avoided being at home on the census night. The book combines their stories, and the author explained how it was about people who had a lack of power – Mary Cage was an abused wife, and the suffragists were trying to offset the lack of power for women around 1900.

Jacqueline's next book, *The Fressingfield Witch*, was based upon the true stories of Mary Anne Corbyn, who was accused of witchcraft after her death (by her widowed husband, no less - following the death of a child and the sudden demise of the brother of his first wife) and Faith Mills, who was also accused of being a witch (through the investigations of the "Witchfinder General" of the troubled seventeenth

century, Matthew Hopkins). Jacqueline again combined the two stories into one narrative and populated her fictional version of the village of Fressingfield with real characters that she had found in her researches. She gave her detective for this book the name of one of her ancestors. (She commented that the Corbyns of Fressingfield have a family connection with Jeremy Corbyn, albeit a long way back.)

The author noted the advantages of being a self-published writer (probably more affordable than ever before) giving her the freedom to write the books she wants to, rather than conforming to the requirements of the publishing industry.

She explained that in her next book her hero is coming out of East Anglia for a series of murders in the 1880s set in London, which I assume to be a reference to Jack the Ripper.

She explained that in a new story she was working on her hero is coming out of East Anglia for a series of murders in the 1880s set in London, which I assume to be a reference to Jack the Ripper

# skullduggery in stowmarket

BY JEFF TAYLOR

**The sixth annual crime writers festival took place in the middle of June. Organiser Charlotte Clark, Southwold Library Manager, here describes the weekend's events.**

This year Southwold Library celebrated its sixth annual Slaughter in Southwold Crime Writers Festival on the 13th-17th of June at Southwold Art Centre. Over 300 people took over 700 places at 15 events over the five days. This included welcoming nine amazing crime authors. After a taster of some classic crime films earlier in the week Friday night kicked off with people trying to solve whodunnit it in "The Wenlock Mummy" a murder mystery evening written by the amazing Elly Griffiths. Everyone enjoyed an Egyptian themed dinner and about a quarter opted for the correct murderer.

Over the weekend Slaughter began in earnest on Saturday with spy story writer Edward Wilson, speaking about his own undercover experiences, followed by historical writer Simon Scarrow, talking about



his change of genre and time period for his latest crime book *Playing with Fire*. After a lovely lunch with the authors, provided by Cafe 51, the master of the crime thriller Robert Goddard tantalised us with what may lie in his latest book *"The Panic Room"* and Saturday's talks closed with the marvellous Mary-Jane Riley, undeterred by her broken arm, to talk about her Southwold mysteries. In the evening a dozen teams wracked their brains with the *"Elementary my Dear Watson"* very vaguely crime related quiz, the victors being *"The Fashion Police"*.

Sunday opened with the excellent Mike Ripley talking about continuing the legacy of Margery Allingham [via Albert Campion], and then turning his talents to interviewing the amazing Stella Rimington; the audience was so gripped by her working life and her works you could hear a pin drop. After a seasidy fish and chip lunch Sophie Hannah wowed us with her latest Hercule Poirot novel, out later this year and the festival ended in style with the brilliantly funny Mark Billingham and Martyn Waites both of whose brilliantly well written new books were published at the very beginning of the festival. Roll on *"Slaughter in Southwold 2019"* on the 15th and 16th of June.

# quiz

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# quiz:

## trainspotting by latymer

**It's 25 years since the 1993 publication of Irvine Welsh's notorious *Trainspotting*, apparently pulled from that year's Booker Prize shortlist after two judges threatened to withdraw. Let's celebrate that anniversary with an appropriately themed quiz.**

1. Which actress starred in two separate train films with Charters and Caldicott?
2. What adverb describes how the train halted at a Cotswold station in a 16 line poem?
3. Which county links a Pulitzer Prize winning novel to a railway poem?
4. Which river was Charles Dickens crossing when he nearly died in a train crash?
5. Who wrote a number of railway books in his vicarage just outside Wisbech?
6. Which author's 1953 non-fiction book inspired *The Titfield Thunderbolt*?
7. From which London station does Richard Hannay depart after bribing the milkman?
8. At which fictional junction is Ferdinand Lopez crushed by an express train?
9. What is the final city mentioned in Auden's *Night Mail*?
10. Which 1904 born novelist had a middle name synonymous with railway timetables?
11. In which author's book does the protagonist drop a red bag before dying under a train?
12. Wordsworth's railway protest sonnet mentions which hill in the Lake District?
13. Who wrote a train related book that begins with Peter's tenth birthday?

NB Names of authors, poets, etc are surnames unless otherwise stated. Good luck!

Take the first letter of each answer and rearrange those thirteen letters to form the name of a thematically linked two-word novel.

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 September or email [booktalk@sbl.org.uk](mailto:booktalk@sbl.org.uk) by the same date.



# answers to quiz from issue 169: muriel spark by latymer

Congratulations to our winner Lynne Bloomfield

Here are the answers to the Muriel Spark quiz by Latymer

1. In which New York hotel did Spark lease an apartment for several years?
  - Spark rented a suite at the Beaux-Arts Hotel
2. Who wrote of “waiting for the spark from heaven to fall”?
  - Matthew Arnold in *The Scholar-Gipsy*
3. What actress links JG Ballard’s *Crash* to a 1974 Spark film adaptation?
  - Elizabeth Taylor is central to *Crash* and starred in *The Driver’s Seat*
4. Who won a Tony award for her portrayal of Miss Jean Brodie?
  - Zoe Caldwell won the award in 1974
5. Which Spark character advises easily distracted writers to “acquire a cat”?
  - Mrs. Hawkins offers this advice in *A Far Cry From Kensington*
6. What was the jeweller’s trade magazine edited by Spark after the war?
  - Spark wrote articles for the journal *Argentor*
7. Which Spark play was produced by Ingmar Bergman?
  - Bergman directed *Doctors of Philosophy*
8. What brand of diet pill made Spark hallucinate and so inspired her debut novel?
  - Spark regularly took *Dexedrine*
9. One Spark novel has two men both claiming to be which notorious British earl?
  - *Aiding and Abetting* features two men claiming to be Lord Lucan
10. In 1951 Spark won a short story competition run by which national newspaper?
  - Spark triumphed in the *Observer* competition
11. Which Spark novel features a character who plunges into a Venetian canal?
  - Lena throws herself into the canal in *Territorial Rights*

All being well, we can rearrange those eleven initial letters to form the three-word name of a poem by Muriel Spark: That Damn Cold

Well done if you worked this out!

# Suffolk Book League Events for the Autumn 2018

<b>Monday</b>	<b>10th September</b>	<b>Sarah Perry</b>
<b>Monday</b>	<b>8th October</b>	<b>David Hayden</b>
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>8th November</b>	<b>Iestyn Edwards</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>5th December</b>	<b>Charlotte Peacock</b>

If you would like to reserve tickets by email for these events please contact the SBL Membership Secretary on [tickets@sbl.org.uk](mailto:tickets@sbl.org.uk) who will then be in touch.

If you would like to reserve tickets by post please write to Janet Bayliss, SBL Membership Secretary at 20 Lingfield Road Ipswich IP1 6QS enclosing details of the events you wish to attend and including a SAE envelope for confirmation. Please don't send any money as payment will be taken on the door as usual. Reserved tickets must be collected fifteen minutes before the start of events.

