Writing from
Andrew Burton, Tricia Gilbey, Amanda Hodgkinson,
Keith Jones, Jacquie Knott and Jeff Taylor

No.174

The journal of the
Suffolk Book League

suffolkbookleague.org

Suffolk Book League

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BookTalk

Spring 2020

Created by Gill Lowe
and
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contents

FROM THE CHAIR

JACQUIE KNOTT

Greetings in isolation. I hope, like me you have been able to take comfort in reading in these strange times. This has reduced our opportunities to do the things we want to do but it has also reduced the demands upon us. I've often felt that life rather gets in the way of reading, so at the moment it does so much less. Maybe for some among you it's given you time to write, if so I hope we can look forward to you sharing the results.

This was always intended to be our first online copy of BookTalk and that has been fortuitous as printing may have been rather difficult to achieve at present. The lockdown has however meant that it has not been possible for people to meet to work on this together, so a special vote of thanks to those who have produced this first online BookTalk under these difficult circumstances, particularly to Gill Lowe.

We hope our regular activities can resume soon and we will ensure we keep the website up to date with news. As you may expect, we are driven by the public guidance on how we can proceed. The speakers who have been asked to stand down so far have all agreed to postpone rather than cancel, so we can still look forward to those events sometime in the future. I hope to see you soon.

Till then, keep safe and well.

Jacquie

MARK COCKER

BY ANDREW BURTON

In October, Mark Cocker gave an illuminating talk about his most recent book *Our Place: Can We Save Britain's Wildlife Before It Is Too Late?*

A sense of place pervades Cocker's work, as it does the work of many of our most respected and admired nature writers. Think of the late Roger Deakin and his moated Suffolk cottage at Walnut Tree Farm from where he dreamed up the aquatic peregrinations he undertook in *Waterlog*; think of Richard Mabey and his journey in *Nature Cure* from the Chilterns to put down roots in East Anglian soil; think further afield of Nan Shepherd's deep, intimate knowledge of her native Cairngorms, evoked so vividly in her book *The Living Mountain*. So it came as both a surprise and a sadness to learn that after having established himself as an essential part of the literary ecology of our region for so many years, Mark Cocker has decided to up sticks and return to his native Derbyshire.

Blackwater, the Norfolk smallholding he purchased in 2012 largely on the proceeds of his book *Birds and People*, is portrayed in affectionate detail in the opening

chapter, and it is of course from a distinctly Norfolk vantage point that Cocker wrote *Crow Country*, which was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize in 2008 and won the New Angle Prize for Literature in 2009.

As he has developed in maturity as a nature writer, he has also witnessed, over the years, the continuing degradation of the British countryside, a reduction in bio-diversity, habitat loss, species decline, the impacts of climate change and, recently, news of a global collapse in insect numbers. Cocker reads each new volume of the *State of Nature Report* avidly and it proves sobering reading to anyone who cares about our country's wildlife; Britain is now the twenty-eighth most denatured country in the world.

Speaking for a good hour without notes but with irrepressible energy and passion, Cocker's presentation covered a country mile of anecdotes, strongly held opinions and acute analysis of the state of Britain's wildlife today. He explained the origins of nature conservation in this country and outlined what he terms 'The Great Divide', the severance of landscape conservation and nature protection. He observed that some nature organisations, (notably The National Trust) have an anthropocentric viewpoint whereas others (such as the RSPB) ask what the organisation can do for nature. This anthropocentric stance is widespread and explains how, for example, money flooded in when the Cathedral of Notre Dame was ravaged by fire but not to help the Amazon recover from its recent devastating fires.

Cocker outlines the pioneering 19th century work of Octavia Hill and her original 'The Commons and Gardens Trust' which became, in time, The National Trust. But he points out that it was not until about 70 years ago, after

the end of the Second World War, that state conservation began in Britain. This was significantly later than in North America where the Yellowstone National Park was founded in the 1870s.

He marvelled at the wondrous interconnectedness of things: how humans fundamentally depend on nature for the stuff of life (e.g. for bacteria, food, wood, medicines) yet we often appear to distance ourselves from nature, as if we could survive distinctly from it. In Cocker's view, nature is also central to human creativity, as well as to our mental and even spiritual well being.

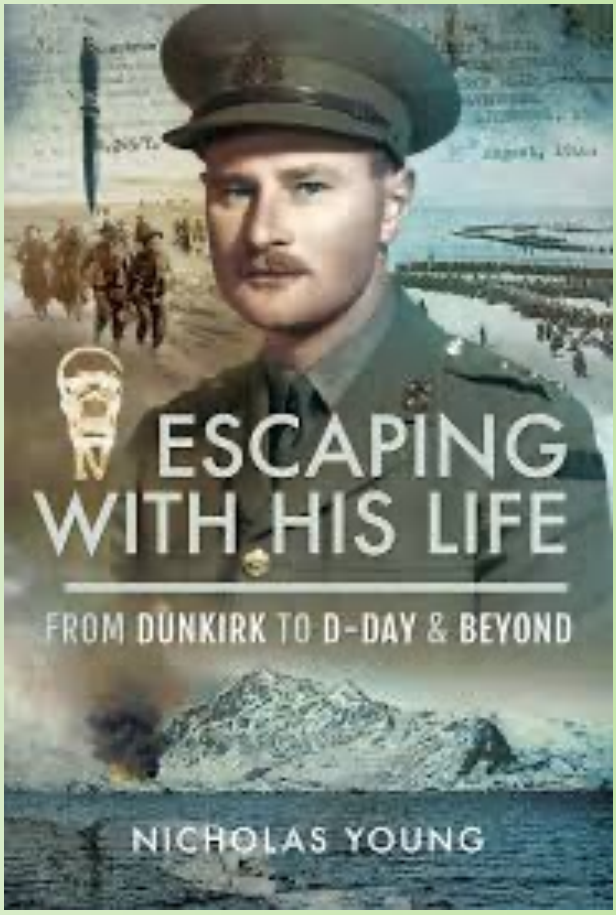
Asked by an audience member what we can do to combat complacency about the ongoing decline of Britain's wildlife, Cocker said the most significant thing we can do is to improve education, that we should educate young people about our relationship with the natural world before it is too late.

Our Place: Can We Save Britain's Wildlife Before It Is Too Late? (2018) is published by Jonathan Cape.

SIR NICHOLAS YOUNG

BY KEITH JONES

Escaping with his Life is the book Sir Nicholas Young has written about his father, who died in 1986. Among his effects was a modest notebook, kept in his bedside table, revealing a period of his life about which he had said nothing. It proved, on inspection, to be a record, kept in pencil, of his release from a northern Italian prison camp and his dangerous journey to the allied lines in the south of Italy, during 1944. This discovery was to cause a major event in his son's life, by causing Nicholas to find out what had happened to his father throughout a war about which he never spoke.



Leslie Young had a full war. He was present in the BEF and was rescued at Dunkirk. He trained as a Commando and took part in the Lofoten Islands raid in Norway. He fought in North Africa, and was captured after a traumatic experience in the hills of Tunisia. When the Italian prison camp was opened up during the chaos of the collapse of the Fascist regime, he did what Eric Newby did: he set out through the Apennines in search of the advancing allies. After all that he enlisted for further

service in France, and after D-Day he served until the allies got to Germany. This is the career which the soldier's son carefully uncovered, visiting the sites his father knew, and even, in Italy, meeting the last remaining partisans who remember those dark days. One person even recalled his father hiding in the barn behind their house. Part of the book is a tribute to the people of Italy who risked their lives by sheltering such refugees.

Nicholas chose to be interviewed rather than give a monologue. He did however read two extracts from the book, conveying the excitement of the story and the personal involvement of writer and subject. This style of interview achieved something else: we learnt that this book is not simply a story of the war. It is the record of a personal tribute to a father, even a personal search for somebody whose life hid a secret and painful history, and the cost Leslie Young's escape involved for the people who were there for him in the hills of Italy.

There was a good turnout for the meeting on December 11th 2019, and the questions that followed Nicholas's presentation showed our engagement with the story we learnt. The Italian campaign was, at the time, overshadowed by the huge events taking place on other fronts in the great conflict. It was a brutal and bitter struggle, from which Italy recovered slowly. The friends Nicholas has made have earned him the title of Cavaliere in recognition of his discovery of this little known heroism. It was a pleasure to learn from Nicholas, following the meeting, that he had enjoyed his visit to us enough to take out a membership of the SBL for himself and his wife.

Escaping with his Life: from Dunkirk to D-Day and Beyond (2019) is published by Pen and Sword (Military).

Nick Young listed four books that he used during his research. He writes, ‘They are all 'good reads' and by no means dry and dusty war stories!’

Love and War in the Apennines by Eric Newby - the famous travel writer (*A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* etc.) tells of his time in PG Campo 49 in Italy (the same camp as my father), and his adventures whilst on the run after his escape, aided by the beautiful Wanda - whom he eventually returned to marry;
Italy's Sorrow by James Holland - the full story of the horrendous but little-remembered Allied campaign to liberate Italy from the Germans, fought over nearly two years from September 1943 by men who were insultingly dubbed the 'D-Day Dodgers';
Thin Paths by Julia Blackburn - a haunting account of how the author became close to the old people of a remote Italian mountain hamlet, as they told her their stories of times gone by. 'Write it down for us,' they said, 'because otherwise it will all be lost.'
The Desert War by Alan Moorehead - the classic war correspondent's account of the see-saw fighting in North Africa, in which the Allied First Army and Monty's Desert Rats finally triumphed over Rommel, the German Desert Fox;
In Combat Unarmed by Keith Killby OBE - the founder of the Monte San Martino Trust (see above) recounts the extraordinary tale of how, as a conscientious objector during WW2, he came to work as a Medical Orderly with the SAS, and of his various attempts to escape from captivity.

CAITLIN DAVIES

BY TRICIA GILBEY

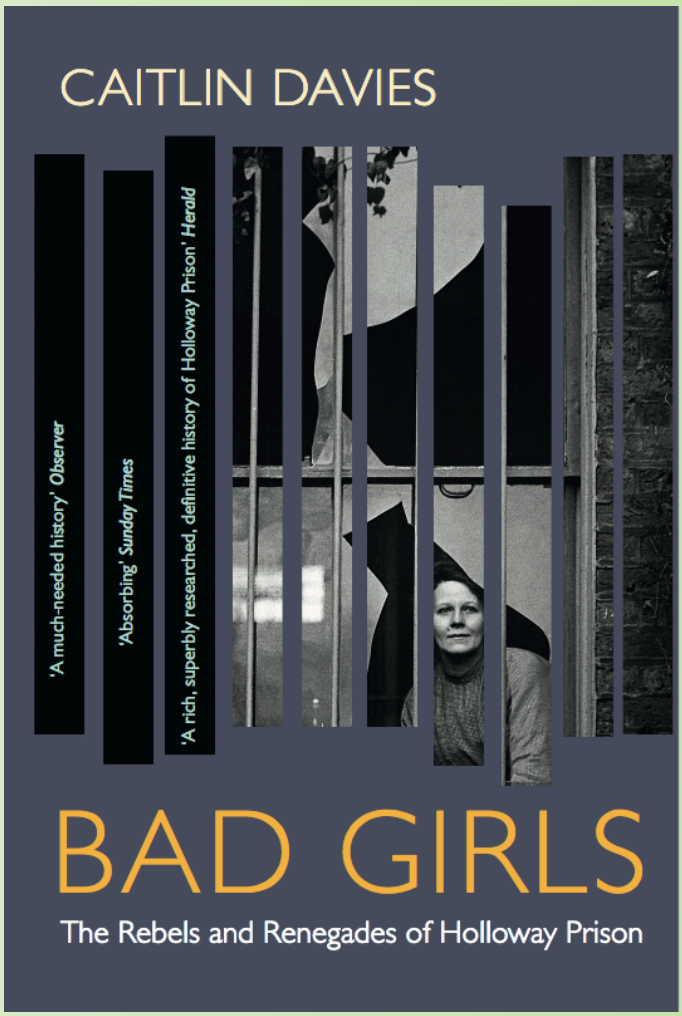
Caitlin Davies enthralled us all with a talk about Holloway Prison, 'a terror to evil doers.' When passing the prison as a child, she stopped to stare, seeing it as a fantasy castle—'all that was missing was a moat and a drawbridge!' In 2003 she returned to London, from a career in journalism in Botswana where she'd been taken to court twice herself, and began to investigate the history of Holloway.

A mixed prison when it opened in 1852, prisoners were isolated at all times. Men wore masks in the exercise yard, women were veiled. Often people were locked up for minor misdemeanours such as begging, and sentenced to hard labour. There was no equality—a woman got six months for 'using threats while drunk at church,' while a man received the same sentence for killing his wife. There were 41 different offences the prisoners could be further punished for, and if they became ill they had buckets of water tipped over them. By contrast, members of the ruling classes were 'first division prisoners'. They could wear their own clothes, have visitors and receive letters. Some even sent out to Harrods for provisions.

In 1902, the female prison population had grown so the prison became women only. In 1906 the first suffragette was imprisoned, to be followed by many more. The suffragettes agitated for the status of political prisoner, and wrote letters which were smuggled out to the press. A brooch with an arrow on a portcullis was designed to celebrate their imprisonment. At one point, the women inside were able to organise dancing, sports,

singing, storytelling and even an entire mock general election with canvassing and voting!

Gradually, Holloway became overwhelmed, and this was when Doctor Forward, who stepped up the force feeding of suffragettes, took over. He was attacked at home by three hundred women and men from the East End, who called him a ‘beast and a torturer’. He was whipped with a horse whip. Suffragettes also bombed the prison. Then, with the outbreak of war, the suffragettes were released.



It was heartbreaking to hear that as the Second World War loomed, 3600 Jewish women and their children, fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany, were imprisoned in Holloway. By the 1970s the regime saw women prisoners as ‘mad not bad’, and this led to three-quarters of them being drugged, often with strong, mind-altering drugs.

Eventually, in 2015, the prison was closed and the site left derelict. Local people protested that it should not be sold to private developers, and so the site will be used for community housing, and a women’s building where women can receive help with drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues.

Museum Street, Ipswich.

After Caitlin's enjoyable and informative talk, we had the extra treat of Joy Bounds talking about the suffragette movement in Ipswich, and particularly Constance Andrews who spent a week in Ipswich Gaol. She was another woman who was prepared to risk her liberty for the freedom we enjoy today.

Thank you to Caitlin and Joy for a wonderful start to our Book Talk events this year, and for your fascinating answers to so many audience questions.

Bad Girls *(*2018) is published by John Murray.

NATANIA JANSZ

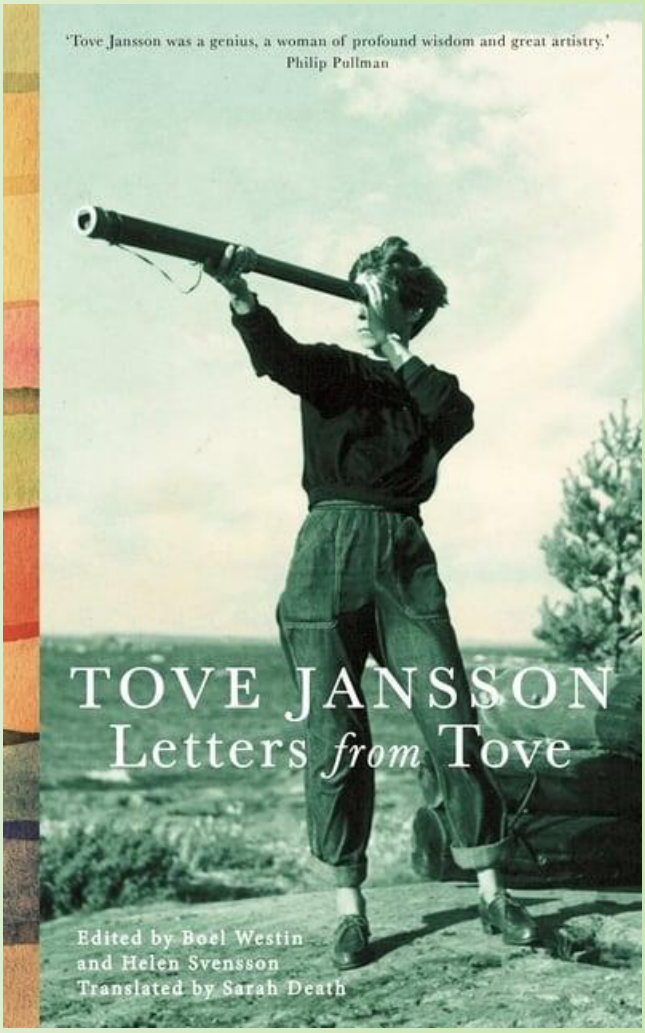
Publisher at Sort Of Books on TOVE JANSSON

BY AMANDA HODGKINSON

In early March this year, before lockdowns and social distancing began, I was thrilled to be able to attend the Suffolk Book League evening with Natania Jansz, publisher at 'Sort Of Books,' responsible for the UK publication of Jansson's original Moomins books. Sort Of Books also published *Letters from Tove*, a beautifully edited collection of Jansson's personal letters and *Life, Art, Words*, her authorised biography. Natania gave an illuminating talk, not only about the magic of Moomins and of Tove Jansson's creative talents and personal life, but also about her own story of publishing Jansson's books in the UK.

Natania and her partner Mark Ellingham, originally decided to set up their publishing company and publish a very small selection of books each year, focussing on producing them as beautifully as possible. Then, on a visit to Seattle, Mark was browsing in a second-hand book shop when he came across a rather weather-beaten edition of one of the Moomins books. He and Natania fell in love with the illustrations, the story and the characters and decided they must publish the Moomins in the UK. And that was where their relationship with Tove Jansson began.

Born in 1914, Tove grew up in a family of artists whose creative drive provided a perfect environment for the development of her own talents. She would grow up to



be Finland's most famous author- illustrator and her popularity around the world endures and increases year on year.

Natania also discussed *Letters from Tove*, an edited collection of Tove's private correspondence which had recently been serialised on BBC Radio Four. The letters are to the people Tove Jansson loved in her life, her family, her companions, close friends and fellow artists. All her life, she wrote letters and saw it as a way of emotionally connecting to others. In one letter she states, ' While I am writing, I have you here,' and it is this intimate tone which pervades the collection. Tove Jansson received a great many letters herself, in the form of vast amounts of fan mail. She attempted to answer every letter she received, an indication of her generous nature even, when writing to a friend, she mentions that she found this 'an overwhelming daily task.'

Throughout Natania's talk, her enthusiasm and admiration for Jansson was clear. Focusing on her adult fiction, she spoke powerfully about the beauty and philosophical riches found Jansson's lyrical and evocative novels.

Natania was quietly passionate in her talk about a woman who also came across as quietly passionate in her life as writer and artist. Reading from one of Jansson's adult novels *Fair Play*, a love story between two women artists, working and travelling together, spending idyllic summers on a remote island, Natania then went on to discuss Jansson's love affair with Tuulikki Pietiläand, better known as Tutti, an artist who became a central figure in Jansson's private life. Discussing the autobiographical elements of Jansson's writing, she described *Fair Play* as 'a peon to tact and discretion and an exquisite rendition of the joys and life-affirming complexities of relationships.' She also spoke about Jansson's *The Summer Book,* a novel which had enchanted her years before she even thought of becoming a publisher.

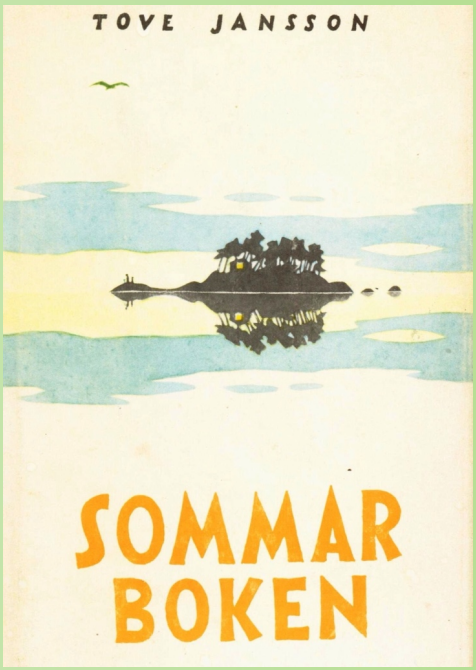
The evening offered a sensitive insight into Tove Jansson's art, writing and personal life alongside a publisher's passion for books. Natania discussed how important it is for publishers to care about the authors they publish and her own personal enthusiasm, literary knowledge and understanding of Tove Jansson's work came across strongly.

The evening was particularly pleasurable for an audience clearly beguiled and enchanted by the beautiful, gentle and curious Moomins, all of whom seem to have a little something of all us in their stories.

Natania Jansz's choice of books by Tove Jansson

Letters from Tove : edited by Boel Westin and Helen Svensson: trans. Sarah Death (Sort Of Books 2019, hdbk £20)

This collection of letters by Tove Jansson, the world renowned artist, author and creator of the Moomins, offer glimpses into her bohemian and extraordinary life as it unfolds. To read them is to immerse yourself in a richer mind, a constantly curious and evolving one. The perfect tonic.



The Summer Book (1972, Sort Of Books pbk, 2003, £9.99)

A young girl spends a summer with her grandmother on a tiny island in the Gulf Finland. On the surface little happens yet, in the deceptive lightness of Jansson's prose, we discover themes of love and mortality. An instant and enduring classic.

The True Deceiver (1982, Sort Of Books pbk, 2009, £9.99)

The perfect dark companion to *The Summer Book*, *The True Deceiver* glitters with a wintry light. In a snowbound hamlet an elderly illustrator opens her home to strange young woman. But who will deceive whom? Ruth Rendell described this book as 'cool in both senses of the word'.

Fair Play (1989, Sort Of Books pbk, 2007, £8.99)

A book for mature lovers. Two women who respect each other's creativity show their love in a multitude of natural gestures of tact, sympathy and attention. A masterclass in how to build an enduring relationship.

Moominland Midwinter (1957, Sort Of Books hdbk, £10.99)

A book that speaks to these self-isolating times; of a Moomin waking up to a world that is utterly familiar yet eerily changed, and discovering he has the resources to cope. This is a book I'm posting to all my friends stuck at home with young children right now.

From ***Moominland Midwinter***

2020 THE REPUBLIC OF CONSCIOUSNESS PRIZE

BY JACQUIE KNOTT

Each year, two main things shape my reading choices. The first is our programme of guest speakers whose books I always read in preparation for our events, and the other is the Republic of Consciousness Prize shortlist.

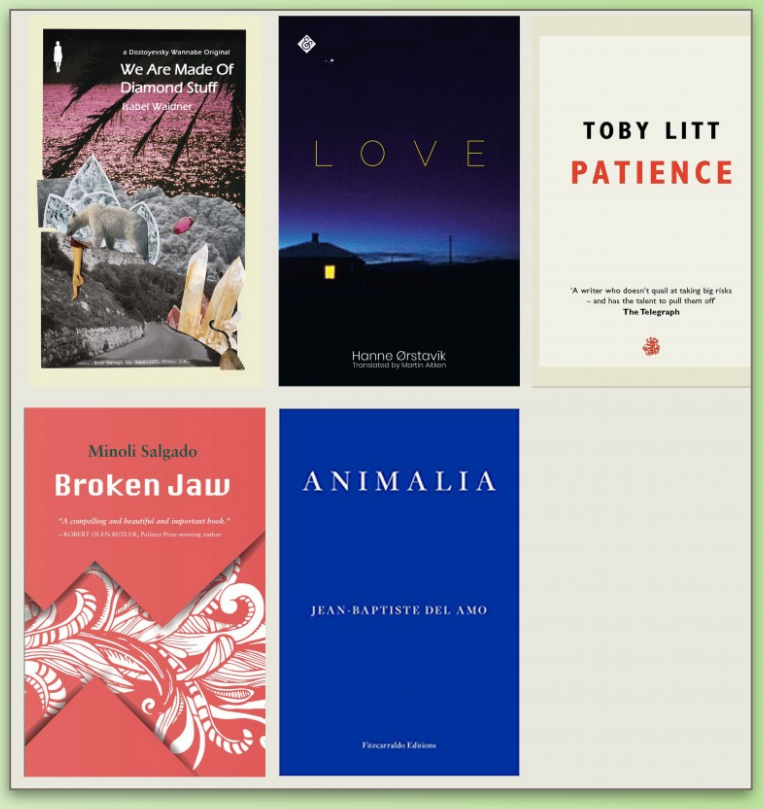
The RoC Prize was founded in 2017 by the author Neil Griffiths. He initiated it with £2,000 of his own money, and then, as he puts it, guilt-tripped other successful authors into putting more money into the prize pot. It is now supported by the *Times Literary Supplement* and Arts Council England, as well as its partner the University of East Anglia in the form of the UEA Publishing Project.

The RoC Prize is open only to works of fiction published by small presses. The definition of a small press in this context is one that employs fewer than five full-time staff.

The Prize is unusual in that publishers do not have to pay for their books to be on the shortlist, and in that the prize money goes to the press as well as to the author. Before I came across the RoC Prize I had no idea that a publishing company had to pay for putting their books forward for our major prizes, the argument being that the contribution is needed to pay for publicity for the prize, and these expenses can be recouped in increased sales. The RoC doesn't ask this.

The winner of the first RoC Prize was John Keene in 2017 for *Counter Narratives*. Eley Williams won in 2018 for her marvellous short story collection *Attrib.* and there were two winners in 2019, the poet Will Eaves for his

novel *Murmur* and Alex Pheby for *Lucia*, the book he came to talk to us about later that year.



The winner this year was *Animalia* (Fitzcarraldo Editions), by Jean-Baptiste Del Amo. It tells of a family pig farm in French countryside. It takes the form of four books in one and ranges from 1898 to 1981. It is by no means an idyllic tale of rural life, being as brutally graphic about the lives of humans as that of pigs. A work of great literature, translated here by Frank Wynne, it is the first of Del Amo's books to be published in English.

Due to the Coronavirus, and the strain it is putting on small presses to survive, the prize money this year was shared by all the shortlisted authors and their publishers. If you want to support the prize, or just read more about it, visit the Republic of Consciousness Prize website. They run a monthly subscription book club, all books provided by small presses and all proceeds going towards running the prize.

‘THE READER’ IN SUFFOLK AND ESSEX

BY TRICIA GILBEY

All of us in Suffolk Book League are keen readers of course and love our BookTalks, but did you know there is also an organisation called ‘The Reader’ which has begun to offer shared reading groups in Suffolk and north Essex? ‘The Reader’ is a very inclusive organisation which usually welcomes people to weekly groups open to all and free to attend.

‘The Reader’ grew from the work of Jane Davis from the University of Liverpool. Groups read a chapter or more of a novel, or a short story, aloud, and then a poem, discussing and relating these to their own lives. It is this ‘live, in the moment’ shared meaning-making that makes them different from most book groups, where people will typically read and reflect alone and only come together afterwards to discuss. Members of groups run by ‘The Reader’ often understand what they are reading in different and sometimes deeper ways because of the input of other group members. and the discussion of personal experiences which grow from the literature.

Back in 2008, when there were a cluster of groups in the Liverpool area, Blake Morrison wrote an article for the *Guardian* called *The Reading Cure* about Jane Davis’s work, calling it ‘bibliotherapy’, as research has shown that shared reading is an effective way of improving health and wellbeing. This was syndicated internationally and interest grew. Over the next decade, thousands of people from all sorts of backgrounds around the world joined groups with trained leaders, and recently new groups began here, in Suffolk and north Essex.

‘The Reader’ has refurbished Calderstones mansion in Liverpool and this has now opened as an international centre for shared reading and culture. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit them hard, as with all arts organisations and charities, and ‘The Reader’ has, for now, moved its activities online. This gives us all the perfect opportunity to see what shared reading might look like in practice. Everyone can get access to live and recorded events on website for ‘The Reader’ and on their Facebook and Twitter. It’s impossible to recreate exactly a group where everyone contributes, but this is a good time to get a feel for what ‘The Reader’ is all about and to enjoy the company of other lovers of literature. Then, if you’d like to join a group once the lockdown is lifted, you can contact ‘The Reader’ who will be happy to point you in the right direction.

https://www.thereader.org.uk/get-involved/the-reader-at-home/

UNDER A WARTIME SKY

BY LIZ TRENOW

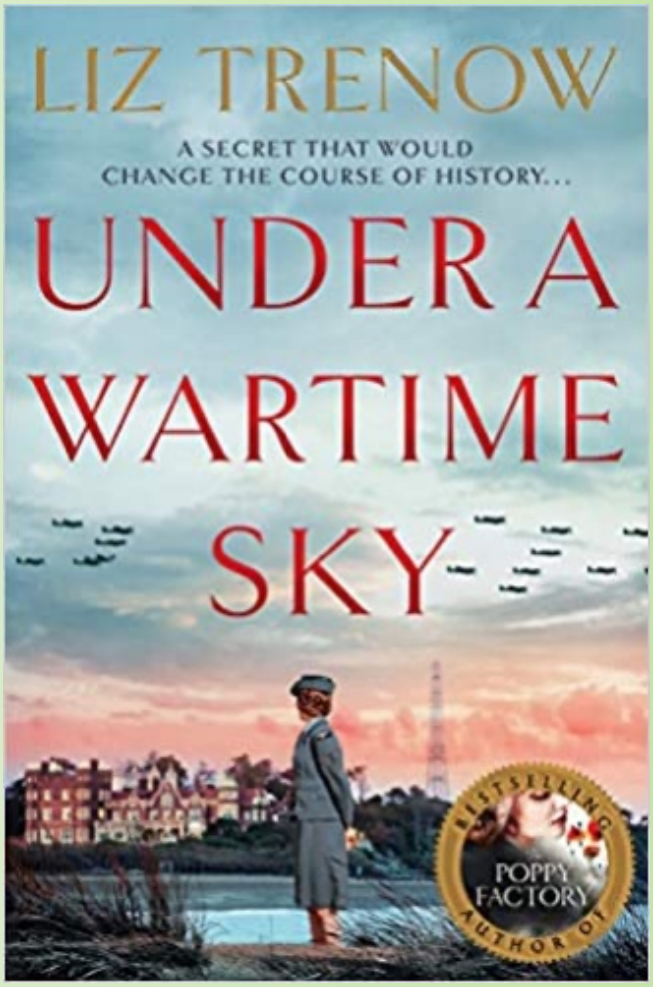
Pan (2020)

Liz Trenow has written seven novels. Her first, *The Last Telegram*, published in 2012, was set in a silk factory in Suffolk during the Second World War and inspired by her own family history. She returns to a solidly Suffolk setting for her latest novel, *Under A Wartime Sky*, published in February. It is set mostly in Felixstowe and Bawdsey just before and during the Second World War. This story is also inspired by family links as Liz spent childhood holidays at Felixstowe Ferry and later took advantage of various invitations by friends to stay in Bawdsey Manor, a central location in the book.

Liz writes historical fiction which often links the past to the present and this recent novel is no exception. Those links are often character driven and in *Under A Wartime Sky* the two main characters are brought together by their involvement with Bawdsey Manor during the time it was being used as a base for the development of Radar. They are Vikram (Vic) Mackensie a young and brilliant physicist brought in from Cambridge to work with Robert Watson-Watt, an expert in radio detection, and Kathleen (Kath) Motts, a local girl who knows Vic from working in the Manor's canteen and later as a Radar operator. This unlikely pairing allows the author to explore a number of themes, including racism and homophobia.

It is clear in all her novels that the author does a significant amount of research on the period in which her stories are set and this is particularly evident at the end of

Under A Wartime Sky where she provides a very useful list of resources which inspired her to write the novel. However, she wears this research lightly in her novels. The reason maybe gleaned from a comment she made in a recent interview with Catherine Larner in the *Suffolk Magazine:*



'The trickiest aspect of research is knowing when to stop, though. Research can destroy your imagination in many ways. You have to use it as a launchpad. Take copious notes, then close your notebook and put it to one side.'

One aspect of the novel which the author doesn't need to research is the geographical setting which she knows so well. My concern is that many of her readers will not have this advantage so maybe an introductory sketch map showing the location of Felixstowe and Bawdsey would have been useful.

Reviewed by Jeff Taylor

THE PHILOSOPHER'S DAUGHTERS

BY ALISON BOOTH

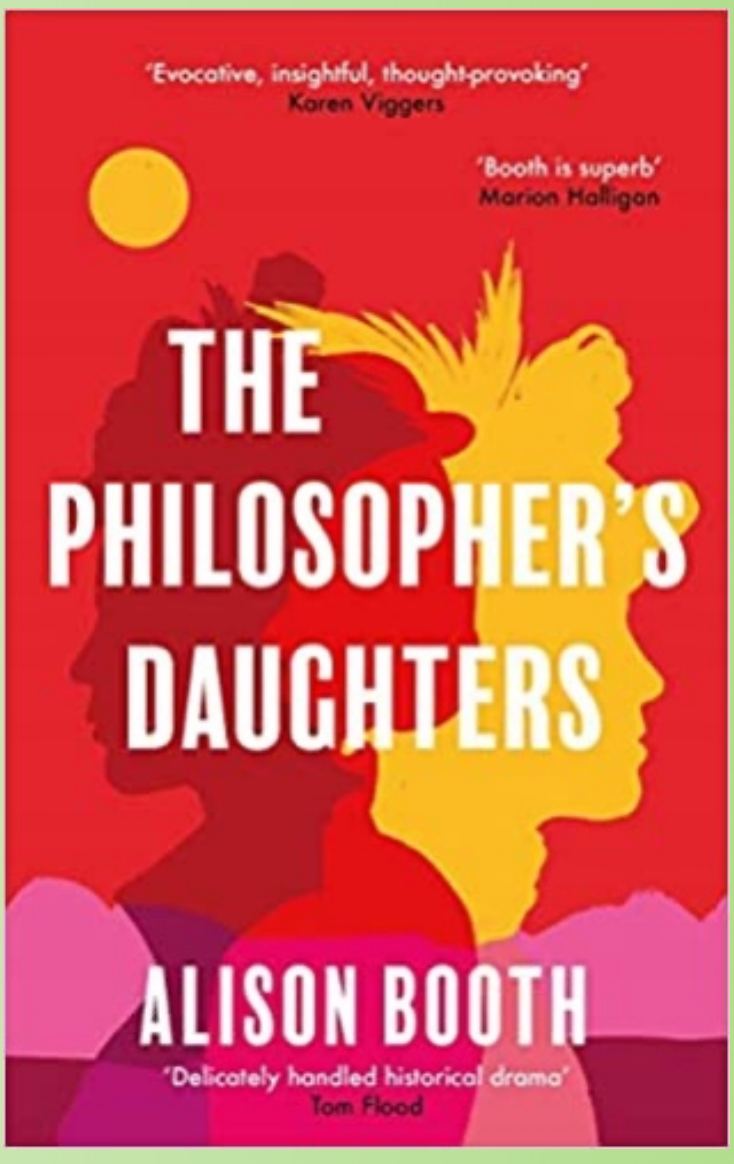
RedDoor Press (2020)

The Philosopher's Daughters, set in 1890s London and Australia, has contemporary resonance with its exploration of racial tensions and the fight for true equality for women. I made an immediate personal connection with this novel too because Alison Booth demonstrates so well the complex effects of separation on two sisters when one emigrates to another continent, as my own sister did.
The sisters are Sarah and Harriet, daughters of the moral philosopher and reformer, James Cameron. Sarah falls in love and goes to explore Australia with her new husband. Harriet is a dutiful daughter who helps her father and paints in her spare time. She's very involved in her father's campaigns for social justice, but when he suddenly dies, she's cut adrift from everything she's known. Impulsively, she boards a ship to join Sarah in the Northern Territories on a cattle station.

In this fledgling outback society the sisters come up against less enlightened people who talk of the 'aboriginal problem'. Harriet, at first, feels only the 'emptiness, like a presence hemming you in', but she soon realises 'that the emptiness surrounding her was not emptiness at all but was peopled with a rich and beautiful mythology and history.'

This book is full of references to light, both the harsh sunlight which means Harriet can't paint at all to start with, and the slanted light which falls through the leaves of the eucalypts and throws shadows. Harriet has to learn to see

in a new way so she can paint again, and this helps her through her grief and towards a new life and a new love. As the philosopher's daughters free themselves of the blinkers of 'civilisation', they each respond in different ways to the challenges of the vibrant but unforgiving outback and the other people who live there.



The Philosopher's Daughters is 'a work of fiction embedded in historical fact', and Alison Booth's note at the end indicates her meticulous research, although her story wears that research lightly. By the end I was left musing on love, the value of art, and how important it is to stand up for your beliefs. This is a novel which effortlessly carried me nine thousand miles and more than a century away to a world, which, although very different, made me reflect on our own.

Reviewed by Tricia Gilbey

THE WHAT DEMENTIA TEACHES US ABOUT LOVE

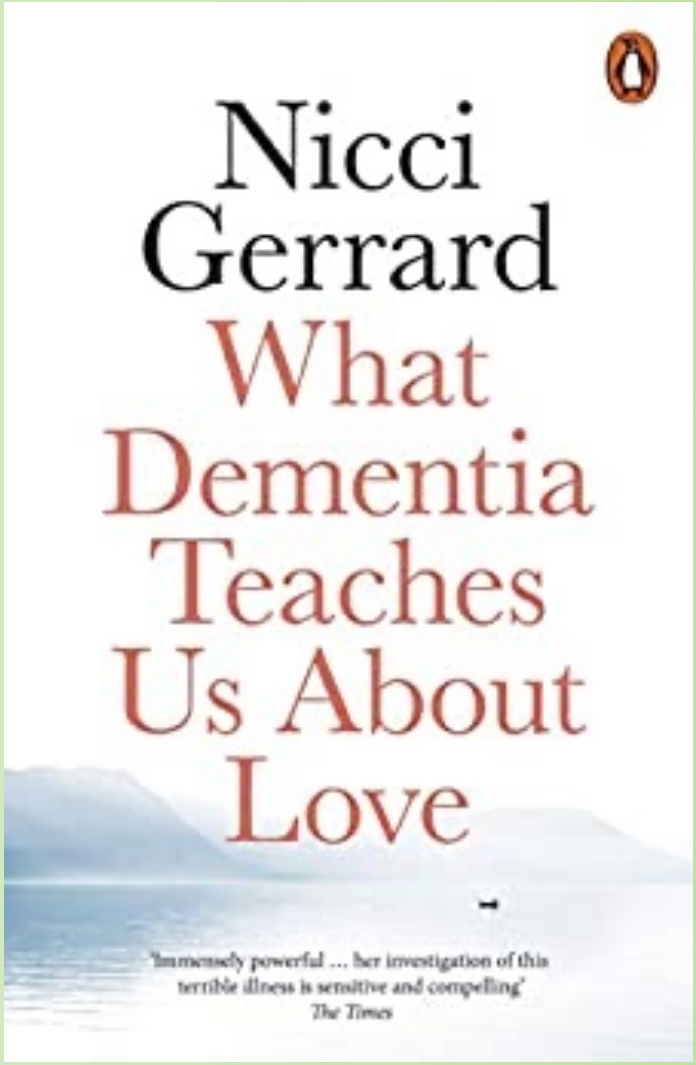
BY NICCI GERRARD.

Penguin Books (2020)

Nicci Gerrard is a crime novelist and journalist, who has been visiting institutions across the UK in which sufferers from dementia are living and dying. Having watched her own father suffer from this sickness, she is strongly engaged with the plight of these people. So this book is partly her observation of people confronting this threatening condition, but also a personal reflection on it, leading her to offer views on the nature of our humanity.

Dementia robs us of ourselves, all that gives us a sense of being a person. It is therefore a form of death, in which the indicators listed by the philosopher Peter Singer are those we lose: 'self-awareness, self-control, a sense of the future, a sense of the past, the capacity to relate.' We lose even the ability to love, which for carers is often the bitterest part of their plight. And yet she says that her father 'in some mysterious way' remained himself. He was 'like a man'.

Some of the most moving parts of the book are descriptions of people maintaining activities and interests and ambitions until far into the illness: the artist William Untermohlen, for example, gaining courage by painting. But besides the narratives of consolation are unblinking description of the meaningless existence, and the desolation of the carers who watch their loved ones disappear before their eyes while they play the part of those who still live in a world of meaning. The vivid and



truthful accounts of people under stress, the heart ¡of the book is the description she gives of John's Campaign, to enable carers to be seen as welcome to hospital wards: an access valuable both to the sufferers and also to the carers themselves. As all of us fear dementia, so these pages give us the courage to face what seems like the worst with truth and honesty. There is also practical advice on how to prepare for the ordeal.

She is herself an avowed humanist, and conducts humanist funeral rites, so she has no religious views to offer. She does not even wander into that vaguely numinous haze which people often designate as ‘spiritual’. She wants to describe the experience in this-worldly terms, with compassion and empathy for victims, carers and associates alike. This is a shortcoming, as dementia

often causes people to ask profound questions about human identity and what in religious terms is called the soul. Like the hymns which were sung at her own father's funeral, religious musings are hard to keep out. Nicci Gerrard's own conclusions about the matter aside, the book would have been richer for acknowledging how various belief systems condition the way people cope with the death of personality at the end of life.

This is otherwise a warm and vivid book about a bleak subject, steering us between bogus confidence and existential despair.

Reviewed by Keith Jones

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Poets of the First World War Study Day

When things get back on track, post Covid-19, Jean Moorcroft Wilson will lead a study day on the lives and work of writers in the First World War. Jean is a biographer, academic and authority on Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Charles Sorley, Isaac Rosenberg and Edward Thomas. The day is also likely to touch on the work of Wilfred Owen, Julian Grenfell and Rupert Brooke. *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to Goodbye to All That* (1895-1929) was published in 2018 and Jean is working on the second volume of Graves' life. Jean lectures at Birkbeck, University of London, and is an enthusiastic, engaging and amusing tutor. She will illustrate her short talks and encourage discussion and questions.

Suffolk Book League committee's uplifting, amusing and joyous book recommendations for tricky times.

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout*
Clemency Burton-Hill, *Year of Wonder*
J. L. Carr, *The Harpole Report*
Tom Drury, *The End of Vandalism*
Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage* and
Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It
George Eliot, *Silas Marner*
Paul Ewen, *Francis Plug: How to be a Public Author*
Stella Gibbons, *Cold Comfort Farm*
Graham Greene, *Travels with my Aunt*
Amanda Hodgkinson, *Spilt Milk*
Tove Jansson, any of her books, especially the Moomins
Norman Jay, *Mister Good Times*
Amy Liptrot, *The Outrun.*
Richard Mabey, *Nature Cure*
Any by Robert Macfarlane
Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence*
Anything by Jessica Mitford
Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*
Ann Patchett, *The Dutch House*
Philip Pullman, *Daemon Voices: On Stories and Storytelling*
Dodie Smith, *I Capture the Castle*
John Lewis-Stemple, *Meadowland*
Nina Stibbe, *Reasons To Be Cheerful*
Olga Tokarczuk, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*
P. G. Woodhouse's books