
Summer Reading 2021

The Peter Symonds Summer Reading List 2021

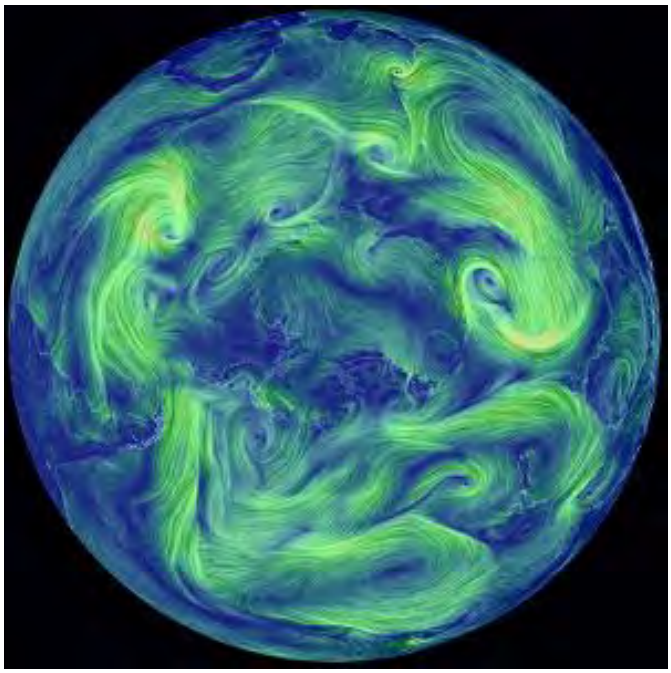
Bibliophile: a person who loves or collects books.

Climate Change: "Climate change is the long-term shift in average weather patterns across the world. Since the mid-1800s, humans have contributed to the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the air. This causes global temperatures to rise, resulting in long-term changes to the climate." (*The Met Office* July 2021).

Despite being a long challenging year for all the staff at Peter Symonds, the enthusiasm for books remains rich and broad, resulting in a wonderful selection of reviews for this year's list. These include *Diary of an MP's Wife* reviewed by Norman Levy (which included a word I hadn't read before *squireocracy*) and *Word Perfect* by Ben Farndon (which included the origins of the expression "taking the biscuit"). A number of excellent Science Fiction books have been reviewed, including Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* by Kayleigh Clarke (which really made me wonder whether Sci-Fi/sci-fi should be capitalised or not) and Jenny Curtis reviewed Becky Chambers' *A Closed and Common Orbit*, an author who is currently making a huge wave within Science Fiction circles. This year's list also reflects an increasing area of bibliophilic behaviour, the enjoyment of the graphic novel with Fran Lee-Davis reviewing the illustrated adaption of Attwood's *A Handmaid's Tale*. A good number of non-fiction books have also been reviewed this year, including those by Nick Allen, who has gone beyond the bibliographic call of duty and delivered four reviews for this year's list. I do so hope a book or two within this year's list meets your bibliophilic needs during the summer holidays.

An immense thank-you to the twenty-six contributors for their reviews. The character of the reading list depends on these wonderful reviews, and it is a real pleasure receiving them and then putting the list together. Thank-you for enduring my repeated chivvying.

In the last few years, several books have been reviewed for the list that deal with important environmental issues, such as *Wilding* by Isabella Tree and this year's Summer Reading List celebrates the Environmental Science department at Peter Symonds. Started in 2001 this department has been growing steadfastly for 20 years and it is staffed by the most extraordinary and committed teachers. I know this first-hand as I teach above their classrooms in Wyke Lodge and so hear and see the most amazing things. One day, after I came downstairs with an EPQ question on wind turbines, an Environmental Science teacher sat me down and showed me the most marvellous website - the Earth Nullschool website - which displays a colour map of Earth in real time with its wind, temperature and gas fluctuations. Please do check it out https://earth.nullschool.net . Then there was the day when I was upstairs in the classics classroom trying to recreate



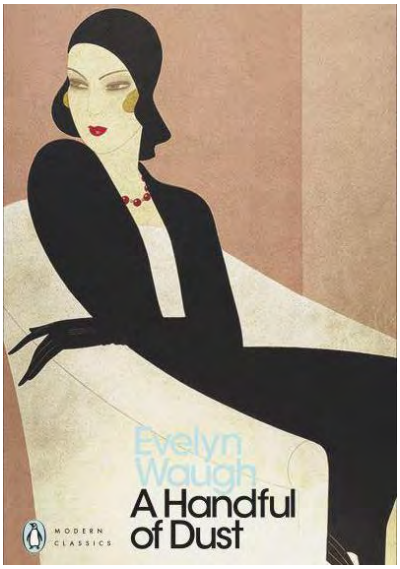
part of book 5 of Homer's *Odyssey* for my students, the episode where Poseidon stirs up a storm to batter the hero Odysseus. There I was deploying sound effects and a full-throated reading of the epic poem for my students, when I was soundly defeated by an Environmental Science lesson downstairs on noise pollution that included a reconstruction of the impact of Concorde taking off at 120 decibels. Peter Symonds delivers such a wide breadth of A level and BTEC subjects that allow our massive body of students to take on valuable multi-disciplinary subjects in depth. The Environmental Science department is without doubt one of the unsung heroes for facilitating the delivery of this unique programme of extensive opportunities. During my tutorial one to ones, when discussing a tutee's three subjects, Environmental Science frequently stands out. I hear about superb trips to Belize as well as to the local sewage plant. I also hear about the fascinating topics being covered, such as sustainable development, conservation of biodiversity and energy sources. If you want to find out more there is the wonderful AQA text-book *Environmental Science* (2018) written by a founding member of the department, the amazing Richard Genn. Richard is retiring this year after 40 years of teaching and he departs with our very best wishes. Early on in his book Richard cites Mahatma Ghandi:

"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

Richard has kindly supplied the cover photographs (and a few additional shots) for this year's reading list including this one here of a sleeping dormouse. On the front cover there is an African sea-eagle taken at Lake Naivasha in Kenya and on the rear a remarkable picture of a ship-wrecked freighter, the EDRO III, which ran aground off Cyprus in 2011. These three photographs I think nicely reflect our mix of feelings at the end of his tough academic year.

Ed Bragg

KATE GRUNSTEIN, Head of English Literature



***A Handful of Dust* by Evelyn Waugh**

I don't know whether it's to do with being an English teacher, but when someone asks me to select a novel to formally recommend, it sends me into something of an existential crisis. *A Handful of Dust* is an old friend to me, as for many years it was the one I would go to. I'll start with the title, which I think is one of the greatest novel titles ever (Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* is another one, also Javier Marías's *Tomorrow In The Battle Think On Me*). It is taken from TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and quoted in epigraph,

'...I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust'

... thus, striking something of a chilling note at the start of what is - at least on the surface - a comic novel. Set in the rather effete and hedonistic upper-class society of the 1930s, of which Waugh himself was a member, like many of his novels, it satirises the shallow amorality of his contemporaries. It is the story of Tony Last, owner of a stately home in the Gothic style - deeply unfashionable at the time - whose wife Brenda becomes bored with his retiring country life. She makes a bid to re-enter the London social whirl by starting an affair with John Beaver, a marvellously insipid hanger on, who survives by making up lunch parties as a bachelor and refers to his mother (another brilliant, monstrous creation) as 'Mumsy'. Everything is intensely understated and the whole novel moves relentlessly towards the chaos of the absurd. There is a close to perfect scene following the sudden accidental death of the Lasts' young son John Andrew. Waugh somehow understands that the best way to evoke the sheer wordless horror of the event is through humour: Tony waits in the silence of the house for his wife to return from London, playing Animal Snap with a virtual stranger, because it's the only game he can remember. Like the title, the ending of *A Handful of Dust* is one of the most perfect in literature. Too much of a spoiler to say why, but it leaves you not quite sure whether to laugh or scream. Almost certainly, Waugh means you to do both. Actually, the more I think about it, the more perfect I think this novel is. I must go and read it again.

TOM PRENTKI, Teacher of English Literature

***The Secret Hangman* by Peter Lovesey**

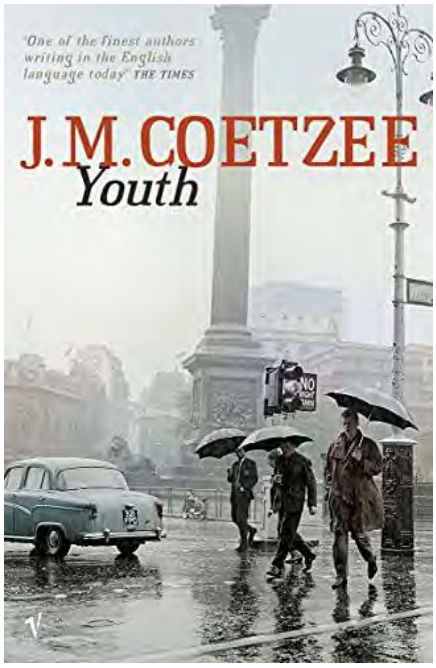
During the stresses of home schooling and teaching, reading a novel which required prolonged concentration and interpretation proved beyond me, so, I turned back to the easy comfort of Peter Lovesey.

This book is the ninth in the Peter Diamond series though there is no particular need to start at book one. Lovesey was recommended to me some years ago when I first developed an interest in crime fiction. Since then, I have mostly pursued that interest though Ian Rankin's Rebus series.

But, in need of something lighter I went back to Lovesey. If you have a knowledge of Bath or the wider Wiltshire and Somerset area, then there will be plenty of local interest for you. All the books

are set in the wider South – Southwest area. The plot lines are grisly – this is about a series of apparent hangings assumed to be suicide – but there is plenty of humour. There is also a love interest for the protagonist: cynical, ageing detective Peter Diamond. Some of the characterisation is a bit clumsy and cliché but Diamond is likeable, sardonic and witty. This is a 'great whodunnit' which bowls along to a clever conclusion.

***Youth* by J.M. Coetzee**

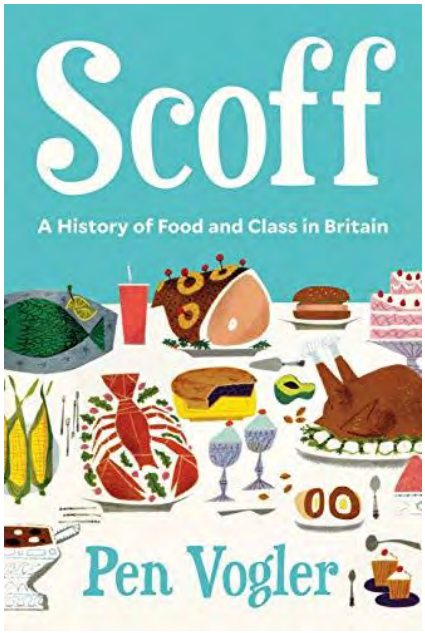


This is a very easy read. I am not a quick reader, but I managed this in a couple of sittings, probably propelled on by the fact that I love everything of Coetzee's that I've read previously. This is quite different from all the rest – a semi-fictionalised autobiography which is based upon Coetzee's experience as a student in London, having fled his native South Africa during apartheid. In large parts this novel is about monotony and listlessness, which doesn't sound particularly appealing, but I was enthralled. Set mostly in 1960s England, the third person narrative follows his totally unfulfilling time spent working as a computer programmer for IBM as well as a series of meaningless affairs, as he struggles to feel truly at home and accepted amongst the British.

At its heart, I felt this was really an examination of one young man's search for meaning and the difficulty in navigating between the material (money and sexual gratification) and a more profound and a longer term sense of building an identity which sustains us.

ANNA WHITT, Teacher of Spanish

***Scoff – A History of Food and Class in Britain* by Pen Vogler**

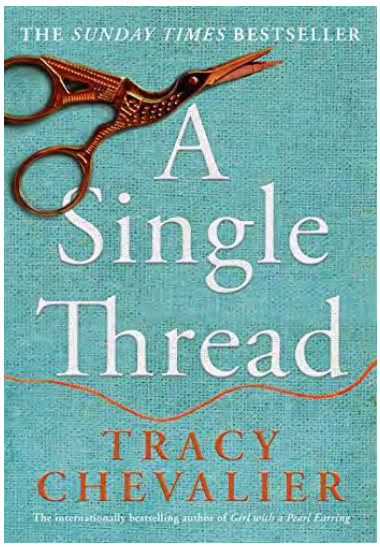


Let's face it: I'm probably not the only one of us who spent rather more of the COVID-19 lockdowns thinking about food than was probably healthy. And what food! Supporting local businesses (ahem) through deliveries from the Cheese Stall and Hoxton Bakehouse to my renewed obsession with Sainsbury's Salt and Vinegar Twirls, and the wonderful family meals that helped us to get through it all. But what made the first two examples somehow more adult, more tasteful, than the eye-wateringly acerbic snacks?

Pen Vogler's *Scoff* is a fantastic study of why we look at food in the way that we do. What is the link between food and social class? How did spuds become socially acceptable, and how can we explain the rise and fall of white bread? Each bite-sized section (which makes this a great term-time read) includes an older and a more recent recipe for the same dish, illustrating how our diets have evolved over the centuries, by tracing the origins and spread of different foods or fashions. There are sections on etiquette, on Christmas Pudding, as well as on gin, tripe, gravy and avocados, and many more, all following the author's broad range of interests and meticulously researched.

This book is for you if you love history, sociology or food, or all three, and it is one of those reads that leaves you as satisfied as after a cracking meal.

***A Single Thread* by Tracy Chevalier**



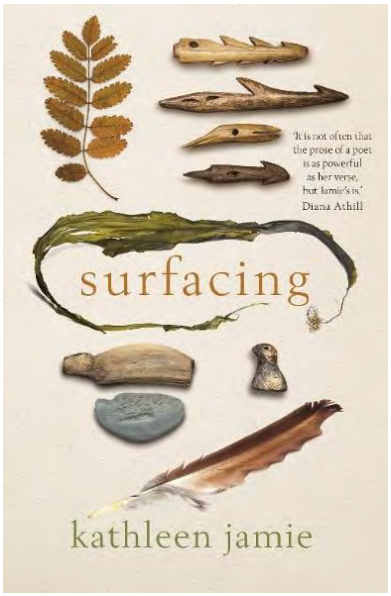
An unashamed recommendation here for a novel with a local connection, but if you come for the familiarity of the Cathedral and the landmarks of the Clarendon Way, you'll stay for the beauty of a slow-paced evocation of life in 1930s Winchester.

Violet is a "surplus woman", whose future died with her fiancé in the trenches, and whose move here is a brave step taken to escape the expectation that she will devote her life to caring for her overbearing mother. The novel gently weaves a detailed picture of a generation of women quietly but determinedly pushing boundaries to lead their own lives, brushing with many of the issues still facing women today, including the gender pay gap, sexuality and the dilemmas and anxiety involved with your first holiday alone.

The novel draws us into the female sphere of the Cathedral broderers whom Violet longs to join, in spite of her own loss of faith, because she too wants to contribute a legacy to the ancient building, perhaps in the face of having seen so much destruction already in her life. The detail of her commitment to master the complex needlepoint stitching demanded by Miss Pesel (who did indeed lead the Cathedral broderers) brings to the fore the skill and dedication needed to attain perfection for what ultimately are functional cushions. Alongside Violet's austere life and daily grind, we can see the gathering storm clouds of the war that would shake further the rigid social structures that 1914-1918 conflict had already undermined. Violet would not have called herself a feminist, but her choices and needs can certainly be framed as such. This is not a campaigning nor a polemical novel, but one in which you find yourself saying, "you go, girl" to Chevalier's Violet.

FRANK MYZOR, Teacher of English Language

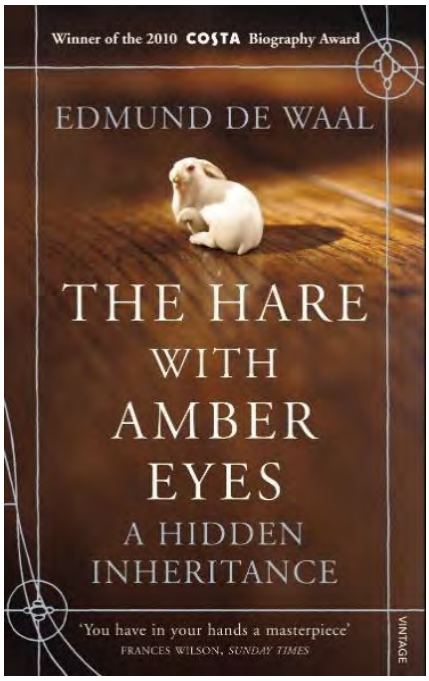
***Surfacing* by Kathleen Jamie**



This is genre-defying stuff. I suppose you might say it is a collection of short stories as most of the dozen pieces here have a narrative thread of sorts, although some of them are very short at around two or three pages. *Surfacing* is actually non-fiction and in an obvious sense it is mainly about archaeology and travel. A couple of the longer pieces recount the writer's joining of archaeological digs, one in Alaska, the other on the Orkneys. The former is a fascinating account of an isolated Inuit community re-discovering their roots in the artefacts thrown up due to climate change – mainly the melting perma-frost. Then there are two pieces of travel writing about the author's experiences as a young western woman on the Chinese borders of Tibet during the Tiananmen Square crisis in the 1980s. Apart from that it tends to be quirky observational writing, such the short reflection on elderly relatives, the ageing process, and the death of the author's father. I particularly liked the one about being lost in a wood. 'What are you doing here anyway? …You wanted to think about the horror. The everyday news…the weight of it all… the knowing.' Does this sound heavy going? It's not though. These are gentle, well-crafted little things that leave you plenty of room to think. They're not hard to understand but pinning them down is not so straight forward. I guess there is always something surfacing – memories, things in the soil, people and animals observed - you're not quite sure what to make of them, but who cares? Treat yourself to something a bit different**.**

SARA GOODHEAD, Teacher of History

The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance **by Edmund de Waal**



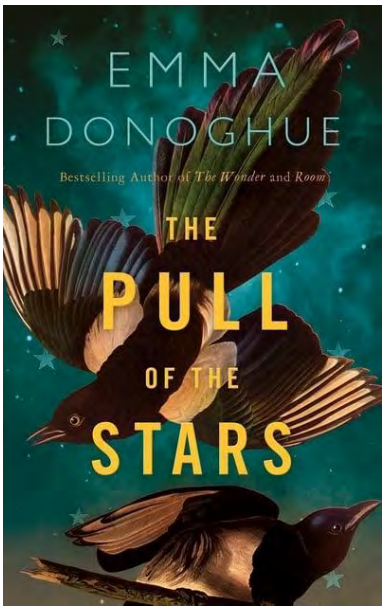
In the 1990s, potter Edmund De Waal inherited a collection of 264 Japanese netsuke from his great-uncle Iggie. He had already fallen under the spell of this collection of exquisite little carved objects, one of which is the eponymous hare with amber eyes. He became so fascinated by them that this book is the outcome of retracing the places the collection had been held and he lovingly recreates the settings in which they were housed.

The writer first traces the collection back to Paris in the 1870s, where it was brought together by Charles Ephrussi, a cousin of his great-grandfather. From then it passed as a wedding gift to De Waal's branch of the family in Vienna, was smuggled out of the hands of the Nazis and brought first to England and then back to Japan. This journey provides the structure for the writer's exploration of family history. Through detailed research and beautiful writing, he conjures the characters and the sense of time and place that provided the settings for the collection. First, late 19th century Paris, where the Ephrussi family moved in circles with the writers and artists of the day. The collection was just one of the many rich works of art collected by this pan-European Jewish dynasty, who had gained their fortune as grain brokers and bankers. Moving to Vienna, he builds a detailed picture of the wealth and status of the family there, based in their grand palace on the Ringstrasse. The most moving section of the book details the shocking and brutal way this lifestyle was abruptly brought to an end after the Anschluss, as the Nazis take over their impressive home and confiscate almost everything they owned. But the collection of Netsuke miraculously made it out of the house, eventually to be reunited with the family.

This is a book that defies categorisation. It is part family memoir, part art history, and, most of all, a personal journey with reflections on the power of objects to connect people. I found it a compelling story; I was transported to the places he describes in such careful detail and moved by the personal stories of loss and rediscovery.

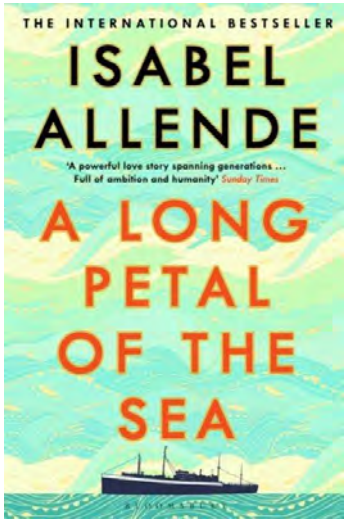
EIRLYS TUNNARD, Deputy Head of Careers

The Pull of the Stars **by Emma Donoghue**



Set during the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918, this novel is narrated by Julia, a nurse on the maternity ward of a fever hospital in Dublin. This is a fascinating look at the last known serious epidemic in the British Isles and it has resonance with our own recent experiences. The book covers three days where, on account of acute staff shortages at the hospital because of the war and the virus, Julia is put in charge of a small labour ward for women with the fever. As the women are from very different backgrounds, we can see the effect of poverty and ill health on their life chances, but also the way they support each other. The friendship between the young women is heightened by the terrifying times they are living through.

***The Long Petal of the Sea* by Isabel Allende**

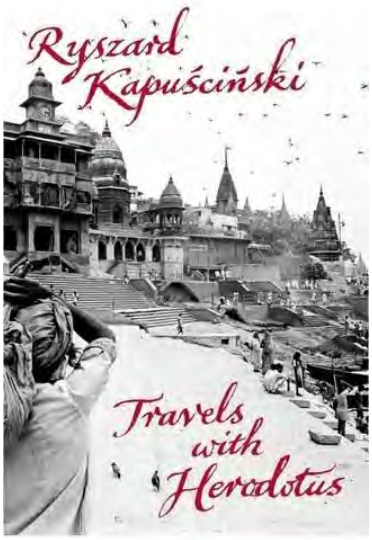


This is a wonderful new work of historical fiction by the Chilean-American writer Isabel Allende. From the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s through to life in Chile towards the end of the 20th century, this book follows a Spanish family who supported the Republican party and follows their dislocation from their homeland through to their new life across the Atlantic. The story focuses on two members of the family; Victor Dalmau, a medical student whose studies are punctuated by fighting on the losing side in Spain, and Roser, his pregnant sister-in-law, and how they leave Spain for South America on the refugee ship the SS Winnipeg. Although the war tears the family apart, the dislocation in some ways eventually helps to re-unite them.

(Editor's note: President Obama awarded Allende the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014 for her meritorious contributions to American life.)

GRAHAM GARDNER, Head of Classics

Travels with Herodotus by Ryszard Kapuscinski



No, I'd never heard of him either and I don't want you to run away with the idea that I indulge in esoteric works produced by obscure Eastern European authors … but more of that anon.

The author studied History at the University of Warsaw in the early 1950s when he came across the name Herodotus, but as he himself admitted, the name appeared and then quickly vanished from his conscience – at least he could find no reference to him in his notes.

Subsequently, he became a journalist for Sztander Mtodych ("The Banner of Youth"), spending his time trooping around the towns and villages of Poland, but never beyond; after all, this was Poland during the early years of the Cold War and 'Uncle Joe' didn't encourage tourists. A chance remark to his editor ("a strapping, handsome woman with thick blond hair parted to one side", though not sure what that has to do with things) was that he would "very much like to go abroad". "Where? What for?" came the response; "Czechoslovakia", he said, but it came to nothing. A year later, his editor calls out of the blue – "You'll go to India". And as a parting gift, she gave him "a thick book with a cover of yellow cloth. On the front, stamped in gold letters, was Herodotus: The Histories", the Polish translation of which, he hints, had been supressed until two years after the death of Stalin.

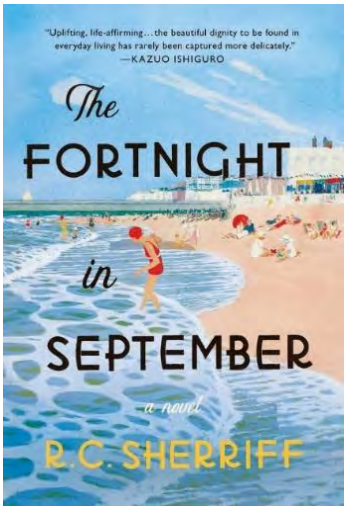
Thereafter we have a travelogue – Kapuscinski seems to have become Poland's only foreign travel correspondent – and his subsequent journeys take him to China (a different kind of communist control) and Africa where, rather incongruously, he takes in a Louis Armstrong concert in Khartoum. His travelogues are fine, though some might say Michael Palin has done them better. But his constant companion was Herodotus and large sections of his book offer a retelling of that historian, not least the great wars between Persia and Greece and the book slips seamlessly between travelogue and avuncular history. So, if you're looking for an introduction to the 'Father of History', you could try this.

As mentioned at the start, I don't really go in for obscure Eastern European authors, but the book was given to me by Ewa Slinn, a former colleague in Study Support who sadly passed away last year. She had joined us on one of our College Greek trips and gave it me as a 'Thank you'. "You'll enjoy it," she said; I did.

KATE BUCKLEY, Teacher of English Literature

***Miss Austen* by Gill Hornby**

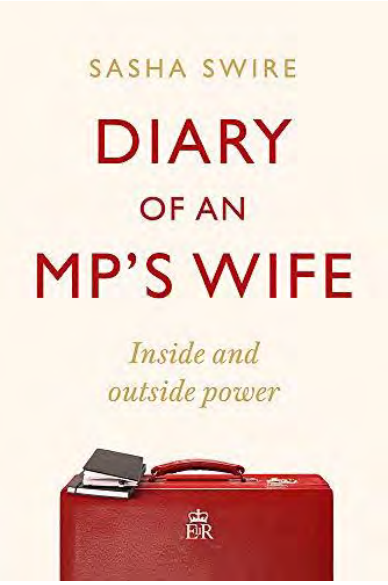
Literary historians have long believed that Cassandra Austen is guilty of a heinous act of vandalism: the destruction of many of her famous sister Jane's letters. In this novel, Hornby seeks to examine what might have motivated Cassandra's actions and by interweaving past and present, breathes life into the less famous Austen sister who, Hornby argues, was 'midwife' to Jane's novels and without whom they could not have been written. By turns very funny and very moving, the novel explores moments of Austen family history as well as the precarious status of women in the early nineteenth century who have 'failed' to marry. When the novel opens, it is twenty-three years since Jane's death and Cassandra, now in her sixties, returns to the rectory at Kintbury in Berkshire, home of her long-lost fiancé, Thomas Fowle. Ostensibly there to pay her respects following another family bereavement, in reality Cassandra wants to have a rummage around for the letters she believes are stored somewhere within the rectory, in order to prevent them falling into the wrong hands. In a leap of imagination, Hornby recreates the precious missing letters, convincingly ventriloquising the voice and wit of Jane Austen, whose presence in the novel further grows via Cassandra's associated memories. What emerges is a story of sisterly love and solidarity that endured to the end of Cassandra's life. Jane Austen was an intensely private person who wished her published writing, not her own personal story, to stand testimony for her achievements. Cassandra wished to protect her sister from the prying eyes of history and by the end of the novel, you feel she was entirely right to do so.



***The Fortnight in September* by R.C. Sherriff**

Best known for his WW1 play *Journey's End*, Sherriff had for a while harboured an ambition to write a novel. The idea for *The Fortnight in September* (1931) came to him, he says, while he was on a seaside holiday in Bognor Regis, sitting on the seafront watching the holiday makers go by. It is about an ordinary and apparently unremarkable working-class South London family, who always spend their annual summer holiday at Bognor, making the same train journey, staying in the same boarding house, visiting the same old haunts. The novel begins on the night before the family's departure and the ritual of their well-practised packing and preparations; we accompany them on their train journey and spend the novel with them on their 'staycation'. But as the fortnight progresses, we come to understand each member of the family more deeply: the failed ambitions of Mr Stevens and how the timid and overlooked Mrs Stevens is terrified of the sea but strives to hide this from her family. We witness the longing for romance experienced by their daughter Mary and the professional ambitions of their son, Dick; frustrated by the prospect of being "settled for life" in his first job since leaving school, Dick becomes inspired in a moment of epiphany to forge a career for himself as an architect. And there is the youngest child, Ernie, whose undaunted enthusiasm for all their traditional activities contrasts with the two grown up children, who are becoming too old for family seaside holidays. As a result, Sherriff poignantly captures the inevitable passing of time and no matter how familiar they are, things cannot stay the same. Perhaps the hopes and disappointments that characterise any ordinary life are best conveyed by the name of the Stevens' home-from-home, 'Seaview', from which, in reality, the sea can only be glimpsed at the far end of the street.

NORMAN LEVY, Study Support Teacher



***Diary of an MP's Wife* by Sasha Swire**

Who would have the audacity to publish a diary giving a very indiscreet picture of events, politically and socially, involving former Conservative colleagues and friends? Who would run the risk of possible social alienation through the loss of both friendships and the social events involving that peer group after the publication of such a memoir?

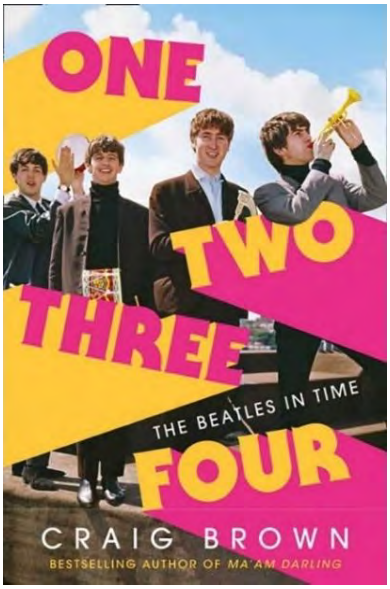
Enter Sasha Swire, (daughter of Sir John Nott, former cabinet minister under the Thatcher administration), journalist, mother, and wife of Hugo Swire MP for East Devon. His career as a Minister of State for Northern Ireland from 2010 – 2019, is colourfully and humorously recollected by her diary entries from 2010 – 2019.

As her husband's secretary, her observations are entertaining, witty and salaciously recorded. Notable highlights are particularly those of Cameron's 'Chumocracy', the hung parliament of Theresa May's premiership, and the Brexit debate. All these are peppered by some very fruity language too, turns of phrase, and some interesting nicknames awarded to some cabinet ministers for good measure.

At the same time, Swire manages to write skilfully, making some very astute and perceptive observations of MP's and their spouses. Other characters abound within the pages including celebrities, 'squireocracies' and minor royalty, all of whom are brought to life by her waspish and sharp intellect. Her thoughts also encompass implicit feminist reflections of the role of women within the Westminster village.

Perhaps in the wake of the current situation with Brexit and Covid 19, Swire's main achievement of her book is to show that politicians of high office, of whatever political persuasion, are really 'ordinary' human beings doing extraordinary jobs. Each having strengths and frailties, needs and wants, like the rest of us ordinary mortals! Her diary entries are a sober reminder that while power and influence are temporal, its trappings are a very powerful aphrodisiac to those in power. More Tea Vicar?

***One, Two, Three, Four, The Beatles in Time* by Craig Brown**



Noel Coward despised them. Cliff Richard winced at the very mention of them. Frank Sinatra thought that they would not make it in New York, but Leonard Bernstein admired them. Marlene Dietrich tried unsuccessfully to upstage or 'bomb' their photo call at the London Palladium. Politicians sucked up to them.

These and many other vinaigrettes can be found in Craig Brown's book *One, Two, Three, Four, The Beatles in Time.* This is latest addition to enter the canon of literature about the 'Fab Four' and their subsequent influence on popular culture. However, by drawing upon interviews and careful research including fans, musicians, journalists, amongst others, Brown successfully unearths and gives voice to their stories offering new, fresh perspectives about the Beatles lives and times.

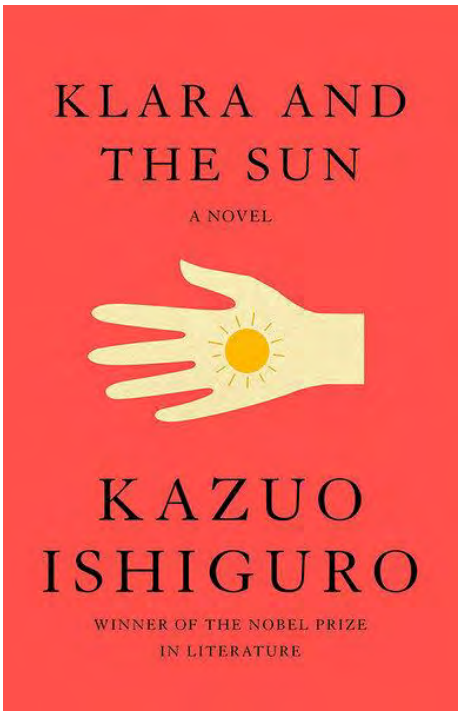
Although the book has a chronological thread, each chapter can be read as a stand-alone short story. Thus, giving insights into the personal and professional lives of the contributors. Many of them have been published for the first time and are quite revelatory. Collectively the one hundred and fifty short chapters gives a flavour of those experiences

and unique perspectives of each contributor's encounters with the 'Fab Four'. Many of the chapters are humorous, insightful, and tragic with a touch of the surreal for good measure. All this with the backdrop of the sixties, a period of tremendous social and cultural change.

Readers old and new to the Beatles and their music, will find this book a refreshing and engaging summer read. Those having read and enjoyed this may well want to have a more in- depth account of their story. For this, I would recommend Philip Norman's excellent and authoritative *Shout, The True Story of the Beatles.* For the musically minded, the late *Ian McDonald's Revolution in the Head* is a worthy read too.

All in all, a splendid read is guaranteed for all!

KAYLEIGH CLARKE, Teacher of English Literature



***Klara and The Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro**

Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro has masterfully explored the theme of unrequited and misplaced love in his impressive canon, most notably embodied by Mr Stevens in the 1989 Booker prize-winning *Remains of the Day*.

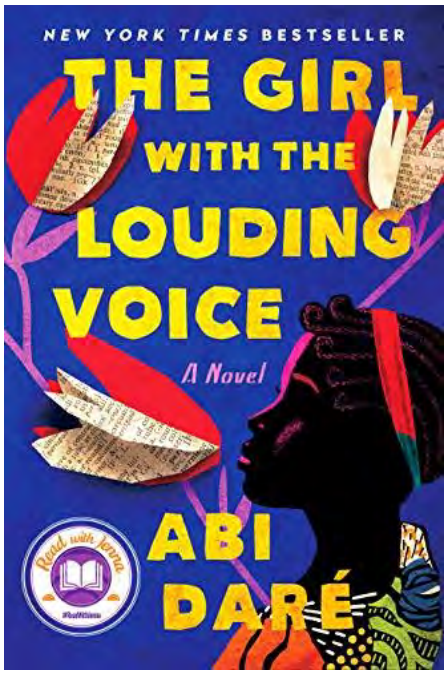
In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishaguru returns to a similar world that he first explored in his 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go*. This is Sci-Fi with a small 'sci' and a big 'Fi'. A type of science fiction that doesn't delve deep into the actual science or the future and, instead, gets on with exploring the emotional responses of the protagonists. (So Sci-Fi purists beware!) Like *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro uses the first-person narrative from the point of view of an 'other', Klara, to dispense with the need to exposit the world she inhabits. You learn like she does, by watching.

Klara is an AI 'friend' to teenage Josie, who chose Klara from her shop window amongst other AI 'friends', including newer models. Klara is perceptive and naïve at the same time, calculating scenarios and reading situations, but misunderstanding human motives. Her power comes from solar energy, so the Sun becomes a type of deity. It is also her source of hope when the human world around her reveals its darker side.

Josie is part of the 'lifted' program, a type of chemical and biological engineering project. Children who have the money and ability are made exceptional (like if exclusive schools were sponsored by 'Big Pharma'). Being lifted has become perceived as a necessity, but it comes at significant risk, including a previous tragedy within Josie's own family. Klara begins to learn her purpose might not be as simple as she originally calculated. As her world begins to grow and the circumstances become bleak, she senses her responsibility to Josie and asks for help from a 'non-lifted' neighbour boy, deciding what sacrifices will need to be made to save the girl she is programmed to love.

Ishiguro's Klara and The Sun is a beautiful parable, a meditation on love, loyalty, progress, and humanity. Like all great Sci-Fi, Klara inhabits a world that feels familiar, its differences narrowing as we surround ourselves with advancing 'Siris' and 'Alexas' and an overwhelming obsession with academic success despite the growing risks to financial stability and mental health. With a haunting echo of Ishaguru's Mr Stevens, you begin to see it's the one perceived incapable of love who is so profoundly affected by it.

CAROLINE BERETON, Exams Officer



The Girl with the Louding Voice **by Abi Daré**

This is the debut novel for Abi Daré and it follows the life of a Nigerian teenager sold into domestic slavery. *The Girl with the Louding Voice* is written with the main character Adunni as the narrator and it opens in a small Nigerian village called Ikati. It is told in a prose style that will sound unfamiliar to many readers, particularly Western ones, but the effect is as vivid as the sassy, strong-willed narrator's pidgin. Though occasionally challenging, Adunni's brave, fresh voice powerfully articulates a resounding anger toward Africa's toxic patriarchy.

This unforgettable novel tells the powerful story of a young girl living in modern-day Nigeria who dreams of receiving an education. Despite the many obstacles and misfortunes that she faces, Adunni refuses to let her 'louding voice' be silenced. Her inspiring story mirrors the story of many courageous young women across the world who long for a better future. Adunni's resilient voice will stay with you long after you finish reading the book.

It starts with Adunni, barely a teenager, who has had to drop out of school because her father can no longer pay the fees. He's decided to marry her off to the local taxi driver for a dowry of four he-goats, alongside: "Agric fowl, very costly. Bag of rice, two of it. And money." Her life then faces many very interesting and challenge times and what I found fascinating is how the writing style changes in parallel with Adunni's life journey.

The Midnight Library **by Matt Haig**

This is the first novel I have read by Matt Haig, although I have read his self-help books and briefly, this could still be classed as one of those. As a novel it certainly challenges you to assess the impact that life choices make, not only for you, but also for those around you.

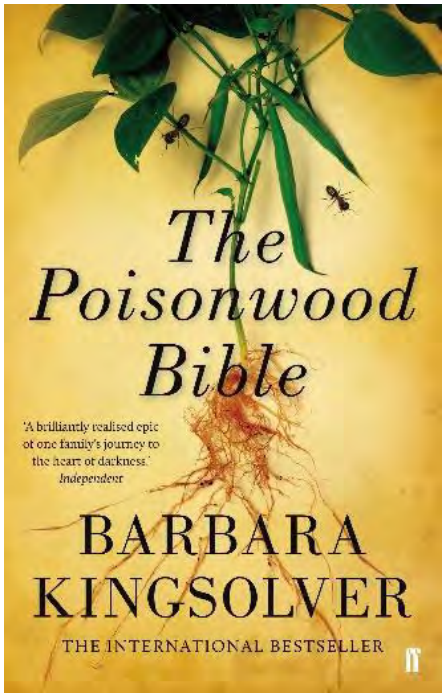
In the book, between life and death there is a library, and within that library, the shelves go on forever. Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived. To see how things would be if you had made other choices . . . Would you have done anything different, if you had the chance to undo your regrets?

In *The Midnight Library*, Nora Seed finds herself faced with this decision. Faced with the possibility of changing her life for a new one, following a different career, undoing old breakups, realizing her dreams of becoming a glaciologist; she must search within herself as she travels through the Midnight Library to decide what is truly fulfilling in life, and what makes it worth living in the first place.

While we all wonder how our lives might have been, what if you had the chance to go to the library and see for yourself? Would any of these other lives truly be better? I certainly found the book very thought provoking.

CATHERINE HAMILTON, Teacher of English Language and Literature

One of the advantages of teaching English is that it's possible to justify spending hours reading books as research and preparation for lessons. Occasionally these turn out to be texts you don't really enjoy, but mostly it's a good way of broadening your reading horizons and picking up texts that you otherwise might not come across. A short extract from Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* in a past exam paper led me to searching out a copy in a charity shop and also buying another of her novels, *The Lacuna*. Both novels are rather long and as such perhaps a little daunting, but both are wonderful texts and perfect for long summer holidays.

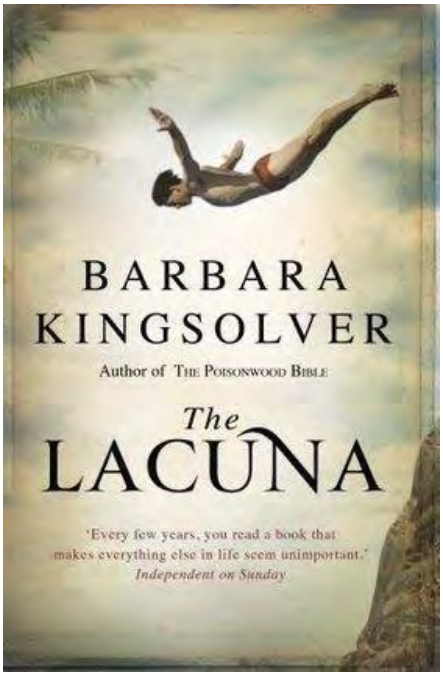


***The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver**

The Poisonwood Bible tells the story of four sisters who travel from America with their parents to live and work as missionaries in the Belgian Congo in the 1960s. The narrative switches between the perspectives of each of the girls and their mother. This effectively excludes the voice of their father who, in his refusal to try to understand the Congolese community and his determination to convert everyone to his evangelical beliefs, is often a cause of the many hardships the women have to endure. Each of the sisters, from five-year-old Ruth May to fifteen-year-old Rachel, has a very distinct personality and outlook on their experiences and there is humour as well as fear in their accounts of their daily lives. While a large section of the novel focuses on their time as missionaries, Kingsolver allows the characters to grow up, providing more insight into their childhood experiences as they reflect back on them. The political background of the Belgian Congo is significant to the events of the novel, but this is very much about how individuals manage to survive despite hardships.

***The Lacuna* by Barbara Kingsolver**

The Lacuna is set in the USA and Mexico during the early to mid twentieth century, focusing on the life of a boy who works as a cook and secretary for the artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, as well as for Leon Trotsky (in exile in Mexico). After Trotsky's assassination, the narrator moves to live in the USA but uses his knowledge and experience of Mexico to become a successful historical novelist. It's very different in subject matter to *The Poisonwood Bible*, but Kingsolver uses similar techniques such as shifts in narrative perspective, a time frame that allows characters to age and reflect, as well as writing about how political events affect the lives of individuals.

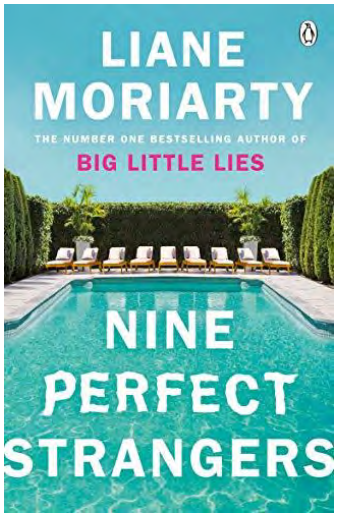


BARRIE ROBERTS, Teacher of Biology

***Hag Seed* by Margaret Atwood**

This is one in a series of reinterpretations of Shakespeare's plays written by contemporary authors and, as would be expected of Atwood, it is very cleverly plotted. A theatre director planning a production of *The Tempest* is deposed by his understudy. He finds employment teaching prisoners English skills through drama and of course he chooses to put on his version of *The Tempest* using the prisoners and so finds the perfect chance for revenge. Of course, the book follows the plot of the play and some of the fun is working out how the characters in the play and the book correspond. There is a lot of fun in Atwood's writing and the author clearly enjoyed the challenge of writing the book alongside the original play. It is not without flaws, however. I thought the Caliban character was a bit weak, but the ghost of the director's child is excellent. I would recommend it as an easy way into the play, and although I've never read *The Tempest*, it is definitely on my summer reading list now.

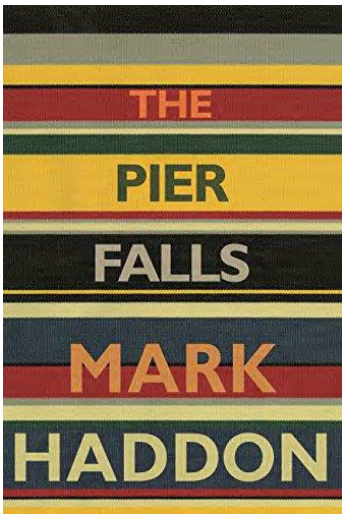
BEL PERTWEE, Careers Advisor



***9 Perfect Strangers* by Liane Moriaty**

This is one in a series of reinterpretations of Shakespeare's plays. (*Editor's note: check out Barrie Roberts' review of Hag-Seed*). *9 Perfect Strangers* is a great summer read. Written by Liane Moriaty (who wrote *Big Little Lies*), it is a great page turner if we are ever lucky enough to get a beach holiday this summer. The story is about 9 strangers who meet at a health resort for 10 days of detox. The main character is Frances Welty, a best-selling romantic novelist, who is struggling from two broken marriages and a broken heart. She is immediately curious about her fellow guests and the mysterious Masha who runs the health resort. As you read the book each of the nine characters is revealed and you are gradually drawn into their stories and the mysteries of everything that Tranquillium House has to offer.

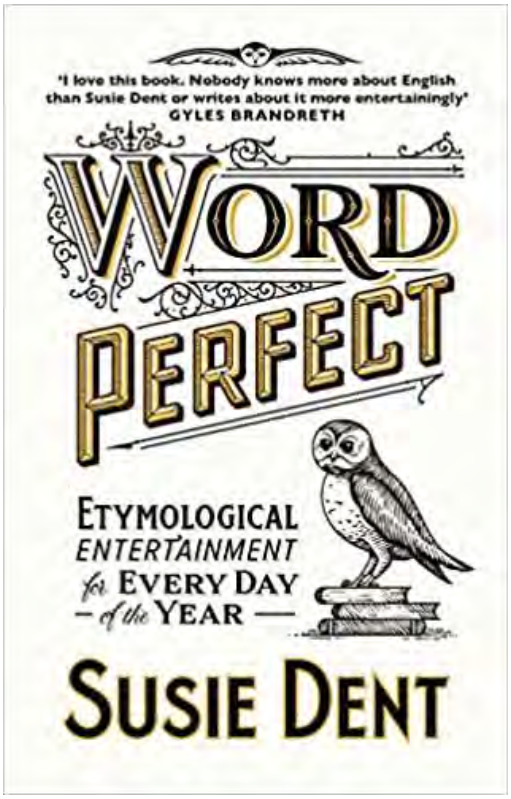
BEN FARDON, Head of English Language



***The Pier Falls* by Mark Haddon**

I think I reviewed this collection of short stories a few years ago. I remember it as pretty much the only thank you gift ever received by a departing student prior to this year: Matthew was his name if I recall correctly. Suspiciously linked to the era of teacher-awarded grades, was I alone in finding 2021 seemed to strangely bring a much fuller array of such gifts: no books, but plenty of edible and drinkable treats. Perhaps some post-results analysis work on the correlation between students' TAGs and the amount of chocolates received as gifts might make for some revealing data. It prompted me to read this book again anyway. It is a collection of 9 short stories. The themes aren't necessarily that cheery (death seems to run through a good few of the stories), but Haddon takes the reader into contrasting worlds of varied characters in locations as diverse as the Amazon jungle and a space station.

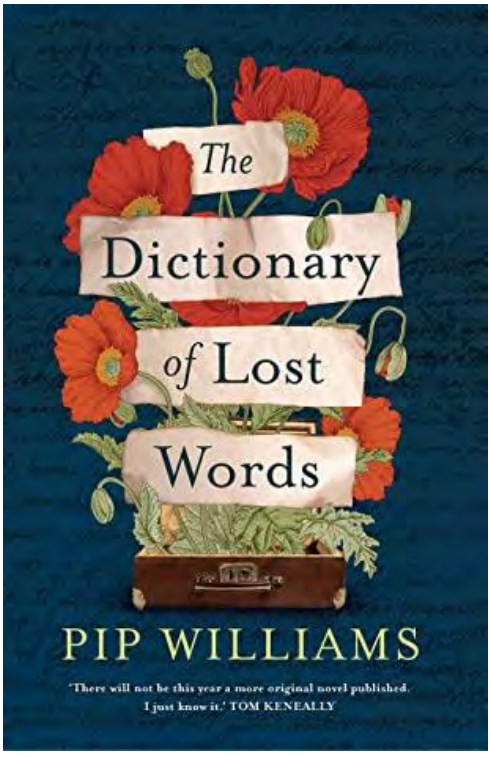
***Word Perfect* by Susie Dent**



The format of this book is a word entry for each day of the year, with some humorous anecdotes about its use and etymology. It's been a nice book to dip into daily for some word-based interest. Of course, one is drawn to entries for key dates in an individual's life. I'm hoping it may prove invaluable one day to know that my daughter's birthday falls on World Biscuit Day, and that the phrase "taking the biscuit" links back to a 19th century African American dance competition in which those displaying the most accomplished steps were awarded a slice of cake. Some dates of course won't fall annually: perhaps it's revealing this year's celebration of A-level Results Day (10th August) is given the entry for "the full monty", for which Dent points out how folk-etymologies (1940s British English Army General Bernard Montgomery's insistence on a full English breakfast each day) can sometimes persist. Hopefully GCSE Results Day's entry (12th August), "stitched up", reported as a 16th century creation for hasty sewing, bodes better than it sounds.

JO THOMAS, Head of Politics

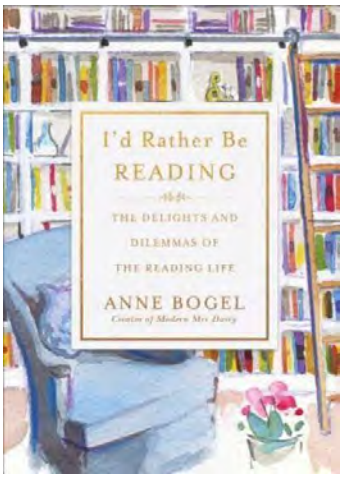
***The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams**



A perfect book for the summer! The context for this book is the writing of the first version of the *Oxford Dictionary*. This took place in the last decades of the 19th Century when it was decided that there was a need for a new dictionary. The process involved in the writing is in itself fascinating - people all over the country sending in words and definitions with a team of lexicographers working in the scriptorium or 'Scripy' (basically a garden shed) to decide on the best definitions - and every few years publishing a volume of a letter (the whole process lasted until 1928). Against this backdrop, we follow the life of the fictional Esme, daughter of one of the men working in the 'Scripy', and her interactions with characters who are based on the real men and women behind the dictionary. Esme spends many hours of her early childhood hiding under the table in the Scripy and comes to love words and their meanings. Her own life takes unexpected twists and turns and this provides a great story in itself - her relationship with Lizzie, the housemaid, her catastrophic stay in a boarding school, her involvement with the suffragettes, and personal tragedy … but along the way she begins to realise that there are many words that are not finding their way into the new dictionary, specifically, women's words - words that are not written down anywhere but are in common usage. Esme realises that some words are considered more important than others, and that words and meanings relating to women's experiences often go unrecorded. She starts to collect these words and definitions on small scraps of paper - the definitions always accompanied by a phrase provided by the woman who she heard use the word; she keeps them in a suitcase under Lizzie's bed which she calls 'The dictionary of lost words.'

If you love words and their meanings this is for you. Also, if you enjoy listening to books on Audible I can recommend this experience as it is exquisitely read by Pippa Bennett-Warner.

ED BRAGG, Teacher of Classics



***I'd Rather Be Reading* by Anne Bogel**

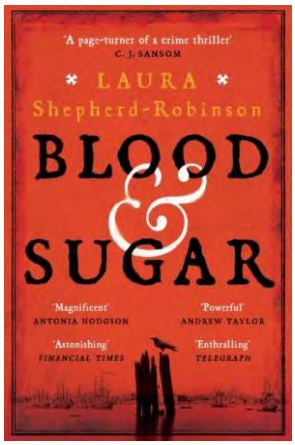
During a sleepless night in April, when in desperate need of a new book, I remembered a brief cross-reference to book addiction on the website *Good Reads*. After a couple of minutes of research, I downloaded Anne Bogel's *I'd Rather Be Reading* to my kindle, and in a couple of days I had devoured this fab little book.

In 21 short thematic chapters the American writer, blogger, and 100% bibliophile, Anne Bogel discusses the various consequences of being a book addict. E.g. in chapter 17 "Again, for the First Time", she discusses the pleasures and benefits of re-reading one's favourite books and how this results in new insights about the text. I was so pleased to see Bogel's reference to Jane's Austen's *Persuasion*, a novel that I myself have re-read many times, and how knowing the ending of *Persuasion* helps you really understand each character's "inner thoughts, motivations, and … resolutions."

In chapter 4, "The Books Next Door", Bogel tells of the consequences of living right next door to the town library for 13 years. "If I needed a new book to read, no problem. There were fifty thousand books next door." It reminded me of the summer holidays when as a boy I had started to become addicted to books, and, fortunately the Bragg family stayed right opposite the town library in Lyme Regis. This chapter also made me think about how lucky I am today to work in an office that is only three and half minutes' walk from the LRC, AKA the Symonds' library.

Then, there is the section which really struck a chord with me, chapter 10 "Bookworm Problems", where Bogel points out the emotional and mental challenges of being a book addict. E.g. your favourite book is about to be turned into a film and you have a mix of excitement and terror in your stomach about what Hollywood will churn out. E.g. you are in a book sale, you spot a certain title, and you can't remember whether you already own it. Should you buy it or not? Then she discusses one of my customary summer problems, how many books should you pack when you are about to go on a trip? Overall, this book is a real pleasure as Bogel does a great job illuminating the physical and mental mechanics of being a full-time bibliophile.

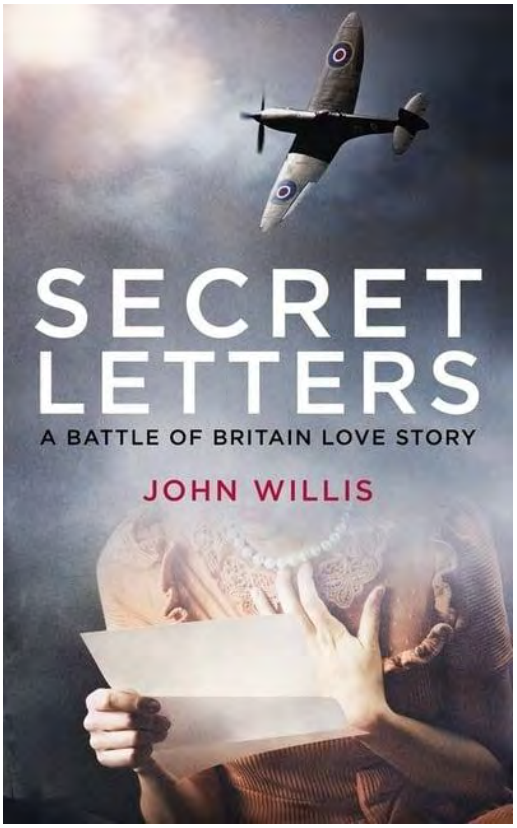
***Blood & Sugar* by Laura Shepherd-Robinson**



I came across this new work of historical fiction last summer and became excited when I spotted it was set in Deptford in 1781. Not only is this period a rich source of fiction for some of my favourite authors like Jane Austen and C.S. Forester, but I also used to live on the Deptford side of Greenwich during my PGCE, so it's a part of London that I know about.

Blood & Sugar is a murder mystery that delves into the seedy underbelly of late 18th century London. A retired army officer Captain Harry Cosham investigates the death of an old university friend, who had been found hanging from a hook above Deptford wharf, dead, naked and branded by a slaver's stamp. As Cosham pursues his various leads around London, primarily in Deptford, but also in Greenwich, the Inns of Court, Whitehall, and even out onto the docked ships on the Thames, we are brought face to face with the complex nature of the slave trade and how it was integrated within the various layers of British society. In her debut novel Laura Shepherd-Robinson has created a highly impressive historical environment (a clear product of extensive research) as the economic, psychological, and legal aspects of the slave trade come into view during Cosham's bloodhound like investigations.

***Secret Letters: A Battle of Britain Love Story* by John Willis**



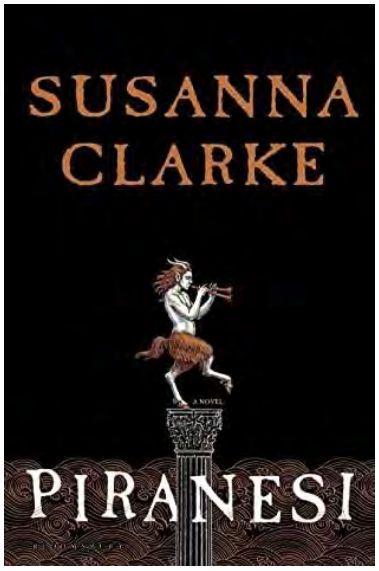
During a lesson on ancient gift exchange in late November, I had a Christmas present panic moment. What the heck should I get for my parents? Immediately after class I bumbled down the hill into Winchester, rushed into Waterstones, and within a moment I spotted this book for my Mum, who thoroughly enjoys reading historical romances. "Job's a good 'un" to quote Robbie Fowler. Then during the May half-term, my Mum whilst praising the book insisted that I read it, handing it to me on temporary loan.

Despite its generic front cover and title, this is an unusual book. Geoffrey Myers was a Jewish journalist, who worked for the *Daily Telegraph* in 1930s. In 1932 he married a young French woman Margot and the couple moved between London and Paris and started a family. Then war broke out in 1939 and Myers became an intelligence officer for the RAF and was initially stationed in France. As the Germans advanced into France, Myers retreated West with his RAF unit, escaping to England via Dunkirk, whilst Margot and their two children headed South holing up at a family farm in central France near Moulins, a region occupied by the Germans.

During 1940 and 1941 Myers wrote letters to his absent wife within a private diary that were never posted to Margot. They are an intimate and at times intense eyewitness account of the fall of France in the Spring of 1940 and the Battle of Britain in the second half of 1940. It is when Myers was an intelligence officer for 257 fighter Squadron during the Battle of Britain that the letters become most poignant, when he tells of returning and missing Hurricane pilots. As the officer receiving post-sortie reports, he tells of the variable leadership at squadron and group level, and how young pilots were pushed to the edge of their physical and mental abilities. The letters also tell of Myers' frequent worries about his wife and children stranded in France, the wife and children of a Jewish RAF officer.

John Willis is a television executive, who has worked on various programmes for Channel 4 and the BBC. He came across Myers' secret letters, researched the era in great depth, and then with the family's permission published them in 2020 in a peculiar, yet highly effective format. During my postgraduate research when analysing ancient letters, e.g. those of Cicero, I would have books of the original letters on one side of the library table and then separate commentaries on the other side, which provided scholarly explanations and cross references to individual letters. In *Secret Letters*, Willis has gone for an all-in-one text and so delivered Myers' letters in an efficient and effective manner. Within the 16-chapter text, Willis has included Myers' letters in bold paragraphs and then broken up the scroll of letters with an insightful commentary in plain script before and after the bold paragraphs of the letters, so providing the reader with the essential context of each letter. This in-built commentary (including the odd footnote) allows the reader to fully understand the situation Myers is currently discussing within each letter without being interrupted. E.g. when Myers tells of his personal view of how a squadron leader was replaced in early August 1940, Willis provides the historical context of the sacking in relation to RAF Fighter Command. I finished this wonderful book in less than a week. Job's a good 'un.

JULIAN FOSTER, Teacher of Biology



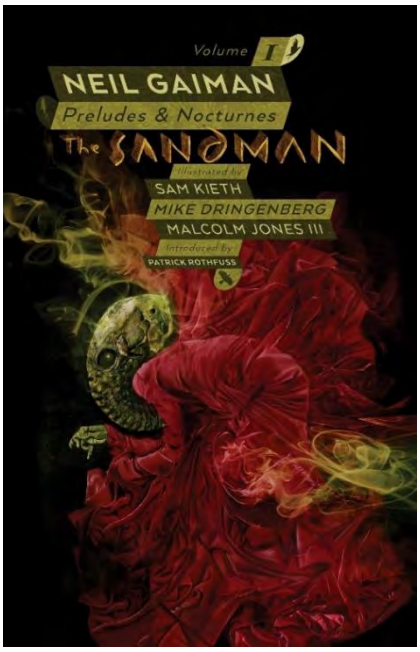
***Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke**

This is a fantasy book for people who hate fantasy books. There are no dragons or sword-wielding idiots, no wizards in pointy hats, incantations in the form of bad poetry or made-up languages. (Yes, I am committing the sin of criticising Tolkien). What Clarke has done in this slim novel is to create a strange, magical world entirely composed of enormous halls carved from marble containing statues and other architectural delights, including dizzying flights of steps descending into the sea and gigantic domes in which clouds form.

This succession of wonders is occupied by only one person – Piranesi, who wanders from hall to hall, fending for himself, but also constantly awestruck by what he encounters (an albatross nesting draws his devoted attention, for example) and recording his thoughts in hand-written diaries. In case you are wondering, this was written long before COVID and lockdowns, so Piranesi's solitude is quite accidental. However, Piranesi occasionally encounters another man, simply called 'The Other' – a well-dressed, rather impatient, self-obsessed visitor who seems to want something from Piranesi and, in fact, has bestowed the name on him. (The real Piranesi was an 18th century Italian engraver).

What on Earth is going on? How did this world of architecture get here? Who is 'The Other'? Who, in reality is 'Piranesi'? I will not spoil it for you but, if you have read Clarke's only other novel, the gigantic *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* you will find this very different, just as enchanting and a lot shorter! Put any prejudices to one side and just read …

***The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman and various artists**

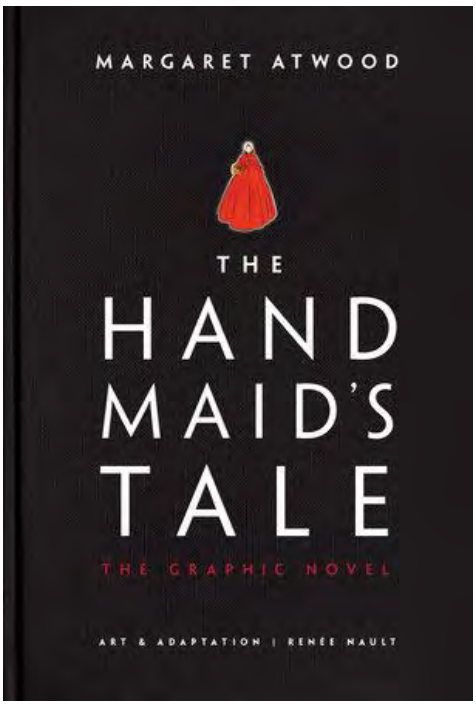


The Sandman was a comic published back in the late 1980s and early '90s, written by a young Neil Gaiman, now famous for a variety of novels, films, and TV series.

In simple terms, Sandman is the king of dreams, Morpheus, so he is effectively immortal, hanging out in his library of unwritten books, chatting with nightmares and so on. He appears to us as a white-skinned young man with spiky black hair and dark eyes – a bit like the angsty lead singer in a goth band. However, your impression of him changes depending on your viewpoint: an African princess sees him as a tall black man, a cat sees him as an enormous cat, unsurprisingly. Back in my comic-reading days I found Sandman puzzling – was it horror? Was it fantasy? There were even (tragically) superheroes in some issues. It took me nearly a year to realize that Gaiman was creating a mythology and, really, *The Sandman* is just about storytelling.

You can now get the entire run of the comic in ten handy volumes. These alternate between long, multi-chapter stories set in the here and now, and collections of short stories in which Morpheus pops up in imperial Rome, the golden age of Baghdad, the land of faerie, Ming dynasty China and, yes, as a cat. Gaiman may be the star but there is some gorgeous artwork by P. Craig Russell, Charles Vess, Jon J Muth and many others, all perfectly suited to the tale being told. If you want an impression of a good *Sandman* story, just imagine sitting by a roaring fire on a moonless night with somebody saying: "It was a night, very much like this, many years ago when…." Delicious.

FRAN LEE-DAVIS, Teacher of English Literature

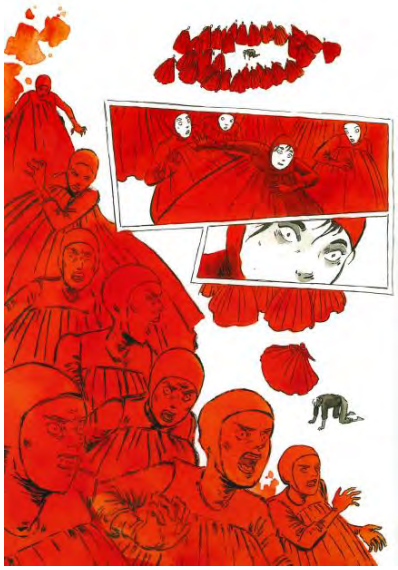


***The Handmaid's Tale -The Graphic Novel* by Margaret Atwood; art and adaptation by Renée Nault**

It must be impossible to have missed *The Handmaid's Tale* since the explosion of its Hulu television adaptation onto screens in 2017. Both the post-Trump feminist reworking of the show, alongside the novel's 2019 sequel, *The Testaments*, added to the handmaid-mania (handmania?) and the iconic costumes worn by the handmaids have been claimed as a symbol of protest on social media. Even Kylie Jenner got in on the act, famously throwing a Handmaid-themed birthday party. Praise be!

Revisiting the original text, which I encountered for the first time as a student here at Symonds myself, is its own reward. Atwood's text, told through the eponymous handmaid Offred, is one of my favourite books to teach, and students come away loving its twisting, turning narrative. So the question is - what is the point of a graphic novel adaptation? Fortunately, Atwood herself weighed in, stating 'each form is able to do something that the others can't.' Indeed, the comic's artist Nault claims: "graphic novels can switch seamlessly between abstract and literal imagery" and this is its strength.

The graphic novel is, indeed, striking. The ubiquitous red of the uniform, "which defines" the handmaids, contrasts with the subtle whites and blues of the setting. The haunting interruptions from Aunt Lydia, the narrator's instructor in being a handmaid, are black against the muted backgrounds, as stark an interruption into her narrative as her words are on the page. It's impossible to avoid flipping through to the most iconic scenes from the book: the ceremony, the mass executions, and even the ambiguous ending. Of course, it is an adaptation, and therefore some of the beauty of the writing is lost, but what is gained is compelling, and a wonderful addition to any bookshelf.

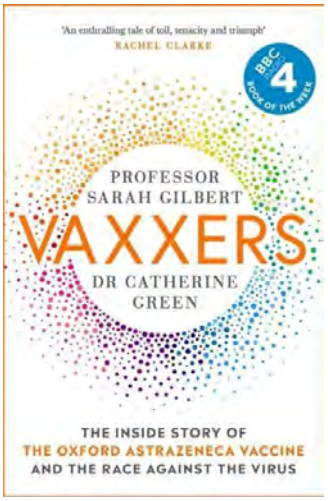


DAVID FRANCIS, Teacher of Chemistry

***The Green Grocer* by Richard Walker**

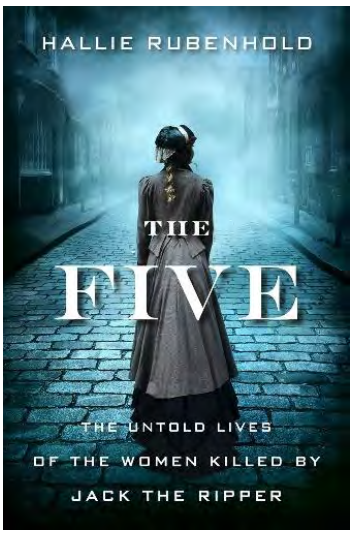
How does a Greenpeace activist put principles into practice if he finds himself the CEO of a supermarket? That's the background question to this personal account. I liked Walker's openness in accepting his own limitations and the constraints of his position. Yet his determination to make a difference shines through on every page of this book. The veiled threats and smear campaign launched against him following his decision to remove palm oil from own brand products was shockingly portrayed. His style can seem unpolished at times, but in a way that adds to its authenticity. I'd question his reasoning in a few places. For example, he doesn't seem to be aware of modern monetary theory. Overall, the take home message of *The Green Grocer* is optimistic: management with a social and environmental conscience is possible and necessary, setting a trend for others to follow.

***Vaxxers* by Professor Sarah Gilbert and Dr Catherine Green**



Released just a few days ago, I found this book it so interesting I finished it in three days. Written by two scientists at the heart of the Oxford vaccine research team, it describes clearly how the vaccine was made in record time, despite a whole series of practical and political obstacles. But probably more importantly to the lay reader (who will probably want to skip over the biological details) it very effectively puts you in the shoes of the two authors, letting you know what the day to day life of these underrated scientists is actually like. This human aspect is constant throughout the book, describing how they manage huge work pressures while keeping family life going through the pandemic, and the way they each write a chapter then swap over is very effective. The authors make it clear that something like COVID-19 has been expected for some time, and another major outbreak by a different virus in our lifetime is highly likely. But with sufficient funding, and international cooperation, we now have the tools to be ready to react even faster to a new threat.

SARAH OWEN, Marketing Officer



***The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* by Hallie Rubenhold**

Hallie Rubenhold's book focuses on the lives of the five women believed to have been killed by Jack the Ripper in the 1880s. It is a fast, fascinating and furious read, describing their lives with compassion, painting a detailed portrait of a society more interested in the lurid details of the crimes than stopping them happening again.

Reams have been written about Jack the Ripper but almost nothing about his victims. Rubenhold's book attempts to right this wrong and explores the lives of the five victims in detail, dispelling the assumption that all five victims were prostitutes, demonstrating how quickly and easily people could fall down the social ladder,

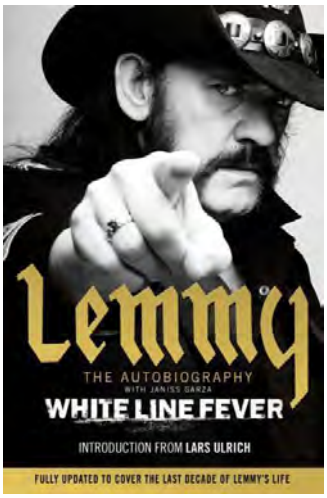
highlighting police bias, and critiquing the sensationalist newspaper reporting and the subsequent idolisation of the myth of Jack the Ripper.

Rubenhold's approach is intriguing in that she rarely even mentions Jack the Ripper and never goes into detail about the deaths and mutilations of his victims. The book focuses on their lives – who they were, how they lived, their families and the circumstances that brought them to the wrong place at the wrong time.

It's not difficult to see that we still struggle with these issues today; Peter Sutcliffe, the 'Yorkshire Ripper', received obituaries in several newspapers when he died recently. The police only started to take the case seriously once he moved away from killing sex workers and murdered 'innocent' women.

Rubenhold writes with passion, rage and heart and the result is a gripping mix of social history and sympathetic biography, rejecting the Ripper myth and restoring dignity to the Five.

TARA BAKER, Head of Religious Studies



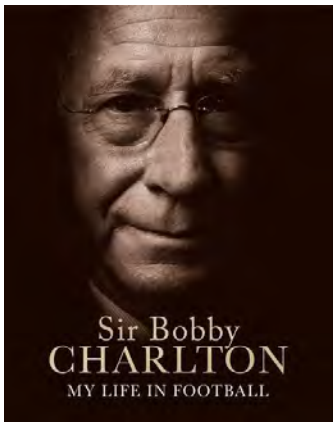
***White Line Fever* by Lemmy**

I am really glad I read this book. I remember as a child being at a friend of my parents' party, going off upstairs, finding a record player and listening to Alice Cooper, Judas Priest and Motorhead. It was the 70's before people decided that such things probably weren't appropriate for children under the age of ten! I recognised then that there was something very authentic about Motörhead, no gimmicks, just pure unadulterated loud rock and the front man Lemmy scared me a little bit, this long haired, fierce looking creature wearing a bullet belt, leather and denim with a fag hanging out his mouth whilst playing the guitar, yet he was also undeniably enigmatic. The book documents his musical career and the initial motivation for being in a band, which he describes as 'to get chicks' - a plan that definitely worked for him! The book does not delve into family or personal relationships, what Lemmy presents is full on rock memoir. He takes the reader through his early career of playing in a multitude of cover bands, living in squats, sleeping on floors, along with the consistent narrative of getting hired and fired from various bands amid the general carnage of the acid fuelled 60's. For instance, Lemmy spent some time as a roadie for Jimi Hendrix during this time.

After finding moderate success with Hawkwind, which again he ended up being amicably fired from, Motörhead was born in 1971, a consistently evolving band that underwent several line-up changes through the years, with Lemmy being the constant, after all he was Motörhead. The band had their ups and downs and the rise to fame was never plain sailing but they worked relentlessly. The memoir details the various antics of touring and Lemmy jokes that Spinal Tap and Bad News were pretty accurate observations of what life on the road was like. The golden years for Motörhead were undoubtedly the 80's, with their biggest commercial song, The Ace of Spades cementing them firmly in rock anthem history. In 2015, just a few months before Lemmy's death, Motörhead played the pyramid stage marking 40-years of his beloved band. He once claimed that the only way Motörhead would ever stop playing was if he died and at this Glastonbury gig aged 70, he was already terminally ill, visibly out of breath, and continued singing the lyrics of the Ace of Spades to Overkill, but nobody cared, it was Lemmy, and he can do what he likes. People of all ages, generations and musical backgrounds came to appreciate the powerhouse legend that he was. Just a few months later, he died of cancer, the lifestyle having finally caught up with him, although his view on this was that he had done pretty well considering and had absolutely no regrets about the way that he lived his life.

Between the lines of the wild anecdotes of this memoir and his inhuman capacity for touring, drinking, drug taking and sleeping with women, the charming characteristics of Lemmy shine through. He was straight talking, honest and humorous, he was very intelligent polite, respectful, loyal, funny and thoughtful. He was extremely well read and had an avid passion for history, collected war memorabilia. He often expressed his hatred of injustice, inequality and racism, promoting a live and let live attitude. His musical tastes varied, he adored Chuck Berry, Little Richard, The Beatles, The Blues and Rock & Roll. In many ways he was the embodiment of a true philosopher, he lived what he believed, uncompromising, resilient and determined. When I finished the book, I really was left with the feeling that he was also fabulously eccentric, I think If I had met him, we would have got on very well, having a drink discussing music, history, philosophy and the importance of being true to yourself.

STEVE MULLINS, Lead Learning Support Assistant



Bobby Charlton: My life in Football

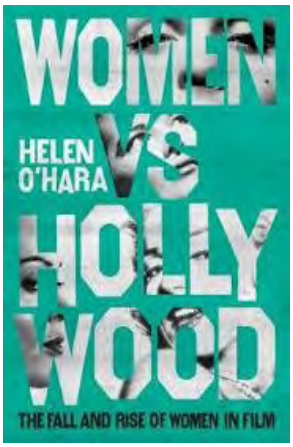
With a not so very subtle link to this specific moment in football history, England having reached the quarter finals of the UEFA European Championship as I type this, I chose to pen a few lines about a football autobiography. I used to live and breath football. For me, the game has changed for the worst and I don't watch much now.

Sir Bobby Charlton epitomised all that was good in football during the time he played, as well as beyond. He is one of the most popular sporting icons that this country has ever produced. The record books show that he played 106 times for England, scoring 49 goals, and that he played 758 times for Manchester United, scoring 249 goals. This, at a time when the playing surface was very different from the immaculate playing surfaces of today, the ball was heavier, football boots heavier, and defenders were, how shall I say, more robust. There was little of the cheating and diving that is commonplace now.

This book brought me a genuine sense of football nostalgia, with vivid memories of how things were, for me a sense of loss, a sentimental longing for things as they used to be.
It's a slightly different format than the usual autobiography as Sir Bobby writes chronologically about the background and key events surrounding the 300 or so individual photographs within the book. Many of the photographs have not been previously been published and it contains illuminating contributions from other football greats of the game like Sir Alex Ferguson, Denis Law, and Paul Scholes.

Anyone with a feeling for football in the 50's, 60's and 70's will cherish this volume. Despite falling out of love for the game, for some time now rugby being my preferred choice, I am enjoying the Euros. By the time you read this, who knows….

HANNAH PARRATT, Head of the LRC



***Women vs Hollywood: the fall and rise of women in film* by Helen O'Hara**

Cinema was born around 100 years ago, evolving during the same period when progress has been moved forward for women's rights. So why (as the #MeToo movement and gender pay gap show) has cinema has generally just reinforced old-fashioned sexist standards?

Helen O'Hara is a writer for the magazine *Empire* and has decided to explore this issue within this book. She begins with looking at the early days of cinema, where there were many women pioneers working both in front of and behind the camera: "In 1917 alone, Universal Studios would

credit eight female directors. In 2017, the same studio made just one film with a female director, *Pitch Perfect 3*".

However, once cinema started becoming an industry on a national scale, women started being left out. It was inconceivable in the early 20th century that a woman could be running a large studio, for example. The studio system created other problems for women too: as the priority was to churn out as many films as quickly as possible, actresses ended up playing the same sorts of roles over and over again (usually girlfriends or mothers).

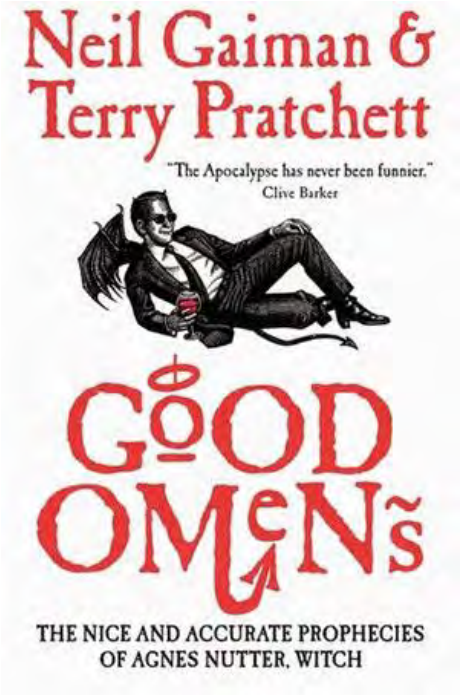
O'Hara also looks at more recent cinema history, exploring the problem of treating directors as genius auteurs and so excusing their poor behaviour and also the way that movies can be filmed through the 'male gaze'. She covers more recently publicised issues such as the gender pay gap and the #MeToo movement, and then looks to the future by arguing that films should be trying to tell more diverse stories because it just makes better art.

For me, however, I think my favourite parts are where she talks about film theory. I had heard of the Bechdel-Wallace test before (does the film feature at least 2 women talking to each other about something other than a man?), but my favourite test for how women are portrayed in a film is this one: could a female character be replaced by a sexy lamp without significant impact to the plot? O'Hara does acknowledge that some films feature women with one line that might move the plot along, so suggests that these then fail "follow-up 'Sexy Lamp with a Post-It Note' Test: could the character be replaced by a sexy lamp with an explanatory Post-it stuck on?"

This is a great book. It's well-written and full of fascinating stories that will anger you! Thankfully, O'Hara's sense of humour and the pace with which the book moves keeps it from feeling too heavy. It's an engaging and interesting read.

CHIARA BORGONOVO, LRC Assistant

***Good Omens* by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett**

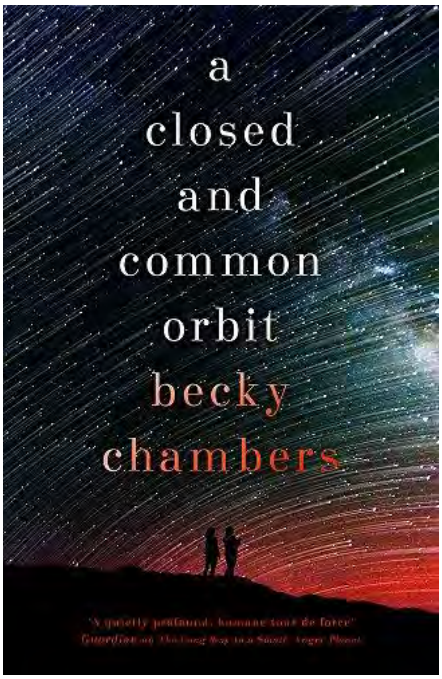


The angel Aziraphale and the demon Crowley have been assigned to influence humanity since *the beginning of time.* They both love life on Earth, and through the millennia, they have realised they have more in common with each other than with their respective head offices, and they have become unlikely friends. They are so comfortable living among humans that they agree to sabotage Armageddon together. As well as Crowley and Aziraphale, there are several other characters at play: the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, who are also living on Earth awaiting the End and having kept with the times, are now the Four Bikers of the Apocalypse. There is Anathema Device, the last living descendant of the witch Agnes Nutter, who's trying to avert the apocalypse by deciphering her ancestor's prophecies but is unaware she's living in the same town as the Antichrist. Other characters include a newly recruited member of the Witchfinder Army, Newton Pulsifer, a Witchfinder Sergeant Shadwell and his landlady, the middle-aged sex-worker and medium Madame Tracy, and the 11-year-old Antichrist Adam. The many entertaining plotlines are one of the strengths of this story, and all cleverly come together in an epic final showdown.

Good Omens has been co-written by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. It is an incredibly funny, well thought out story that makes light of what can be some very serious and topical themes. Armageddon is as likely today as it was 30 years ago (our icecaps are *still* below regulation size), and now we have the power to either stop it or hasten it.

I consider Terry Pratchett the observational comic of the literary word, gifted with a dark and hilarious sense of humour, and I admire Neil Gaiman for his originality, world-building and intriguing characters. This collaboration is a well-paced work of fiction that weaves together British humour, religious satire, cynicism, sarcasm, absurd events, and outrageous characters to criticize our society, in the tradition of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The result is *rather brilliant.*

JENNY CURTIS, LRC Assistant



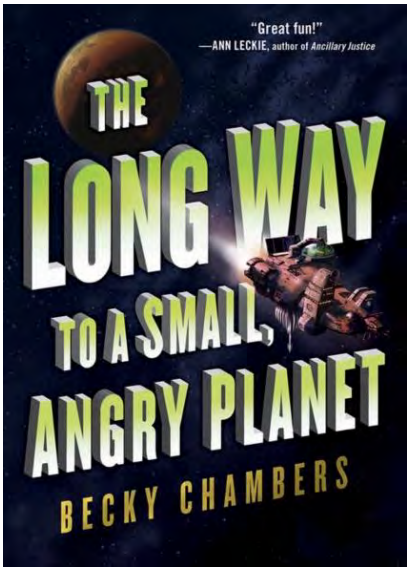
***A Closed and Common Orbit* by Becky Chambers**

A sentient AI with identity issues, a gene-modified mechanic who has broken free from enslavement, and a gender-shifting alien tattoo artist: these are the key characters you will meet in *A Closed and Common Orbit* by Becky Chambers.

Although the story picks up from where Chambers' debut ended, you don't need to read *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* for this to make sense (although you should read it anyway since it's brilliant). This novel tells the story of Sidra (née Lovelace) – a spaceship's AI who finds herself in an illegal synthetic body with no sense of who she is. Sidra is taken in by Pepper, a mechanic, who helps her adjust to 'human' life. Running alongside Sidra's narrative is the story of Pepper's childhood growing up as Jane 23, an escaped member of a slave class who is fostered by a kind AI in a scrapped spaceship.

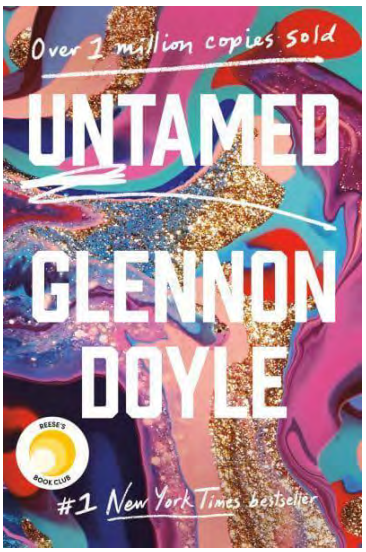
By following Sidra's plight of finding herself, an AI in a body she didn't ask to be in, Chambers opens the reader's mind up to questions of morality that are often left behind when considering AI. The focus in the development of sentient technology tends to either be on what it can do for us or what dangers it could pose for us. A perspective rarely brought to the forefront is that of the rights of AI themselves. As well as being a relevant book when thinking about the future, this book can tell us a lot about our world now. The conversations that are had around identity and bodily autonomy are ones that have been discussed throughout history in regard to different topics - slavery, women's rights, transgender issues - and Chambers' shows us how these concerns will continue to shape our future.

A Closed and Common Orbit is a unique story that encapsulates the joys of sci-fi – foundling family, inter-species co-operation, futuristic cities, and technology – while not shying away from issues that are hard to grapple with, today and in the future – enslavement, body dysmorphia, and civil rights. This may sound like a book with a 'message' but it's not. Chambers deftly handles a plethora of issues and views, presenting them to the reader and letting them make up their own mind. The only thing this book could be accused of 'pushing' is empathy, which is never a bad thing.



(Editor's note: Jenny originally reviewed Becky Chambers' first novel A Long Way to a Small Angry Planet, which is a quality work of Science Fiction, but this had already been reviewed by Barrie Roberts for 2019 Summer Reading List, so Jenny kindly then reviewed Chambers' second novel in the Wayfarers series.)

***Untamed* by Glennon Doyle**



During lockdown, one of my little routines to stay sane was doing some pilates-style exercises in the morning while half-listening to a podcast by Brené Brown. During one unforgettable episode, she had a guest called Glennon Doyle who was promoting her new book, *Untamed*. Without realising, I gave up on my exercises entirely and just sat on my yoga mat listening to all she had to say. By the end of the episode, I had ordered the book.

Part memoir, part self-help (for lack of a better word), *Untamed* shares Glennon's experiences of womanhood and the stifling choices she had to make in order to be a 'good' wife, mother, daughter, and woman, all the while thinking to herself *wasn't life meant to be more beautiful than this?* After years of discontent and an unhappy marriage, Glennon falls in love with another woman - a moment that kickstarted revelations not only about her sexuality, but also about the expectations and burdens placed on her by society. She makes the decision to do what all women long for, but few have the courage to do: stop pleasing and start living.

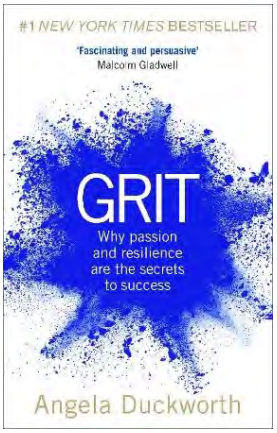
This book inspired and galvanized me in a way no other has. My copy is dog-eared and littered with post-it notes from all the passages that struck a chord with me so strongly that it vibrated through my entire being. It is a true source of comfort and fortitude for me, and I know I will carry it through my whole life.

NICK ALLEN, Deputy Principal

While the Summer Reading List heavily leans towards fiction, there is nothing wrong with spending at least part of the summer in the world of non-fiction. Here, I have picked four of the most engaging books that I have come across over the past year. I must admit that while many found escaping to imagined worlds a welcome antidote to current circumstances, I found it difficult to muster much appetite for reading fiction, while living in a dystopian pandemic world.

***Grit: Why passion and resilience and the secrets to success* by Angela Duckworth**

There is, in sixth form colleges across the country, a curious feature. This feature relates to the extended project qualification. At Peter Symonds College and elsewhere, the students who complete an extended project get better A level grades than students with the same GCSE grades who do not complete the extended project. Despite the fact they are devoting huge amounts of time to their additional subject, they get better grades in their other subjects than those who are not. They also access highly competitive universities in significantly greater number than students with the same GCSE grades who do not complete the extended project. Even more curiously ("Curiouser and curiouser", said Alice, completely forgetting her sense of good English) if you make all students at a college do the extended project, it makes no difference to overall performance: the students just perform in line with those in other colleges. There is something different about those students who make a positive choice to complete the qualification that requires explanation.

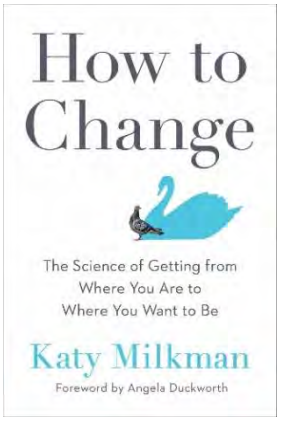


I have searched for years for a compelling answer to this question of why these students do better, and I think I may have found it in ***Grit* by Angela Duckworth**. In *Grit* she explores the secrets of success. Her account is (relatively) dismissive of the gifted and talented myth. It instead emphasises the importance of passion (which she defines as knowing your purpose and going for it), resilience (which is how we respond to difficulties and barriers), and a dash of serious hard work in achieving success. It strikes me that these are the qualities evident in the extended project

students. They all exhibit passion in the sense that they have selected something that interests them, and they have pursued this interest with success; they have elected to do something that they didn't need to; they had the resilience to overcome difficulties and complete the project rather than dropping it. Perhaps we should not be surprised that these students are able to translate this ambition into university progression. An extended project is not a small undertaking after all, and few students will complete one in under a hundred hours.

Duckworth's own analysis takes as her starting point the intake at the US Military Academy at West Point. These are students with remarkable academic pedigree, sporting prowess, and they have all managed to secure a recommendation from a member of Congress or the Senate as part of the application process. However, despite these remarkable 'talents', a full fifth do not complete the course. All of the cadets are talented, but some possess something else. This, for Duckworth, is grit. Interestingly, Duckworth writes at length about how to cultivate the passion and resilience that come together to form grit. Her book provides a really useful summary of the key insights from psychological research over the last half-century into success, performance and happiness, and examines how we can use these insights in our daily lives.

***How to Change* by Katy Milkman**



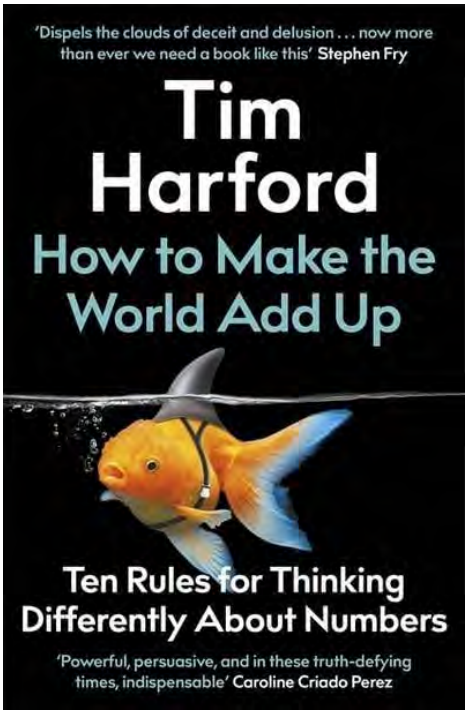
It would be difficult not to buy a book by someone with as splendid a surname as Milkman, and this book is well worth the entry fee. Psychology has often focused on understanding when things go wrong, but in recent decades there has been a movement towards understanding how we can use psychological insights to make things better: what you might (rather simplistically) call positive psychology. What Milkman attempts to do is draw together the insights of positive psychology (and a bit of behavioural economics) in considering how we might improve ourselves: and if it provides an insight into improving ourselves it can help us to work with others.

Take the example of targets for change. I've always hated the tyranny of SMART targets, and the assumption that a target is better if it is SMART. It is not that there is anything objectionable about any of the elements of a SMART target (apart from that those that advocate them can't actually agree on what each letter stands for), it is just that however beautiful a target, it is not the SMARTness of a target that actually makes it work. What makes it work is actually doing it. Milkman's suggestion is that we should use 'if this, then that' targets when we sign-up to doing something: a target becomes an agreement to do something when we experience a particular trigger. To use an example from the psychology of dentistry (which is, apparently, a thing), if individuals are given a brief course in the value of flossing (not the dance) and given some floss, a month later hardly anyone will be flossing, even though the vast majority will remember why it is a good idea to do so. If a second group is given the same treatment but given a precise trigger to react to in starting flossing (something as simple as being instructed to floss immediately after cleaning your teeth), uptake is far higher. Adding positive habits to existing routines works. If we connect targets to existing routines and practices, there is a much higher chance that we will do them. There are huge applications of this sort of thinking for targets in education as well as life in general: we can add things to routines of learning for our classes as well as working with individuals.

Milkman's analysis is hugely entertaining, and highly useful. Anyone with an interest in being different or helping others to be different will gain much from this book.

(Editor's note: for the non-teachers out there, SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.)

***How to Make the World Add Up: Ten Rules for Thinking Differently about Numbers* by Tim Harford**



Last year I recommended a book on statistics (David Spiegelhalter – *The Art of Statistics*) as it provided brilliantly explained accounts of key statistical concepts, rendered comprehensible to the layman by an expert statistician. My numbers-related recommendation this year is not written by a statistician, and in many ways, this is what makes this particular book so compelling. That is not to say that Tim Harford does not know a thing or two about numbers: he must have picked up some understanding of such matters as the presenter of Radio Four's 'More or Less', after all. His take on numbers here is very much in the vein of exploring the statistical literacy that really should be taught in any school. It is about the questions (ten of them) that we should consider whenever we are faced with a number. It is beyond to cliché to say that a real understanding of the numbers we face is an important life-skill at the moment.

Whenever I talk to people about interpreting data, I emphasise the importance of developing a sense of proportion. In educational contexts, my starting point is usually about asking how many students in a typical class a particular statistic represents: if 15% of students left a course, in a class of twenty, that means three students leave; if 70% of students do more than four hours a week of homework, it means that six of the students don't. Harford shows us that this same instinct is valuable in any context. One of his best recommendations is to memorise a battery of 'go to' statistics: Population of Britain around 60,000,000; at any particular age under 60 there are around 800,000 people, you share your star sign with 5,000,000 others, the length of a bed is two metres, the height of the Empire State Building is 381 metres and so forth. These figures help us to contextualise the numbers we encounter: the more we understand about a number, the more we understand its significance.

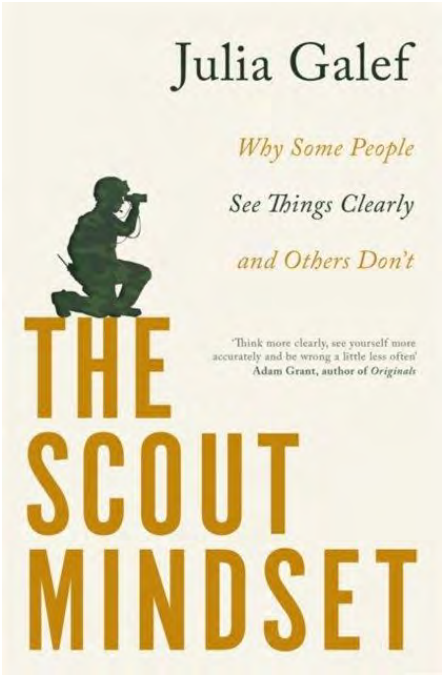
The experience of the pandemic has shown us this. The raw number of COVID cases in Southampton does not tell you very much; what the rate of positive tests per 100,000 per week tells you slightly more; what is the rate this week compared to last week improves things further; how these rates compare to rates elsewhere, even better; having a sense of what rate per 100,000 is enough to put serious pressure on the NHS: things are starting to get useful.

In a world of instant news, we are bombarded with exciting headlines. We need a really strong set of numerical instincts to help us navigate the claims we encounter. This book is an excellent place to start.

***The Scout Mindset* by Julia Galef**

The Scout Mindset is about thinking critically and what thinking can do for us. Along the way Galef introduces some excellent concepts and tools that may not be new for anyone who taught critical thinking or has ever spent time exploring the philosophy of knowledge. However, they provide a really useful reminder to us of the importance of being aware of our own preconceptions, and the impact that our preconceptions can have on our ability to think clearly. *The Scout Mindset* of the title is about a disposition, and she contrasts this with the soldier mindset. If a scout is sent on a reconnaissance mission, they will seek to genuinely understand the territory they have been asked to explore, and when encountering something that goes counter to original understanding, they will alter their map of that territory. Galef suggests we spend much of our lives being soldiers rather than scouts: we start from the position of assuming that our understanding is correct and look for evidence to support this position and dismiss contradictory evidence. We spend our time

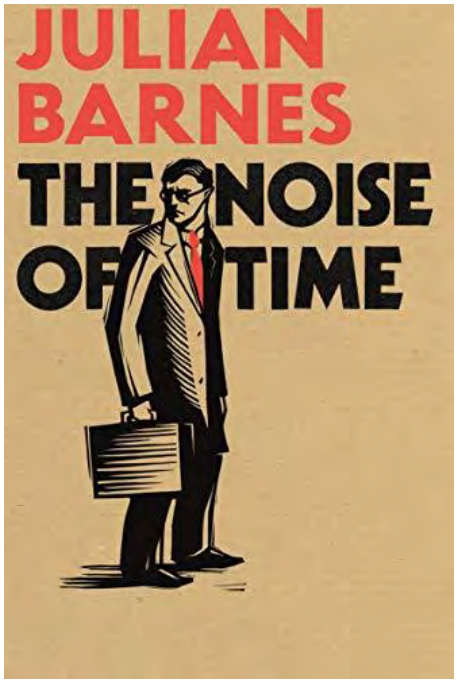
defending our own position against attacks from others. For Galef, the scout is much better positioned than the soldier.



It strikes me that there is a real resonance of these ideas in society at large and in education. There is a real danger when a group of people work closely together that they start to suffer from groupthink, and we (automatically) dismiss the views of others at our peril. Matthew Syed's 'Rebel Ideas' is also a really good read in this context: he writes of the value of cognitive diversity. If we surround ourselves with people that think the same as us, we run the risk of failing to understand the significance of features of the world we inhabit.

Galef also cautions us about the drive for improvement. Here she invokes GK Chesterton, who once wrote an essay in which he asked the reader to imagine that they were walking down a road and came across a fence entirely blocking the road. Chesterton argued that however strong your urge to get rid of the fence blocking your way, you should not get rid of something unless you understand why it is there in the first place. This is a really useful instinct in college management. The instinct to change things (in pursuit of excellence) is a strong one, but it runs the risk of not understanding the implications of changing the things you have decided to change.

SARA RUSSELL, Principal



***The Noise of Time* by Julian Barnes**

This book combines two of my great loves, history and music. A fictionalised account of Shostakovich's life under Josef Stalin and his oppressive totalitarian regime. It explores themes of power, art, conscience, personal integrity and courage through major events in Shostakovich's life.

This is a sombre novel, only 190 pages long and structured into three main sections through which it details the composer's 'conversations with power'. The book opens as Shostakovich 'had been standing by the lift for three hours' waiting for his interrogation by the NKVD (secret police) after a Pravda article titled 'Muddle instead of Music' (most likely written by Stalin himself), denounced his opera 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District'.

The second section jumps to after the second world war and deals with the composer's next encounter with power when he has been restored to the Communist party's good books after his patriotic Leningrad Symphony. However, this ultimately leads to a humiliating denunciation of Stravinsky, a man who Shostakovich respected greatly, during a state sponsored propaganda trip to the United States of America.

Shostakovich's final 'conversation with power' occurs when he is an elderly man during Khrushchev's reign of power. This is where he loses his battle with his conscience and personal integrity. Forced to join the party he becomes the Chairman of the Russian Federation Union of Composers.

The book is a compelling tale of one man's struggle with his own conscience and the power and control of a regime over art and artists, as Shostakovich tries to maintain his musical identity.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