

The 20thC Book Group

Who: anyone who wants to come, to any session that you want to come to; organised by [Kate Macdonald of Handheld Press](#)

What: one book a month, as often as you want

Where: [The Beaufort Bookshop](#), 1 Beaufort Place, Larkhall, Bath BA1 6RP

When: (mostly) every second Tuesday of the month, **19.45-21.45**

Why: to have fun, to enjoy discovering and rediscovering books first published in the 20th century, and to trace British social, historical and cultural change through fiction.

Contact details: enquiries@handheldpress.co.uk; 07494 357360; or find us [online](#).

This is a monthly book group reading books published in the 20th century. For 2018 we'll be reading British fiction: we'll look at different forms and literary cultures in future years.

It's a book group, not an evening class, so although Kate will be organising and moderating the sessions, they're participatory, with everyone contributing as much or as little as they want to. The only requirement is to come to the sessions having read the book (or as much of it as you can manage). There is no requirement to come to every session (though it would be lovely if you did): you only pay for the ones you attend.

There will be a small cover charge of £3 per session, payable in advance, or on the night. Bring a cushion if you want a really comfortable seat around the table, though the shop does have cushions we can use, and adult-sized chairs.

All the books have been chosen for their literary excellence, their enjoyability as good reads, and for their availability. You can order the books in advance from The Beaufort Bookshop (hello@beaufortbookshop.co.uk) and collect them there.

Tuesday 11 September: Una L Silberrad, *Desire* (1908)

Silberrad was a popular but now forgotten Edwardian novelist who wrote about the working lives of modern women. *Desire* is the illegitimate daughter of a rich financier, and becomes friends with a novelist from the North. When her father dies intestate, she learns typing and book-keeping to earn her living. But her class status has cut her off from independence. Rescue comes when her novelist friend offers her a job in the family pottery-making firm, but his malevolent elder brother does not approve. A deeply enjoyable novel in the tradition of Arnold Bennett's novels of the Potteries, and unusual for its frank exploration of how Edwardian women could earn a living. Handheld

has republished this as a Handheld Classic, available from all good bookshops, and from [Handheld Press directly](#).

Tuesday 9 October: Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918)

One of the great novels of the First World War, written from the perspective of the women who stayed behind. Narrated by a woman whose cousin returns from the Front, invalided back with amnesia. He cannot remember his wife, or his young son, but he does remember, with passion, the daughter of the inn-keeper with whom he was in love when they were much younger. All three women are convinced that his amnesia cannot last, but they do not know what he will feel when, or even if, he recovers.

Tuesday 13 November: Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928)

Sassoon's fictionalised memoirs of his life before the First World War, with a protagonist whose life is entirely centred on riding horses. For the non-horsey this may be quite a shock, albeit a comic one. This is a classic work of post-war literature, informed by the knowledge of the war that Sassoon famously resisted in his pacifist protests and in his poetry.

Tuesday 11 December: Margery Allingham, *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938)

One of Allingham's most successful detective novels, from the peak of the Golden Age of English detective fiction, which was acclaimed at the time, in a backhanded way, for being so good that you might not actually think it was a detective novel at all. Set in the years leading up to the Second World War with whiffs of fascism and the tension between women who have successful careers and the men they wish to marry. And there is a death to be detected, of course.

Tuesday 15 January: Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Corner That Held Them* (1948)

A mesmerising narrative, for there is no plot, of life in and around the Fenland convent of Oby in the fifteenth century. Characters come and go, abbesses come and go also, and the reader is gripped with the fascination of watching a community being drenched in the passing of time and history. One of the great historical novels of the 20th century. Since Warner was also a musicologist, expect some history of music to appear as well as of religious communities.

Tuesday 12 February: Barbara Pym, *A Glass of Blessings* (1958)

One of Barbara Pym's most dizzyingly entertaining novels of north-west London Anglo-Catholic society, with her heroine Wilmet wandering around her parish and the shops in a vague smiling dream, not quite sure if she is falling in love with anyone, or if anyone is falling in love with her. Her competent mother-in-law and her affectionate husband keep a benevolent eye on her while she becomes the confidante of the new kleptomaniac (male) cook at the clergy house. Remarkable for its high camp coffee-house scenes and the male knitwear pattern model.

Tuesday 19 March: Rumer Godden, *The Greengage Summer* (1958)

I have never read a novel so drenched in unwitting sexual tension as this one. Written from the perspective of an adolescent girl whose family have been marooned in a French hotel while their mother has been hospitalised. The children are taken under the wing of an Englishman who is clearly having an affair with the hotel owner, and whom, it becomes unnervingly clear, would like to have an affair with the narrator's elder sister too. Whom can the children trust, when it becomes clear that his absences may be criminal?

April: no meeting due to Easter

Tuesday 14 May: Mary Renault, *The Praise Singer* (1978)

Mary Renault wrote a number of excellent historical novels set in the Classical Greek past, or even earlier than that, and is much admired for how she incorporated gay characters in her novels as an established fact of the society she depicted, without distressing English social mores too much. *The Praise Singer* is one of her least tragic novels (it actually has a happy ending, of sorts) about the life of a travelling poet and the Greek history he witnesses. Her style was perfectly and beautifully neutral, making the very distant past immediate and contemporary.

Tuesday 12 June: Terry Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* (1998)

Terry Pratchett was the probably the greatest British satirist of the later 20th century, and his Discworld novels, cunningly disguised as frivolous comic fantasy fiction, contain some of the most clear-eyed and straight-shooting social criticism I have ever read. They are also extremely funny, so we will end the year cackling with laughter (I hope) as well as enjoying the messages and themes in this fine standalone novel of the witches of the small mountain country of Lancre, and how they deal with insidiously powerful invading vampires who are so modern that they go out in daylight.

Suggestions for 2018-19? Please tell us!

