

What We're Reading - 6 November 2020

Opinion - Books Friday, 6th November 2020

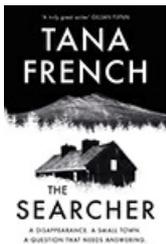
The Bookbrunch team reveals what's on their bedside tables

Nicholas Clee

John Banville's decision to release his novel *Snow* (Faber) under his own name rather than that of Benjamin Black is intriguing. Yes, the echoes from James Joyce's great short story "The Dead", and the portrayal of the decaying, twilight world of the Anglo-Irish, are in keeping with the Banville novels. But here is St John Strafford from the Black novel *The Secret Guests*, along with a reference to the pathologist Quirke, star of seven Black mysteries; and here is a body in the library of a country house. The prose, too, is closer in style to that of the Quirke series than that of Banville novels such as *The Book of Evidence* and his Booker winner *The Sea* - which is to imply nothing about its quality. Just as in the Banville novels, it is the voice that compels: here, conjuring an uneasy atmosphere of suppression, like the eerie muffling of sound in a snow-covered landscape.



Lucy Nathan



Tana French is one of my favourite authors, and I always eagerly await her books every two years. Every time I recommend one of her books to a friend, I do so with such unblinking zeal that people tend to look a little disconcerted. *The Searcher*, released yesterday with Viking, is just as incredible as her other books, a really intelligent mystery with a depth of characterisation that drew me in immediately. It's about Cal, a retired Chicago police officer who moves to rural Ireland, where his determination to lead a quieter life is swayed when a local kid asks him to look for his missing brother. It's quieter than a lot of detective stories, carefully and delicately drawn, with a cast of well-drawn side characters and an evocative, atmospheric setting. The perfect novel for anyone who loves mysteries that read like literary fiction.

Jo Henry



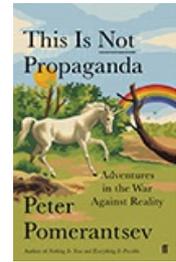
I love a book which re-assesses something that's taken for granted, so *Pandora's Jar* by Natalie Haynes (Picador) is definitely one for me. She sheds a new light on the women who are usually vilified in Greek myth, re-examining their foundation stories and looking at how they have been portrayed in plays, books, art and movies over the millennia. She starts appropriately enough with Pandora, whose original jar (pithos) was mistranslated by Erasmus in the 16th century as box (pyxis), but there is no shortage of intriguing subjects. We look afresh at the much maligned Jocasta, her son 'killed' at birth by her husband only to turn up unrecognised 16 years later to marry her, as well as Helen of

Troy, born in an egg after her mother Leda was raped by Zeus masquerading - this time - as a swan, and abducted for the first time when she was only seven by Theseus, of minotaur fame. With a wonderful mix of deep scholarship and sharp humour, this is a book to be treasured.



David Roche

The Gordon Burn Prize always throws up an interesting shortlist and an intriguing winner, This year's is no exception, and is particularly relevant for calamitous 2020. *This Is Not Propaganda* (Faber & Faber) by Peter Pomerantsev spells out the 'trust no-one' narrative with examples of misinformation operations from all over the world. What makes this unique is that Pomerantsev weaves the story of his parents beginning in the Soviet Union in the 70s with his own and his family's experiences in London more recently. This adds personal weight to the sheer scale of the war against reality, and with the US Presidential election still in the balance, and the most powerful people in the world lying like never before, it's a good time to get educated.



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