

"Reading is an exercise in empathy; an exercise in walking in someone else's shoes for a while"

Malorie Blackman

26

BOOK STUFF

A thought experiment...

Zombies

Lucia lived in a town where the lights were on, but nobody was ever home. She lived among zombies.

This was not as scary as it might sound. These zombies were not the flesh-eating ghouls of horror films. They looked and behaved exactly like you and I. They even had exactly the same physiology as you and I. But there was one key difference: they had no minds. If you pricked them they would say 'ouch' and wince, but they felt no pain. If you 'upset' them they would cry or 'get angry', but there would be no inner turmoil. If you played them soothing music they would appear to enjoy it, but in their minds they would hear nothing. On the outside, they were ordinary humans, but on the inside nothing was going on.

This made them easy to get along with. It was easy to forget that they didn't have inner lives as she did, since they spoke and behaved just like ordinary people and that included references to how they felt or what they thought. Visitors to the town would also fail to notice anything strange. Even when Lucia let

them in on the secret, they refused to believe her. 'How do you know they have no minds?' they would ask. 'How do you know that other people do?' Would be Lucia's reply. That usually shut them up.

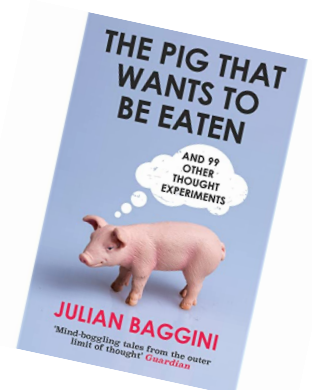
From Julian Baggini, *The Pig that Wants to be Eaten and 99 Other Thought Experiments*

Not many people believe in zombies so this may just seem like a silly story. But advances in AI (Artificial Intelligence) have made these issues very real: can robots think? can they feel? can they provide companionship, even love?

The film *Blade Runner*, based on Philip K Dick's book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* explores these ideas brilliantly. And so does Kazuo Ishiguro's new novel, *Klara and the Sun*, which has just been shortlisted for this year's Booker Prize.

An Olympics quiz

1. In which cities were the summer games held in these years: i.1936, ii.1968, iii.1972 iv.2000, v.2012
2. When and where did the Paralympics start?
3. What does the Olympic motto 'Citius, altius, fortius' mean?
4. What do the 5 rings on the Olympic flag represent?
5. What tropical nation's bobsled team was the inspiration for the film *Cool Runnings*?
6. What sport involves brooms and stones?
7. What Olympic sport was originally called 'snurfing'?
8. Name the 4 pieces of apparatus on which women gymnasts compete, and the 6 pieces used by men
9. In 2016 Neymar scored the fastest football goal in Olympic history. But was it quicker than Usain Bolt's 100m Olympic record in London 2012?
10. Which American athlete holds the record for winning the most Olympic medals?



A Dream of Winter

John Connolly

When I was a boy, I attended a school that stood by a cemetery. Mine was the last desk, the one closest to the graveyard. I spent years with my back to the darkness of it. I can remember how, as autumn descended and winter gathered its strength, I would feel the wind blow through the window frame and think that the chill of it was like the breath of the dead upon my neck.

One day in the bleakness of a January afternoon, when the light was already fading as the clock struck four, I glanced over my shoulder and saw a man staring back at me. Nobody else noticed him, only I. His skin was the grey of old ash long from the fire, and his eyes were as black as the ink in my well. His gums had receded from his teeth, giving him a lean, hungry aspect. His face was a mask of longing.

I was not frightened. It seems strange to say that, but it is the truth. I knew that he was dead, and the dead have no hold over us beyond whatever we ourselves surrender to them. His fingers touched the glass but left no trace, and then he was gone.

Years passed, but I never forgot him. I fell in love, and married. I became a father. I buried my parents. I grew old, and the face of the man at the school window became more familiar to me, and it seemed that I glimpsed him in every glass. Finally, I slept. I slept, and I did not awaken.

There is a school that stands by a cemetery. In winter, under cover of fading light, I walk to its windows and put my fingers to the glass.

And sometimes, the boy looks.

Days

Philip Larkin (1922 - 1985)

What are days for?

Days are where we live.

They come, they wake us

Time and time over.

They are to be happy in:

Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question

Brings the priest and the doctor

In their long coats

Running over the fields.



ANSWERS: Olympics quiz

1. i. Berlin, ii. Mexico City, iii. Munich, iv. Sydney, v. London

2. Rome, 1960 (originally called the International Stoke Mandeville Games, named after the rehabilitation centre for spinal injuries in Buckinghamshire)

3. 'Faster, higher, stronger'

4. The 5 continents: Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, Oceania

5. Jamaica

6. Curling

7. Snowboarding

8. Women: mat, vault, uneven bars, beam; Men: mat, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars, horizontal bar

9. Slower: Neymar 14secs; Bolt 9.63secs

10. Michael Phelps (23 Gold, 3 Silver, 2 Bronze)

www.giveabook.org.uk
www.prisonreadinggroups.org.uk