

BOOK STUFF

#33

"We read to know we're not alone."



What she saw

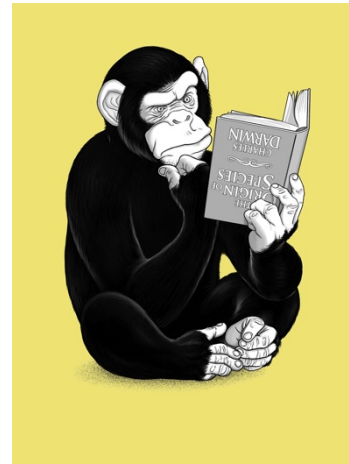
The poet Carol Ann Duffy imagines famous moments from the woman's point of view. In Greek mythology Icarus flew too close to the sun with wings made of feathers and wax - and fell to his death.

Mrs Icarus

I'm not the first or the last
to stand on a hillock,
watching the man she married
prove to the world
he's a total, utter, absolute, Grade A Pillock.

Mrs Darwin 7 April 1852

Went to the Zoo.
I said to Him –
Something about that chimpanzee over there reminds me of
you.



A December quiz

There's more to December than just Christmas. How much do you know?

1. Who said on December 7th, 1941 a 'date which will live in infamy'? And why?
2. December has two zodiac signs, name both.
3. In December 1988 who became the first woman to head the government of a Muslim state when she became Prime Minister of Pakistan?
4. Name the celebration, observed from December 26 to January 1 in the US and other countries, that celebrates African heritage?
5. Which group sang 'Oh, What a Night' about a 'late December back in '63'?
6. Which Archbishop of Canterbury was slain in his own cathedral on December 29, 1170
7. Who became Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England in December 1653
8. The world's first text message was sent on December 3rd of which year: 1972, 1982, 1992

Something we know not what

George Bishop stared intently at the bowl of oranges before him and then thought it into thin air.

He started by making an obvious distinction between the features of the oranges that are mere appearances and those properties that they really have. The colour, for example, is a mere appearance: we know that the colour blind, or animals with different physiologies, see something very different from the normal human experience of 'orange'. The taste and smell are also mere appearances, as these too vary according to who or what is perceiving the fruit, while the fruit itself remains the same.

But as he stated stripping away the 'mere appearances' from the fruits, he found himself left with vanishingly little. Could he even talk about the actual size and shape of the fruits, when these features seemed to depend on how his senses of sight and touch perceive them? To truly imagine the fruit in itself, independent of the mere appearances of sense perception, he was left with the vague idea of something, he knew not what. So what is the real fruit: this gossamer 'something' or the collection of mere appearances after all?

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

Closing lines

The end of the year is getting close. Can you match these last lines with the books or films they come from?

- A. 'It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest I go to than I have ever known.'
- B. 'The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.'
- C. 'This is Ripley, last survivor of the Nostromo, signing off.'
- D. 'The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he did not exist. And like that --- he is gone.'
- E. 'It's a shame she won't live - but then again, who does?'
- F. 'I do wish we could chat longer but I'm having an old friend for dinner.'
- G. 'And here is Toto too. And oh, Aunt Em! I'm so glad to be at home again.'
- H. 'I don't have anything else to add. I just wanted to make sure that I had the last word. I think I've earned that.'

Currents

Hannah Bottomy

Gary drank single malt in the night, out on the porch that leaned toward the ocean. His mother, distracted, had shut off the floodlights and he did not protest against the dark.

Before that, his mother, Josey, tucked in her two shivering twelve-year-old daughters. 'I want you both to go swimming first thing tomorrow. Can't have two seals like you afraid of the water.

Before that, one of the girls held the hand of a wordless Filipino boy. His was the first hand she'd ever held. They were watching the paramedics lift the boy's dead brother into an ambulance. At this time the other girl heaved over a toilet in the cabana.

Before that, the girl who would feel nauseated watched as the drowned boy's hand slid off the stretcher and bounced along the porch rail. Nobody placed the hand back on the stretcher, and it bounced and dragged and bounced.

Before that, Gary saw the brown hair sink and resurface as the body bobbed. At first he mistook it for seaweed.

Before that, thirty-five people struggled out of the water at the Coast Guard's command. A lifeguard shouted over Jet Ski motors about the increasing strength of the riptide.

Before that, the thirty-five people, including Gary and the two girls, formed a human chain and trolled the waters for the body of a Filipino boy. The boy had gone under twenty minutes earlier, and never come back up.

Before that, a lifeguard sprinted up the beach, shouting for volunteers. The two girls, resting lightly on their bodyboards, stood up to help.

Before that, a Filipino boy pulled on the torpid lifeguard's ankle and gestured desperately at the waves. My brother, he said.

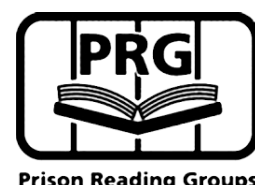
Before that, it was a simple summer day.

- Answers**
- 1. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour ,
 - the US naval base in Hawaii. It was the act that brought the US into the Second World War.
 - 2. Sagittarius (until Dec 21) and Capricorn (Dec 22 onwards)
 - 3. Benazir Bhutto
 - 4. Kwanzaa
 - 5. The Four Seasons
 - 6. Thomas Becket
 - 7. Oliver Cromwell
 - 8. 1992
 - A. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*
 - B. George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
 - C. Alien, dir Ridley Scott
 - D. The Usual Suspects, dir Bryan Singer
 - E. Blade Runner, dir Ridley Scott
 - F. The Silence of the Lambs, dir Jonathan Demme
 - G. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*
 - H. Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl*



www.giveabook.org.uk

www.prisonreadinggroups.org.uk



Prison Reading Groups

