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The exciting sequel to the enormously successful *Is Heathcliff A Murderer?*, John Sutherland's latest collection of literary puzzles, *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?*, turns up unexpected and brain-teasing aspects of the range of canonical British and American fiction represented in the World's Classics list. With bold imaginative speculation he investigates thirty-four literary conundrums, ranging from Daniel Defoe to Virginia Woolf. Covering issues well beyond the strict confines of Victorian fiction, Sutherland explores the questions readers often ask but critics rarely discuss: Why does Robinson Crusoe find only one footprint? How does Magwitch swim to shore with a great iron on his leg? Where does Fanny Hill keep her contraceptives? Whose side is Hawkeye on? And how does Clarissa Dalloway get home so quickly? As in its universally well received predecessor, the questions and answers in *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?* are ingenious and convincing, and return the reader with new respect to the great novels they celebrate.

Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?: More Puzzles in Classic Fiction Details

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From Reader Review Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?: More Puzzles in Classic Fiction for online ebook

LemontreeLime says

holy cats! I never ever made the bluebeard legend comparison to the Jane Eyre storyline, and Sutherland is totally on the money with his insights! The other puzzles are great too, but i am floored that I never thought to stop and think about Bronte's Eyre in investigative depth.

Judith Rich says

LOVE these books. I have the whole series and re-read them regularly.

GracieKat says

I was a little leery going in because I thought it might be boring with the author getting hung up on small, incidental but I was very happy to find this was not the case.

The author presents his theories, proof and conclusions in a very easy to access manner and very funny sometimes.

While I didn't always agree with the author's conclusions they were interesting to read.

I've bought the rest of the series and will be reviewing them as well.

Sheila says

Rather a skewed POV of the Rochester/Jane dynamic. More to fit in with the premise of the book I think. Not one I'll return to

Yellowoasis says

I love John Sutherland's books, picking apart as he does works of great literature and putting them through a fact-checking process. And he really knows his stuff, both in terms of historical accuracy/inaccuracy and in the level of detail he has paid his primary sources. He always makes me want to rush back and re-read the original so I can see for myself what he's deduced.

Lucy says

As with his first book, you need to be an avid reader of classic fiction to get the best from this - I was only beaten by two of the books he dissects, and of course I will now read them! He writes very entertainingly and you can only admire his stamina.

T. Finley says

Although this book is actually the second in a series of books by this author that address puzzles in fiction, it was the first one that I stumbled across and read. I enjoyed it so much that I made a point of acquiring the other books in the series.

Did I like it? Absolutely!

Would I reread it? I have, repeatedly.

Would I recommend it? Yes.

Cat. says

The second book in the author's treatment of fictional stories as 'real life.' It should come as no surprise that Jasper Fforde has been known to use these books.

So, yeah, here we find Jane Eyre, Fanny Hill, Fagin, Maggie Tulliver, Clarissa Dalloway, etc. Peeking through the undergrowth, we can also catch sight of some American classics: Black Beauty, The Madwoman in the Attic, Hester Prynne, Hawk-eye... I've come to expect interesting commentary, so here's the down and dirty on the books I've read (or the chapters that were amusing):

Robinson Crusoe: "Why the Single Print of a Foot?" Having never read the book, I'd not come across this phrase until I read the Crusoe-esque book previously this year. I can see why it would be disconcerting to picture a single footprint. On the other hand, I came up, independently, with the same solution as Sutherland: walking near the shore, walking on stones....

Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure: "Where does Fanny Hill keep her contraceptives?" Indeed, what contraceptives? Fascinating that this was in print in 1749. Good answer, as well.

The Last of the Mohicans: "Whose side is Hawk-eye on?" My answer: his own. Sutherland's answer: (basically) his own.

Oliver Twist and Great Expectations: "Why is Fagin hanged and why isn't Pip prosecuted?" ...for aiding and abetting a criminal act. Because Fagin is creepy, dirty, Jew and Pip is the hero of his book.

Wuthering Heights: "Who gets what in Heathcliff's will?" He dies before he can change it to disinherit. Cathy's doing? According to Sutherland, yes.

Jane Eyre: "Can Jane Eyre be happy?" Boiled down, Rochester's track record with women

sucks. Is Jane going to 'live happily ever after?' Doubtful, according to Sutherland. Depressing thought.

The Mill on the Floss: "How good an oarswoman is Maggie Tulliver?" Too good for reality. She's taught how to row about 50 pages from the end, and still manages to control her boat in a flood, until some "wooden machinery" is driven into it. What the hell is "wooden machinery"?

Daniel Dorinda: "Is Daniel Dorinda circumcised?" Wow. Birth control and circumcision and Jews. In one book. Who says literature is boring!

Tess of the D'Urbervilles: "Who will Angel marry next?" The presumption at the end of the book is that he'll marry Tess's sister. But in Victorian law that was illegal at that time. So perhaps she was meant to remain virginal and pure, unlike Tess....?

The Yellow Wall-Paper: "What cure for the Madwoman in the Attic?" One of my absolute favorite stories...was it the cure that made her mad? [Of course. Hey, Sutherland, take a Women's Studies class once, ok??] And what aspect of it was the maddening one?

Mrs Dalloway: "Clarissa's invisible taxi." A lovely walk around London to purchase flowers. At the end of her walk, Mrs D suddenly is back at home; how did she do it?

Can't wait to get the next book in the series.

Alex says

I could read this.

Jeff Hobbs says

I only found five of the essays in this collection particularly fascinating in the sense that they changed my view of a novel or made me understand it better. Those were "Why is Fagin hanged, and why isn't Pip prosecuted?", "Who gets what in Heathcliff's will?", "Can Jane Eyre be happy?", "Is Daniel Deronda circumcised?" and "Clarissa's invisible taxi."

Rita says

I only read about the books I knew. I hadn't heard of The Yellow Wallpaper. Didn't like his remarks about Jane Eyre that Jane was second choice to Blanche Ingram, to me Jane Eyre is a love story. Some interesting points about the law in Dickens' novels.

Lindsey says

Interesting essays on classic books. I would not recommend however cause they seem to diminish the original story. Stimulating however to read others opinions.

Bionic Jean says

Can Jane Eyre be Happy? More puzzles in Classic Fiction is a follow-up to John Sutherland's excellent first book of this type, *"Is Heathcliff a Murderer? Puzzles in Nineteenth-century Fiction"*. It is another book of literary conundrums, ideal for enthusiasts of the Classics to get their teeth into. The author is a British academic, a distinguished Professor of English literature, and an author. The conundrums here all have their source in classic English novels, plus a couple of American ones, hence it is far more stimulating and satisfying topic for a reader who is conversant with the novels themselves. However, he writes so entertainingly that each piece could act as a trigger to read an unknown work.

The premise here is that a novel should be authentic and believable; both internally consistent and also true to the times. Thirty-two novels are chosen and for all except four, there are separate essays. Two are paired in a joint piece, twice. John Sutherland carefully analyses the text, highlighting apparent inconsistencies, anachronisms and oversights. He explains historical references, which a modern reader may not know, and also points out the context within the author's body of work. Sometimes it becomes clear though, that the author probably just forgot a minor detail.

So are these all mistakes on the part of the author? Are we just trying to catch the great authors out? Well, it seems to vary. Here is one example:

"What Does Mr Pickwick Retire From?"

It is possible that you have read the whole of *"The Pickwick Papers"*, perhaps even more than once, assuming that you know the answer to this. In fact though, not only does Dickens never tell us anything about Mr Pickwick's profession, but he tells us very little about the character's history at all. Mr Pickwick simply starts to conduct his *"club"*, as a sort of hobby in late middle age, already being retired from the hurlyburly of an unspecified profession.

Mr Pickwick is clearly educated and quite wealthy. We learn through events in the text that he has no knowledge of firearms, plus he is lost when confronted by lawyers, so he cannot have either been in the Army, or have had anything to do with the Law. We do not know if he inherited his money, although it is unlikely since he is *"retired"*. Neither do we know how far his education was pursued; he never mentions any university friends or societies, nor any political affiliations. In fact he seems to have no friends outside the *"club"* at all. We do not know where he comes from. He has no regional accent, but does not seem to know much of London except the small area where he lives. The only things we do know, are the fact that he likes tomato sauce with his chops, that he lives in rented rooms on the third floor, and even people who have never read the book may well instantly recognise his genial, rotund, bespectacled appearance:

A little bit of background knowledge helps. *"The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club"* was written long before Dickens ever planned his novels. It was also published in serial form, with "no going back". He did not even invent the appearance of his hero, having been commissioned to write short pieces to accompany Seymour's plates, and make them into a sort of "picture novel" as was then the fashion. Of course he

developed it into far more and it kicked off his amazing career. (For more about this see my review link here). In this case, the scenario was set up before Dickens ever came on the scene

It is therefore not surprising that the details are sketchy (if you will pardon the pun). The only clue we have to Mr Pickwick's erstwhile profession, is when he gives his final speech,

"Nearly all of my previous life having been devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth..."

And that's all we get! John Sutherland points out another twist which had never occurred to me. In *"The Pickwick Papers"* is a boastful character called Mr Jingle. He has a habit of making ridiculous claims, seeming to have done everything, everywhere. He simply has too many pasts. Sutherland suggests that Mr Pickwick's past might have been deliberately kept mysterious, as an antithesis to Mr Jingle's,

"this opposition between Pickwick (man with no past) and Jingle (man with a hundred pasts) is a joke that Dickens chose to keep running to the end of his novel."

This is just one instance. You might prefer to read one of the double ones, *"Why is Fagin hanged and why isn't Pip prosecuted?"*, or *"How Good a Swimmer is Magwitch?"*. Or a single one by a different author, *"Who Gets What in Heathcliff's Will?"*, (*Wuthering Heights*) *"How Good an Oarswoman is Maggie Tulliver"*, (*The Mill on the Floss*) *"Is Black Beauty gelded?"*, *"Who will Angel Marry Next?"*, (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*) *"What cure for the Madwoman in the Attic"*, (*The Yellow Wallpaper*), or even, cheekily, *"Where does Fanny Hill Keep her Contraceptives?"*

In each of the thirty-two chapters, or essays, John Sutherland quotes extracts of other authors' novels, explaining how they can sometimes be seen as evidence that something else is going on below the surface of the book; something which is not explicitly described. It's a fascinating read for those who have a certain type of mind. For others, it might prove frustrating, seem to miss the point, or be merely irrelevant. If like me you enjoy these "brainteasers", you will be pleased to hear that the author went on to write a further third one in the series. They are nice to dip into just after you have read a particular novel, although some puzzle fanatics with good memories might enjoy reading the book straight through.

Here is an alphabetical list of authors, each of whom have an essay devoted to one or more of their novels in this particular volume:

Jane Austen (2)

R.M. Ballantyne (included with Dickens)

Charlotte Bronte (2)

Emily Bronte

John Cleland

Wilkie Collins

Arthur Conan Doyle

James Fennimore Cooper

Daniel Defoe

Charles Dickens (4 - plus 2 "doubles")

George Eliot (3)

Henry Fielding

Ford Maddox Ford

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Thomas Hardy (3)

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Jack London

Anna Sewell

Laurence Sterne

W.M. Thackeray

Anthony Trollope (2)

Virginia Woolf

Tiffany says

I totally disagree with the title essay, but otherwise this is a fine follow-up to his last book of literary puzzles.

Dierregi says

Mildly interesting speculations about minor inconsistencies in famous novels. I read some of the novels analyzed in this short collection of commentaries, but still I did not find the insight particularly interesting.

For instance one essay is speculating about who Angel will marry after Tess execution.... Will he marry Tess's sister? Who knows, but also - in my case -who cares?

The only conclusion, hardly mind-blowing, is that even the best plotted, most famous classics may have some flaws.
