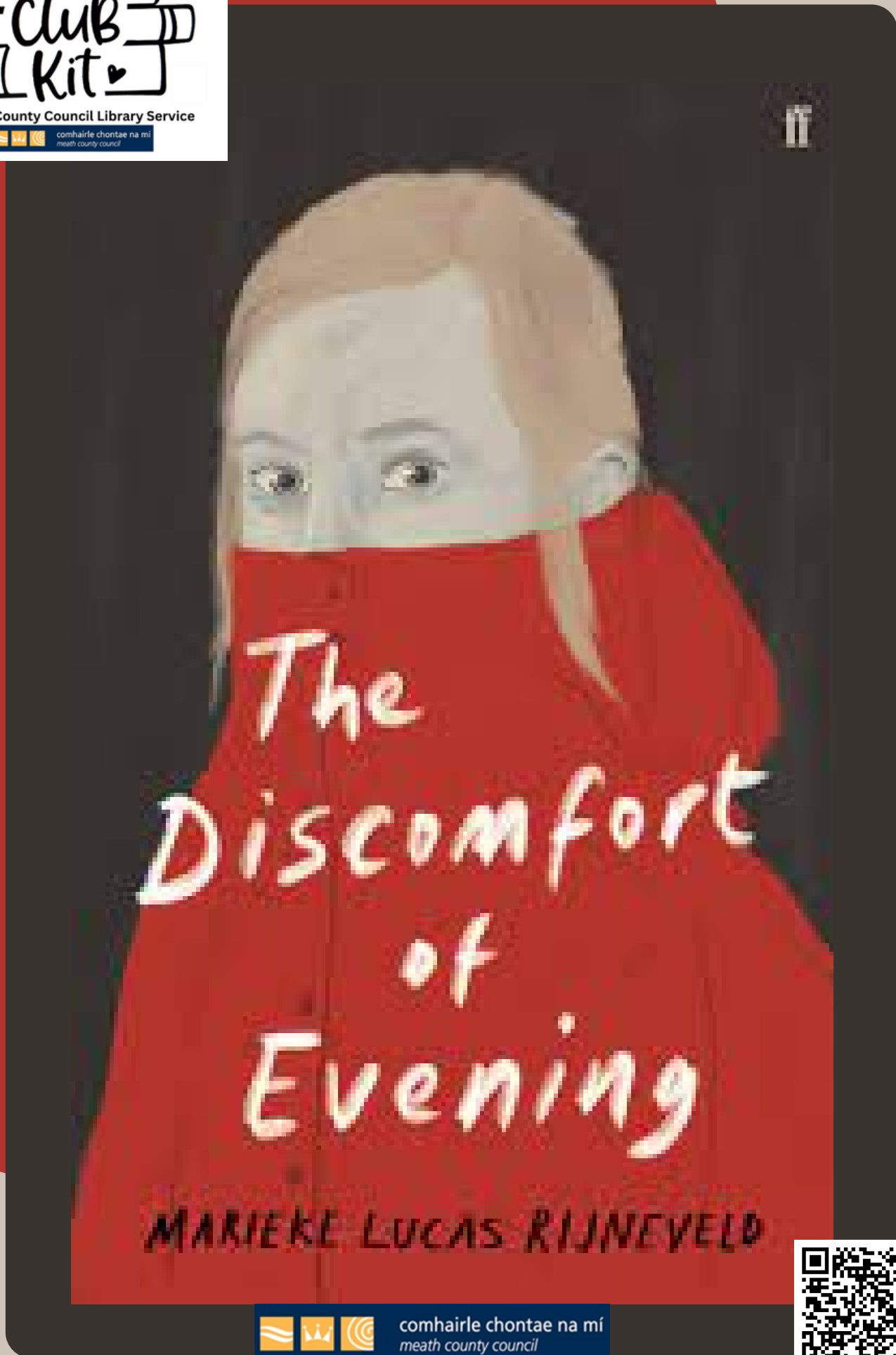




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www.meath.ie/council/council-services/libraries/book-club-kits



Notes To Readers



This kit was created for book clubs to use in their discussions of *The Discomfort of Evening* and contains spoilers

Content Warnings

Please be aware that *The Discomfort of Evening* contains content that may trigger including depictions of violence and mental health struggles.

Resources

This kit is available to download on our website



Reading Group Discussion Questions

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, as you can see from the first names, does not want to be pigeonholed as male or female. Does it really matter whether a book is written by a man or a woman?

The novel opens with the death of the main character's brother. The author's own brother died when she was 3 and she used this as a starting point for her own work of fiction. Is it necessary or useful to know something about the person of the artist (writer, painter, director, composer), or does that only distract from his/her work of art.

"A lot of people seem to be angry/irritated/disappointed that this book won the International Booker. Most readers are displeased because of all the disgusting, uncomfortable scenes. And there are a LOT of disgusting, uncomfortable scenes. But if we looked upon fiction only as a source of comfort or safe space, we'd also have to scorn many of the books that revolutionized the literary scene. This book deserves the prize for the very reasons it's being frowned upon: for testing the bounds of our imagination, infringing on our comfort zones and forcing us to confront the inherent discomfort within it."

This quote is from a Goodreads review by a person who gave the book a 5 star rating. Do you agree with their comments?

Why do you think the author chose to write so descriptively or explicitly of things like bodily functions, animal torture or sexual experimentation? Do you think this was an attempt to shock or do you believe that it could have been an expression of trapped grief and lack of emotional release about the trauma of death?

Who Else Writes Like...?

A readers' guide to fiction authors



DID YOU KNOW?

You can use the library's Reading Recommendation Website "Who Else Write Like?" to find new books to read!

Who Else Writes Like...? will help you to find something to read by uncovering new authors based on ones you already like.

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Some titles included in the site may be suitable for young adult readers, who are in the process of 'crossing-over' to adult novels.

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To use this great resource just visit the Who Else Writes Like Website and Log in with your Library Card. Then select Meath County Libraries from the drop down menu of accounts and click on continue. And you're on your way to finding your next read.

And remember, you can also search our [online catalogue](#) and reserve the titles recommended.

www.meath.ie/council/council-services/libraries/what-to-read-next

About Marieke Lucas Rijneveld



Marieke Lucas Rijneveld (b. 1991) grew up in a Reformed farming family in North Brabant before moving to Utrecht. One of the greatest new voices in Dutch literature, her first poetry collection, *Calfskin*, was awarded the C. Buddingh' Prize for best poetry debut in 2015, with the newspaper *de Volkskrant* naming her literary talent of the year. In 2018, Atlas Contact published her first novel, *The Discomfort of the Evening*, which won the prestigious ANV Debut Prize and was a national bestseller. Alongside her writing career, Rijneveld works on a dairy farm.



Interview with Marieke Lucas Rijnveld


Dominique Sisley: Firstly, how are you? 2020 has been a strange year – how have you been coping?

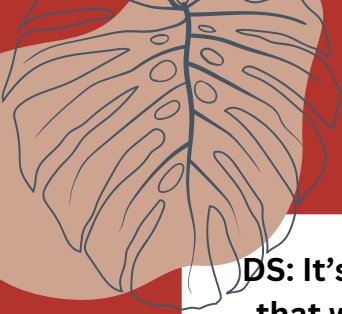
Marieke Lucas Rijnveld: It's been such a strange and simultaneously wonderful year – very bizarre. When we entered lockdown in March, my whole daily routine completely changed. I had no more lectures, could no longer go to the gym, and saw very few people. It was lonely on the one hand, but it also allowed me to fully focus on my new book. And that was delicious. I have never written so much and so obsessively. I would work on it for eight hours a day, and then I'd stop and do some cycling or strength training. I repeated this routine day after day. I've also been worried a lot about the world, about all the vulnerable people, and have been anxious because everything suddenly felt so unpredictable. But the writing has largely got me through it.

DS: You've described yourself as a private person, and yet *The Discomfort of Evening* – which is very close to autobiographical – is so unflinchingly honest and soul-baring. Were you ever afraid about being this open in your work?

MLR: I did have moments while writing *The Discomfort of Evening* when I had concerns or doubts about the book, and feared hurting my family. Sometimes it was so intense that I was completely inhibited and hardly dared to pick up the pen. It took a friend of mine to tell me that I had to be 'inexorable': that only then could I write the book I wanted to write. I then wrote the word 'inexorable' on the wall above my desk. It helped.

It also helped me to think of the book as a novel. Of course, there are similarities with my own childhood or life, but in the end it is really a story in which fiction also plays a major role.





DS: It's also very dark in its humour. I know there was one joke about Hitler that was deemed too offensive to be put into the English version. Do you think it's important to be provocative, and to push these boundaries?


MLR: In retrospect, I thought it was a shame that the Hitler joke had to be removed. I understand that people are affected by that and that's not what I want, but it was written from a child's perspective. It was not intended to be provocative. That's an important distinction: jokes that come from innocence, or jokes that are intended to provoke and hurt. Of course, I sometimes push the boundaries, but I also think a writer should be able to be honest and have the freedom to write what they want. I don't use the pen as a weapon, and that's the most important thing for me. I want to show the complexity of being human, but it's not my intention to shock the reader.

DS: Are there any subjects that you would consider to be off-limits?

MLR: There are not really any topics that I shy away from. I have trouble with some, but rarely while I'm writing them. It's often only afterwards when I read it back, that I sometimes think: 'gosh, how could I have written that?' I also think boundaries are there to be touched, and that the motive is more important than the boundary itself. Are you doing it to hurt, or are you doing it to bring something to light?

DS: Many of these dark thoughts are coming from Jas, your lead character, who comes across as a real outcast. Do you see yourself as an outcast?

MLR: Yes, I've always been different from other people. It was a quality everyone liked in primary school, but in high school it stood out and I was bullied for it. That was painful. I still feel different now, and sometimes dream of being 'normal'. But on the other hand, I'm also starting to like it more and more, and I can see the good sides of being an outcast. In my work, I can distinguish myself and that is partly because of how I am, and because of how I live. Although it sometimes feels lonely to be different, I can partly disperse that loneliness by writing. I'm never alone in writing.





DS: Does that outsider nature translate to your online life? Have you been able to shun social media?

MLR: To be honest I'm a bit addicted to social media. I have a 'Lucas series' on Instagram, for example, where I post a self-portrait every so often and call it Lucas 0.1, 0.2, etc. I'm now on 'Lucas 2.9'. It's my way of giving Lucas space, to develop the boy in me.

Social media is also a good way to meet readers, to bring your books into the world. Sometimes it makes me insecure, though. I can feel dependent on this virtual world where people may or may not like you, and don't have a problem showing it. Selfies, in particular, can make you feel vulnerable, because people judge you by your appearance. But for some reason I feel driven to show Lucas in this way, to feel how close I can get to him.

DS: You come from an extremely traditional, religious background. You are also gender-nonconforming. How did your upbringing affect your gender identity, and has 'Lucas' – your male self – been accepted by your family?

MLR: The first time I mentioned that I'd rather be a boy, my family reacted with anger and pain. They didn't understand, and were afraid of losing the girl in me. Only later did they realise that it was not all that radical, and that I was just looking to express myself to the world in a way that suited me. They are more lenient about it now, although we never actually speak about it.

Looking back, I do think their initial reaction increased the confusion around my identity, because I didn't really have the space to do what felt right. I currently present myself as a kind of in-between person, and that feels good for now. It is nice to feel freer, and I want everyone who struggles with their gender identity to know: you do not have to choose. And if you do choose, it is only your choice.

DS: And what about religion? Do any of the strict religious values from your childhood stay with you today?

MLR: I still believe in God, I never lost that. It's different from when I was a child, less overbearing, less 'magical'. But He is always present, just no longer in the foreground. I still carry the lessons from my biblical education with me – not just the love for fellow human beings, but the power of a unified community. I still miss that sometimes; having a community where everyone is there for each other. I also carry all the beautiful stories from the Bible with me. I learned a lot from the language, from the symbolism. You can argue about whether any of it really happened, but it's even more beautiful to look at the ideas that lie behind it. From that alone you can infer that God stands for love. That is why I sometimes think it's a shame that I grew up with such a punishing God. Mankind paints God as punishing, but the Bible isn't meant to be. Of course, there are horrific stories in there – but when you look beyond that horror, there's often a different meaning behind it.



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The Discomfort of Evening

Marieke Lucas Rijneveld

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