

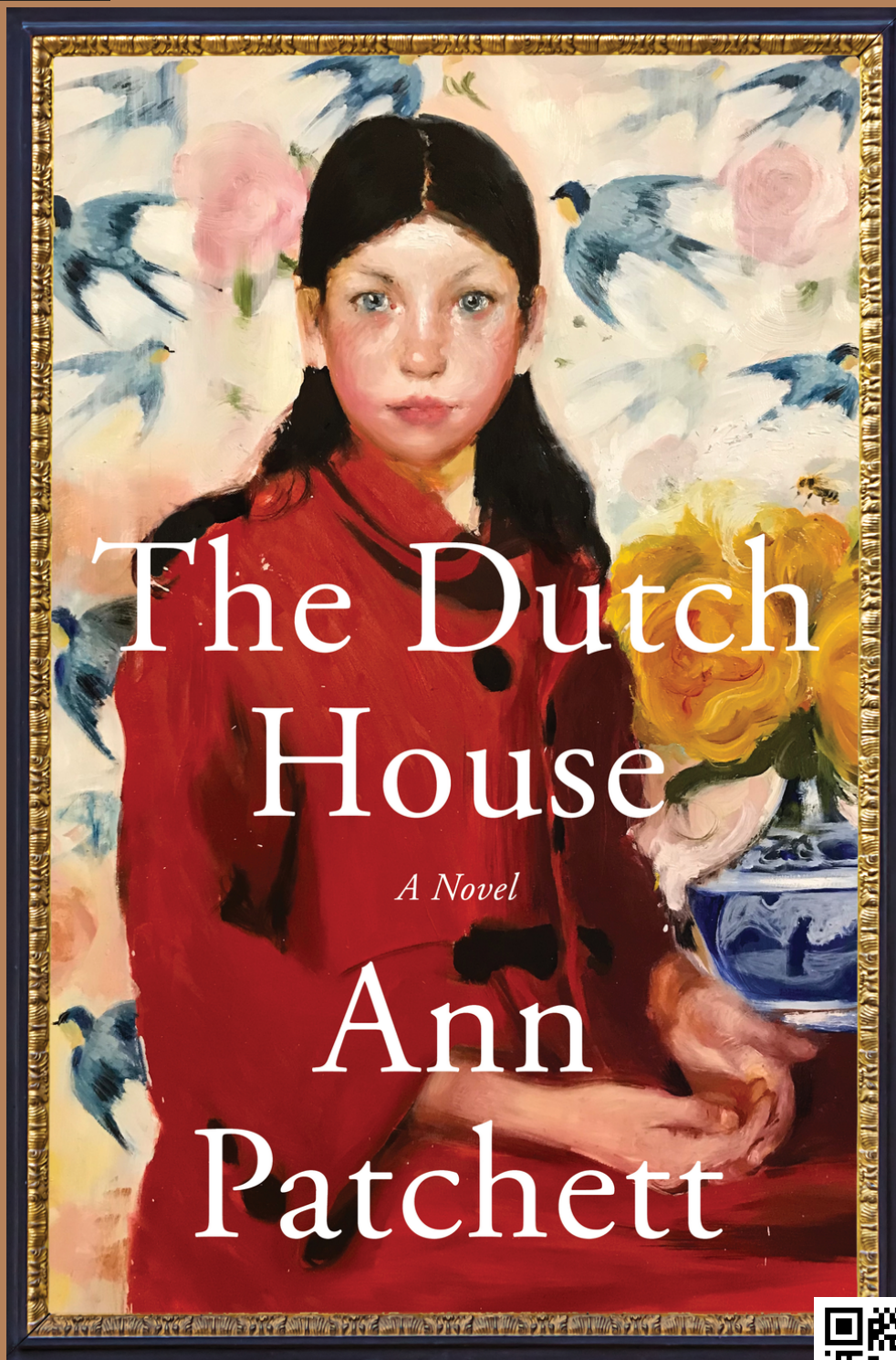


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Meath County Council Library Service Book Club Kit



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Notes To Readers

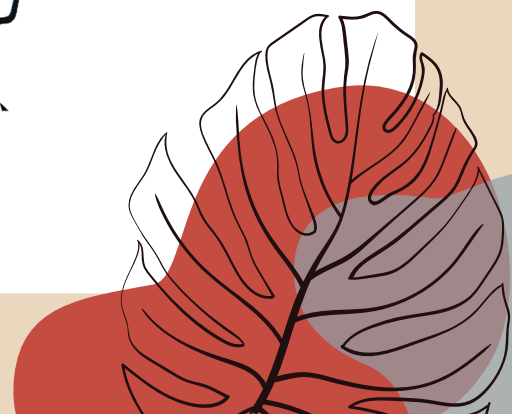


This kit was created for book clubs to use in their discussions of *The Dutch House* and contains spoilers

Content Warnings


Please be aware that *The Dutch House* contains themes that include incredibly close sibling relationship, the effects of abandonment on children, wealth and privilege, materialism, family loyalty, expectations, revenge, greed, compassion, childhood, and memories

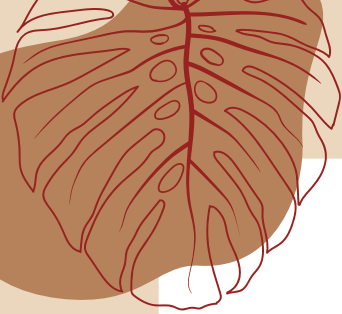
<https://readingladies.com/thinking-about/>





Reading Group Discussion Questions

1. Danny asks Maeve, ‘do you think it’s possible ever to see the past as it actually was?’ Discuss the role of memory in the novel. To what extent have Danny and Maeve mythologised their childhoods? Are their memories re-shaped by what they understand as adults?
 2. The house itself symbolises different things for different characters in the novel. What does it symbolise for Danny and Maeve? How does the absence of their parents affect their relationship towards the house?
 3. Discuss the role of foreshadowing in the novel. Why, for instance, are the VanHoebeeks significant? And what can we make of the fact that Danny goes on to work in real estate and marry unsuccessfully, like his father?
 4. Danny is the narrator, but the main character is arguably Maeve. Why do you think Ann Patchett chose to tell the story this way, instead of letting Maeve narrate? What does Danny’s perspective bring that Maeve’s might not have?
 5. Maeve says of Andrea, ‘the truth is, I have plenty of memories of her being perfectly decent. I just choose to dwell on the ones in which she wasn’t.’ Is Andrea just another wicked stepmother?
- 



6. The house inspires pride and joy in Cyril, but the same house repulses Elna so much that she flees from it, leaving her family behind. Why were their reactions so different? Is it fair of Danny to comment that ‘our father was a man who had never met his own wife’?

7. Maeve is Danny’s sister, but she also takes on the role of his mother, working a job for which she is overqualified to stay near him, and helping him make big decisions about his education. How does the absence of a real mother affect Danny’s relationship with Maeve? And how is Maeve affected by the absence of her mother

8. Reflecting on one of the many hours spent sitting with Maeve in the car outside their former home, Danny says ‘we pretended that what we had lost had been taken from us by the person who still lived inside.’ What do you think he means by this?

9. Can the house be considered a character in the novel? Why?

10. Danny and Maeve agree on their perception of Andrea as cruel and vindictive, but their attitudes to Elna differ: Danny is angry at her, while Maeve longs for her. Why do they feel differently about Elna? What do they think of Cyril?

11. Consider the way the novel ends. Is there a sense of forgiveness? Should there be?

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/dutch-house-9781526614971/>



Who Else Writes Like...?

A readers' guide to fiction authors



Ann Patchett ★ 🔊 📱

HOME COUNTRY USA

BORN IN 1963

GENRES **General**

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Candice Carty-Williams Emma Cline Louise Dean Margaret Drabble
Bernardine Evaristo Zoë Ferraris Claire Fuller Helen Garner
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About Ann Patchett



Ann Patchett is the author of seven novels and three works of non-fiction. She has been shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction twice, for *The Magician's Assistant* in 1998, *State of Wonder* in 2012 and won the prize for *Bel Canto* in 2002. She is also the winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award and was named one of Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2012. Her work has been translated into more than thirty languages. She is the co-owner of Parnassus Books in Nashville, Tennessee, where she lives with her husband, Karl



Interview with Ann Patchett

The protagonists in *The Dutch House* become obsessed with their childhood home after they're turfed out by their stepmother. Do you think people too often get fixated on the past?

So many people just get stuck in their childhood and shoulder that burden through everything. It becomes their defining feature in life. Danny and Maeve [the novel's main characters] chew on their loss of the house: they make it a fetish. I see people doing that and I just think, You can't still be feeling this loss. You've made this your hobby.

Property is both a sanctuary and a burden in the novel. Was that something you set out to explore?

I hadn't consciously set out to explore that and yet the further along I went the more I could see it and the more I could think about the burden of things. I am somebody who feels the burden of things. I think I would have made a swell nun.

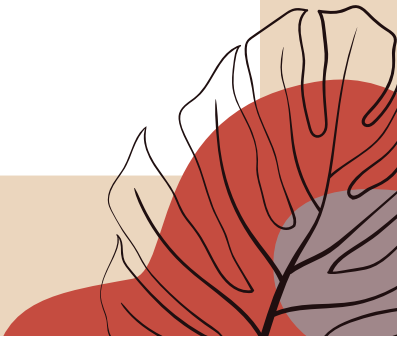
The novel is also about memory: whether we can only ever view the past through the prism of the present. Do you think memory is ultimately unreliable?


Yes, I think that memory is almost a living thing for every person. I was in downtown New York on September 11 with a friend and we were there at the World Trade Center when it fell. We had this huge life-changing day together. Several years later, we sat down and we talked about that day and it was as if we had been on different planets. We remembered every single thing about the day differently. Memory is unreliable and yet we are completely positive that we are right.

Give me a story about a rabbit who's had a very hard time of it and I will be weeping

One of the novel's central questions is how we deal with grief. Do you think culturally we are ill-equipped?

We don't have enough time to deal with our grief. We're almost embarrassed by grief. It's so strange. We have two things absolutely in common: we're born and we die. And everyone goes through those two experiences in a remarkably similar way, with a few medical details to separate us. But the facts are the facts: we weren't here and then we're not here again. But we can't bear to think about it.





You have said in the past that you can't write villains. But Andrea Conroy is an almost fairytale wicked stepmother. Why did you feel able to write a villain now?

I was interviewing Zadie Smith about the idea of writing an autobiographical novel. She said she was writing about the kind of mother she was afraid of being. You can write something very autobiographical that has never happened to you because it's what you're afraid of. And I wanted to write about the kind of stepmother that I would be afraid of being.

There are many fairytale elements in the book. Did you feel as if you were writing a modern-day fairytale?

Yes. I grew up on lives of the saints, which are fairytales. Whether it's Hansel and Gretel or Saint Francis throwing out the last of his bread for the birds – it all comes together. Catholicism: it's just kind of a big fairytale. The parables: fairytales. I'm a very plot-driven person and I think it all goes back to fairytales and parables and saints.

So were you reading parables rather than fairytales growing up?

I was reading them all interchangeably. When you think about it, they really are just the same. There are morals, the good people are lifted up, the bad people get their justice in the end, there's a certain amount of magic involved. I can scarcely remember which goes into which camp.

Which writers have most influenced you?

Philip Roth, John Updike and Saul Bellow. Those were the authors my parents were reading when I was in high school and so those were the books that were lying around. I think influence has more to do with when you read something than who you read.

Which writers working today do you admire the most?


Zadie Smith, Colson Whitehead, Elizabeth Strout, Donna Tartt, Michael Chabon. I could go on.

What do you read for sheer pleasure?

Anything and everything by Kate DiCamillo. Give me a story about a rabbit who's had a very hard time of it and I will be weeping. Give me a story about a mouse who has his tail cut off trying to save a princess: it means the world to me.

Has owning a bookshop changed your relationship to books?

I used to live my life reading EM Forster and Henry James. That's what I used to read and love and dream about. Now I read everything in galleys [advanced copies]. I read 10 or 20 pages of something, chuck it aside and start the next thing.



Is there a book you wish you'd written?

Old Filth by Jane Gardam. It's absolutely perfect. It's one of those books that I think of as a universal donor: everyone I give that book to is thrilled by it. It's a rare book that covers birth to death which is frankly impossible to do.

And a book you think is overrated?

I'm way too polite for that.

Is there a very famous book – contemporary or classic – that you've never got around to reading?

How much time do you have? All I do is read and all I do is realise how much I haven't read. I've only read one Trollope novel.

Who would you like to write the story of your life?

David Sedaris. I love him and he'd embarrass me to death.

Commonwealth by Ann Patchett review – it started with a kiss
[Read more](#)

What's the last great book you read?

The Resisters by Gish Jen. It's coming out in February. It's a book that means to save the world. I can't begin to tell you how brilliant it is.

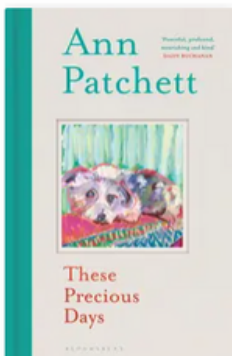
What books are on your bedside table to read next?

The Giver of Stars by Jojo Moyes and Deep River by Karl Marlantes. I'm currently reading American Dirt by Jeanine Cummins: it's fantastic.



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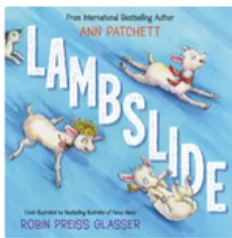
The Dutch House
Ann Patchett



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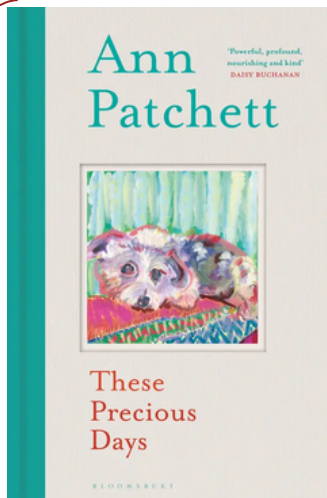


+ My List

Bel Canto
Ann Patchett



More from Ann Patchett



Ranging from the personal – her portrait of the three men she called her fathers; how a chance encounter with Tom Hanks led to one of the most important friendships of her life; how to answer when someone asks why you don't have children – to the sublime – the unexpected influence of Snoopy; the importance of knitting; the pleasure to be found in children's books – each essay transforms the particular into the universal, letting us all see our own worlds anew.



Somewhere in South America, at the home of the country's vice president, a lavish birthday party is being held in honour of the powerful businessman Mr. Hosokawa. Roxane Coss, opera's most revered soprano, has mesmerised the international guests with her singing. It is a perfect evening – until a band of gun-wielding terrorists takes the entire party hostage. But what begins as a panicked, life-threatening scenario slowly evolves into something quite different, a moment of great beauty, as terrorists and hostages forge unexpected bonds and people from different continents become compatriots, intimate friends, and lovers.



It is 1964: Bert Cousins, the deputy district attorney, shows up at Franny Keating's christening party uninvited, bottle of gin in hand. As the cops of Los Angeles drink, talk and dance into the June afternoon, he notices a heart-stoppingly beautiful woman. When Bert kisses Beverly Keating, his host's wife, the new baby pressed between them, he sets in motion the joining of two families whose shared fate will be defined on a day seven years later.



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