

What we've valued during our time in isolation, Number 1

The library committee asked Friends for titles and for titles and comments about books, music and films they found particularly useful, enjoyable, sustaining and enriching during this period of isolation.

This is the initial offering, and we look forward to compiling a second list with your help

Read:

Two Celtic prayers written between 5th and 9th century.

Be Thou between me and all things grisly,
Be Thou before me in all things mean,
Be Thou between me and all things gruesome
Coming darkly towards me.

...mayest Thou Thyself, O God of life,
Be at my breast, be at my back,
Thou to me as a star, Thou to me as a guide,
From my life's beginning to my life's closing.

What are we doing here? by Marilyn Robinson. 2018. Essays with a religious sensibility from the author of *Gilead* and *Housekeeping* argue that modern culture tends to devalue humankind. Writing on behalf of the "wounded or discounted", always Robinson's preferred position, leads to a forceful defence of John Wycliffe and the Lollards, John Calvin, Oliver Cromwell or the 18th-century theologian Jonathan Edwards. We have this title in Friends House library and her fiction titles on order.

Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking, by Susan Cain. 2012. At least one-third of the people we know are introverts. They are the ones who prefer listening to speaking; who innovate and create but dislike self-promotion; who favour working on their own over working in teams. It is to introverts—Rosa Parks, Chopin, Dr. Seuss, Steve Wozniak—that we owe many of the great contributions to society. In *Quiet*, Susan Cain argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and shows how much we lose in doing so.

A Gentleman in Moscow, by Amor Towles. 2017. In 1922, Count Alexander Rostov is deemed an unrepentant aristocrat by a Bolshevik tribunal, and is sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol, a grand hotel across the street from the Kremlin. Rostov, an indomitable man of erudition and wit, has never worked a day in his life, and must now live in an attic room while some of the most tumultuous decades in Russian history are unfolding outside the hotel's doors. Unexpectedly, his reduced circumstances provide him entry into a much larger world of emotional discovery. Brimming with humor, a glittering cast of characters, and one beautifully rendered scene after another, this singular novel casts a spell as it relates the count's endeavor to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be a man of purpose. This novel is a long and enjoyable read.

Ishmael, by Daniel Quinn. 1992. This novel examines the hidden cultural biases driving modern civilisation explores themes of ethics, sustainability and global catastrophe. Largely *Ishmael* aims to expose that several widely accepted assumptions of modern society, such as are actually cultural myths that produce catastrophic consequences for humankind and the environment.

Confessions of a bookseller, by Shaun Blythell, 2019. Also his previous *Diary of a bookseller*. The author owns The Bookshop, Wigtown - Scotland's largest second-hand bookshop. In these wry and hilarious diaries, Shaun provides an inside look at the trials and tribulations of life in the book trade, from struggles with eccentric customers to wrangles with his own staff, who include the ski-suit-wearing, bin-foraging Nicky. He takes us with him on buying trips to old estates and auction houses, recommends books (both lost classics and new discoveries), introduces us to the thrill of the unexpected find, and evokes the rhythms and charms of small-town life, always with a sharp and sympathetic eye.

You can read the Guardian review at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/24/confessions-of-bookseller-shaun-bythell-review>

Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis, by J.D Vance. 2016. A 2017 Brookings Institution report noted that *Hillbilly Elegy* was a "raw, emotional portrait of growing up in and eventually out of a poor rural community riddled by drug addiction and instability." Vance's account anecdotally confirmed the report's conclusion that family stability is essential to upward mobility.

On sheep: diary of a Swedish shepherd, by Axel Linden. 2018. This is a curious and quirky short read (150pages). The author tries to manage life on the farm, the ever-escaping sheep and the trials and tribulations that come with being a shepherd - shearing, lambing and confronting the slaughterhouse. As time passes and he gradually settles into the rhythm of shepherding, his naivete fades away and is replaced with stark realisations about what is now his everyday life. You can read the Guardian review at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/sep/23/the-sheep-whisperer-having-a-relationship-with-sheep-can-be-as-complex-as-reading-proust>

Quaker Climate Emergency recommends these articles:

Defence <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/08/national-defence-corona-pandemic-fighter-jets#maincontent>

Donut Economics <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/08/amsterdam-doughnut-model-mend-post-coronavirus-economy>

George Monbiot

https://www.ted.com/talks/george_monbiot_the_new_political_story_that_could_change_everything

Listen

The Vivaldi album. Decca 2 CD set. Cecilia Bartoli uses her star status and her superb voice to rescue a host of Vivaldi opera [aria] arias from obscurity.

Calm, by Alain de Botton. 2016. This is a book that patiently unpacks the causes of our greatest stresses and gives us a succession of highly persuasive, beautiful and sometimes dryly comic arguments with which to defend ourselves against panic and fury. Last week, in Covid 19 times, Jim Mora interviewed the author, who says: “a positive that may come from the lockdown conditions in which millions of us are living is that it may bring with it consolations. We’re rediscovering something that anyone who has been ill knows instinctively, which is more modest ambitions.” You can listen to this interview at:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/sunday/audio/2018743228/alain-de-botton-finding-calm-through-pessimism>

Watch:

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, by Shoshanna Zuboff was in Barack Obama's top 10 for 2019. Shoshanna Zuboff is a Harvard professor who has written a monumental and alarming book about the new economic order. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* reveals how the biggest tech companies deal with our data. “Digital connection is now a means to others’ commercial ends,” writes Zuboff. An interview with author can be found at:

<https://theintercept.com/2019/02/02/shoshana-zuboff-age-of-surveillance-capitalism/> or you can watch her speak at: <https://iai.tv/video/shoshana-zuboff-the-age-of-surveillance-capitalism>

Greenfeast: autumn, winter, by Nigel Slater. A seasonal vegetarian cookbook with delicious, simple and healthy plant-based recipes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAyJJPbdEBI>