**RAB2 ‘Recommend a book e-mail project’ – Issue 2 December 2019 edited Tony + Barbara Holden @** **thbhholden@gmail.com**

**This project** ► is all about ‘recommending’ books. We need ‘author, title, publishing date’ [in A/Z of author first name] and why you want others to read this book! In say up to 250 words. ‘Discernment is all’ might be our slogan! So, we are aiming to ‘publish’ in August, December and April.

**Abir Mukherjee ‘ A Rising Man’ [2016]** - If you like historical thrillers this is one you are sure to enjoy. The book is set in Calcutta in 1919 under the Raj. The mystery, cultural setting and characters are well drawn with deft touches of humour. When you read it you won’t be surprised it won several awards including the CWA Endeavour Historical Dagger 2017 [Gill Webster].

**Adam Phillips ‘Attention seeking’ [2019]** – I’ve read many of his books. They are often difficult and always energising. This is to do with – “literature and psychoanalysis being the informing presences in this book.” The ‘read more’ section has: Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor ‘On kindness’ [2009] in which the theme is summarized as: “Suggesting that acts of kindness occur when we are at our most open and honest, they ask why it is that our faith in kindness has been shaken – and why we are all too ready to believe that antagonism has taken its place.” I thought ‘kindness over against antagonism’ was spot on for much of what is happening around us [Tony Holden].

**Anne Boileau ‘Katharina – nun, rebel, wife’ [2016]** – I read this for our library book group. I don’t think when I read Reformation studies as part of my Cambridge theology degree she got much of a look in! But this is an excellent story – strong on its sense of history, women as leaders, Luther as a complex figure, the Christian Church and Christendom as changing institutions. [Tony Holden]. I don’t usually read Tony’s book group reads but this took my eye – some hours later I couldn’t put it down [Barbara Holden].

**Annie Ernaux ‘The years’ 2008 translated 2017 Alison L Strayer [2019] -** At first, and if read too ‘lightly’ you might think it a complicated list of words and words about photographs and films! But as she unrolls the years from 1940 to 2006 I began to marvel at her selection of items. Her observations are telling in themselves and – surely that’s the point – taken together they become as a tapestry, quilt, weaving rather than stiches [think Anni Albers]. Or they are a selection of photos rather than ‘the’ one [think Roland Barthes ‘Camera Lucida’ 1980 and ‘the impossible science of the unique being’]. Or – try again – they become both her and the reader’s world. She draws you in especially if your time, be it in England rather than France, has been these years. I felt that here is someone who has understood something of what it is to live through these [changing] times. She grasps that the changes are radical and, for her, to do with the form in which she writes this novel. This is a deeply felt examination [interrogation] of what it means to be human and what it means to be a woman [Tony Holden].

**Clive James ‘Always unreliable’ [2004]** - If you missed these three memoir-novels [!] in 1981, 1986, 1991 or even missed the first omnibus edition in 2001 - now’s the time to catch up on Clive James. It’s laugh-aloud-funny, clever, literary. If you were alive and functioning prior to 1991 it’s a good re-run – if not it’s a robust course in UK-Australian social-history [Adam Holden].

**Donna Leon ‘Commissario Brunetti’ novels** - In the last year I have read all twenty seven Brunetti novels sometimes reading the last page of one novel followed immediately by the first page of the next. / The author Donna Leon is an American professor of English Literature who has lived in Venice for over thirty years and the books are about a Venetian police officer Guido Brunetti. The books follow Brunetti through his investigations. Each journey he walks in the city or takes a water taxi are accurate and detailed so you could follow his tracks and find your way. We hear about the meals he eats so that we could almost cook the meal without a recipe book. We meet his wife and children and their characters are an important part of the stories. In each criminal case we see the seamy side of Venetian life with corruption in official places a normal way of life. He is helped in his investigations by his subordinate Vianello and by Signorina Elettra, the secretary of his boss Patta. Signorina Elettra manages to completely control Patta without him ever realising and her research is an important part of Brunetti’s solving cases in ways which are not always legal. / Donna Leon’s love of Venice is obvious and Brunetti mourns the pollution of his home town and the damage done by tourists and cruise ships. / They are real page turners and written beautifully and I thoroughly recommend them [Janet Dawe].

**Elif Batuman ‘The possessed’ [2011]** – The Stendhal syndrome is named after Stendhal who apparently described his experience when he visited Florence. After seeing some of the amazing artwork he had dizziness, palpitations of the heart, etc. and almost fainted. Batuman writes about it. Can you believe it that Santa Maria Noava Hospital in Florence carried out a research on 106 people admitted to their psychiatry department. with the condition over 3 years, mostly European males between 25 and 40 years old. How amazing [Olcay Aniker].

**Jokha Alharthi ‘Celestial Bodies’ [2010 translated 2017]** - Winner of the Man Booker International Prize 2019 – Google books has: “Celestial Bodies is set in the village of al-Awafi in Oman, where we encounter three sisters: Mayya, who marries Abdallah after a heartbreak; Asma, who marries from a sense of duty; and Khawla who rejects all offers while waiting for her beloved, who has emigrated to Canada. These three women and their families witness Oman evolve from a traditional, slave-owning society slowly redefining itself after the colonial era, to the crossroads of its complex present.” It is set in Oman but it is also about the many societies and cities in our world that are changing. St. Paul wrote: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time [Romans 8:22-24]. Here is a version of that ‘travail’ [Barbara Holden].”

**Marcus J Borg 'convictions a manifesto for progressive Christians' [2014 he died 2015]** – we’ve used this in our local church discussion group. He gives a personal and passionate account. He also offers an alternative to American evangelical Republican Christianity: “In presidential elections in the twenty-first century, about 80% of white conservative Christians voted for the Republican candidate” [Barbara Holden].

**Margaret Atwood ‘The Testaments’ [2019]** – Like many others, I'd waited a long time for this sequel to Margaret Atwood's ‘The Handmaid's Tale.’ It doesn't disappoint. Not at all. The writing is so sharp, the story telling so powerful. The recent TV series had brought her iconic story to the screen, to a new generation of readers - of young women and less young who may have different perspectives but should be equally alarmed by shifts towards populism, misogyny and erosion of rights. ‘The Testaments’ gives resolution for the characters as well as another compelling mix of scary, powerful, hopeful humanity - and raises an ongoing challenge. We should be aware and speak up, less our lips too are closed [Sian Newton].

**Marianne Wiggins ‘The Shadow Catcher’ [2007]** – [1] is “a dual narrative threading the early life of photographer Edward Curtis and current life of "Marianne Wiggins.’ [2] It is so rich that I read it one chapter at a time. [3] It’s a marvellous story: it’s emotionally strong on America, American Indians, photography, people and absent fathers. It’s serious, insightful, unusual. One of the cover quotations [Julia Keller] says that the themes are “families, the American West, death, time, memory, the subjugation of Native Americans and the rise of photography as the chief medium by which we now know the world – or think we do.” [4] Marianne Wiggins acknowledgements begin with “W G Sebald whose interleafing of photographs with prose opened my eyes to the possibility of a new way of reading.” And there is more on Edward S Curtis photographer ‘National American Indian 20 volumes’ [1907 – 1930] at ‘his’ website. And more on Marianne Wiggins on hers [Tony Holden].

**Philip Collins ‘When they go low, we go high: speeches that shape the world and why we need them’ [2017]** - Philip Collins, one time speech writer for Tony Blair, analysis of twenty-five of the greatest speeches ever written is a timely contribution to the current debate on democracy and its future. From the funeral oration of Pericles, via Cicero, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (only 272 words), Elizabeth 1, Emeline Pankhurst, Martin Luther King and others, some less savoury than these, he clinically, yet with much understanding, explores the theme. On a personal note Collins helped me to understand why I’ve always preferred Camus to Sartre [Ron Smith].

**Richard Rohr ‘Falling Upward - A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life’ [2011]** - Today bought in Oxfam 2nd hand bookshop on the spiritual advantages of growing old and how a different journey can begin from what has gone before - work, bringing up children, being 'of use,' etc. Excellent [Ian Harker].