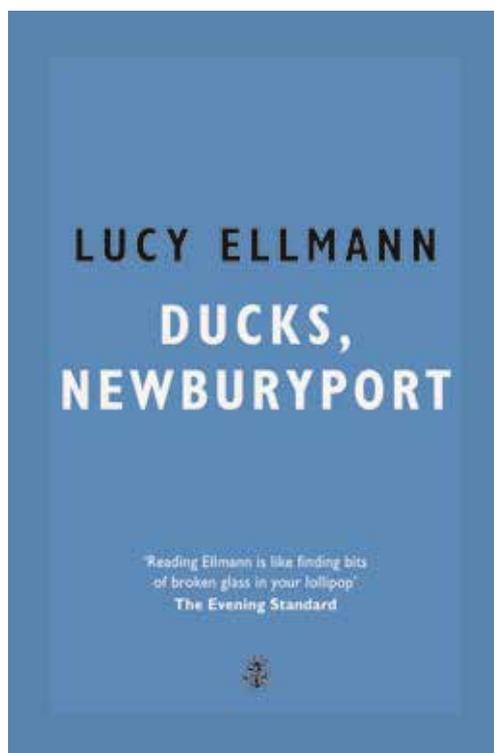




Readers' Guide



Ducks, Newburyport

Lucy Ellmann

Galley Beggar Press

Other novels by Lucy Ellmann

Mimi (2013)

Doctors and Nurses (2006)

Man or Mango? (1998)

Varying Degrees of Happiness (1991)

thebookerprizes.com

About the author

Lucy Ellmann was born in Illinois, USA on 18 October 1956, and moved to England as a teenager. Her first novel, *Sweet Desserts*, won the *Guardian* Fiction Prize. It was followed by *Man or Mango?: A Lament*, Orange Prize-longlisted *Dot in the Universe* and *Doctors & Nurses*. She lives in Edinburgh.

About the book

Latticing one cherry pie after another, an Ohio housewife tries to bridge the gaps between reality and the torrent of meaningless information that is the United States of America. She worries about her children, her dead parents, African elephants, the bedroom rituals of “happy couples”, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and how to hatch an abandoned wood pigeon egg. Is there some trick to surviving survivalists? School shootings? Medical debts? Franks ‘n’ beans? A scorching indictment of America’s barbarity, past and present, and a lament for the way we are sleepwalking into environmental disaster, *Ducks, Newburyport* is a heresy, a wonder—and a revolution in the novel.

What the judges thought

“The unstoppable monologue of an Ohio housewife in Lucy Ellmann’s extraordinary *Ducks, Newburyport* is like nothing you’ve ever read before. A cacophony of humour, violence, and Joycean word play, it engages – furiously – with the detritus of domesticity as well as Trump’s America. This audacious and epic novel is brilliantly conceived, and challenges the reader with its virtuosity and originality.”

Discussion points

How did you find the experience of reading a novel with such a unique structure?

How did it capture the nature of consciousness and reflect on America itself?

The novel ‘tries to capture the reality of what it’s like to be trapped in the prison of a mind’. Do you think it’s successful in this aim?

What role does the story about the lioness and her cubs play in the novel?

The novel includes humour and wordplay. How does this comic element balance the serious topics discussed?

Themed reading

Virginia Woolf *Mrs Dalloway*

Helen Ellis *American Housewife: Stories*

Salman Rushdie *The Golden House*

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/15/ducks-newburyport-by-lucy-ellmann-review>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/04/ducks-newburyport-by-lucy-ellmann-review>

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/magazine/culture/ducks-newburyport-by-lucy-ellmann-review-a-1-000-page-novel-thats-just-one-sentence-long-kj79jnk8>