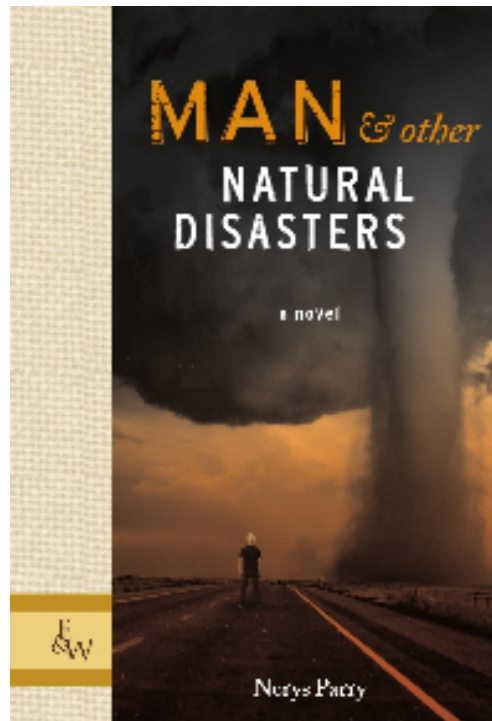


ENFIELD & WIZENTY

Enfield & Wizenty Reader's Guide



Man and Other Natural Disasters

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Story

Simon Peters, a bookbinder full of theories on everything from heart-broken shrimp to the consciousness of DNA, is hiding from his horrific past in the basement of the Calgary City Library. Enter Minerva, a twenty-two year-old student. Her ghostly resemblance to Simon's dead sister compels him to slowly reveal the shocking story of the natural disasters that killed his family.

But Simon's story does not add up. When he finds Minerva bleeding on his bathroom floor, he must conquer the tyranny of his own memory and confront what really happened that summer of 1962. But the truth proves no less confounding, or tragic, than the original tale.

About the Author

Nerys Parry's writing has aired on CBC radio and appeared in publications including *Queen's Quarterly*, and been shortlisted for the *Event* Non-Fiction Award (2004 and 2007). Parry enjoys straddling the divide between science and fiction; she holds a Bachelor of Applied Science from Queen's and an MFA from UBC. She lives in Ottawa with her husband and two children.

Reader's Guide for *Man and Other Natural Disasters*

1. Simon's final psychiatric report raises many doubts as to the veracity of Simon's story. What parts of his story, if any, do you believe to be true? Do you feel there is such a thing as an ultimate truth, or is "truth itself constructed", as philosopher Giambattista Vico claimed?
2. Winston Churchill once quipped that "in wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies". Simon's fugue state is an extreme example of how far someone might go to hide from the truth. Do you believe that there are times when lies are necessary and serve a purpose?
3. "Survival is its own kind of story," Seymon says. What do stories mean to each of the main characters in the novel? In your own life, what role does story play in enabling you to survive and live a meaningful life?
4. Simon expresses his love of paper books throughout the novel, waxing prosaic about their weight, smell and texture. What do you think the growth in popularity of e-books will mean to the paper book? Do we risk losing something precious when we move our words from paper to screen?
5. Many of Simon's scientific theories appear to border on mysticism. What role do science and religion play in Simon's life? In your mind, is science completely separate from religion, or can it be as fanatical and dangerous a belief as any other?
6. During the decade it took to write the book, the world reportedly witnessed an increase in natural disasters and terrorist activities. Do you agree that disasters and terrorism are on the rise? If so, how has this knowledge changed the way you feel about nature and other people, particularly those of other religions?
7. George Santayana once said, "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Although the terrorism in the novel took place over a century ago now, what if anything do you think we can learn from the Freedomite story that could be helpful in today's 'war against terror'?
8. As described in the book, in the 1950s, the government separated the Freedomite children from their parents and sent them to New Denver for schooling. Similarly, in Quebec in the 1970s, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked the war measures act during a FLQ uprising. Both instances involved aggressive acts of state, aimed at bringing a rapid end to terrorism. Some might say they succeeded. In your opinion, was it right to enforce the children's schooling? Do the ends really justify the means?

9. In 2003, the B.C. Ombudsman issued a government apology to the children of New Denver. First nation children who were forced to attend residential schools have also fought hard for a government apology, as have the veterans of secret chemical warfare and nuclear trials. Often the apologies, if they come at all, come many years after the events themselves, and with small recompense. What do you think is the value of a government's apology to someone like Seymon, or a first nations victim, or a veteran? Do you think by their issuance of such apologies, governments will in future change the way they act?
10. Both Simon and Minerva are involved in abusive relations, and are at times abusive themselves. In real life, how easy is it to separate victims from perpetrators? Is it always as clear a line as we would like to believe?
11. In Canada, the Doukhobours were allowed to exercise their right to freedom of religion by refusing conscription, but were forced to register marriages and to send their children to school. Why do you think the government drew the line for acceptable religious exemption at marriage and schooling (which Freedomites also felt were against their religion)? Do you think it was right in doing so or not?
12. In the same vein, in 2011, the spiritual leader of the Church of Latter Day Saints (CLDS) in Texas, was charged with child abuse relating to his relations with one of his twelve year old "brides". At the same time, two of Canada's CLDS spiritual leaders with strong ties to the Texas community, Bountiful's Winston Blackmore and James Oler, were fighting for their constitutional right to practice polygamy as part of their religion after BC had failed to charge them with the crime of polygamy. What role should the government have in regulating marriages, ages of consent, and education, especially in a country with so many different religious faiths and beliefs?