



Night Music: a soundtrack to accompany *The Possessions of Doctor Forrest*

Modest Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition, Movement No. 12, 'Catacombs' (1874)*

As arranged for orchestra, Mussorgsky's piece conjures up all the alarm and ominous unease that might be stirred by climbing down into a subterranean crypt.

Béla Bartók, *String Quartet No. 1 (1908)*

Bartók described this brooding early work as a 'funeral dirge', the death in question being that of his spurned love for the violinist Stefi Geyer.

Charles Ives, *Three Places in New England: III – The Housatonic at Stockbridge (1914)*

Ives made this piece from memories of walking with his wife by a misty river in Massachusetts. Alex Ross, author of *The Rest is Noise*, describes it as 'a mystery in sound'.

Krzysztof Penderecki, *Polymorphia (1961)*

Penderecki wrote this dense, terrifying orchestration of sounds for 48 stringed instruments. It sounds like nothing on earth – rather, it seems to come from the underworld.

György Ligeti, *Lontano (1967)*

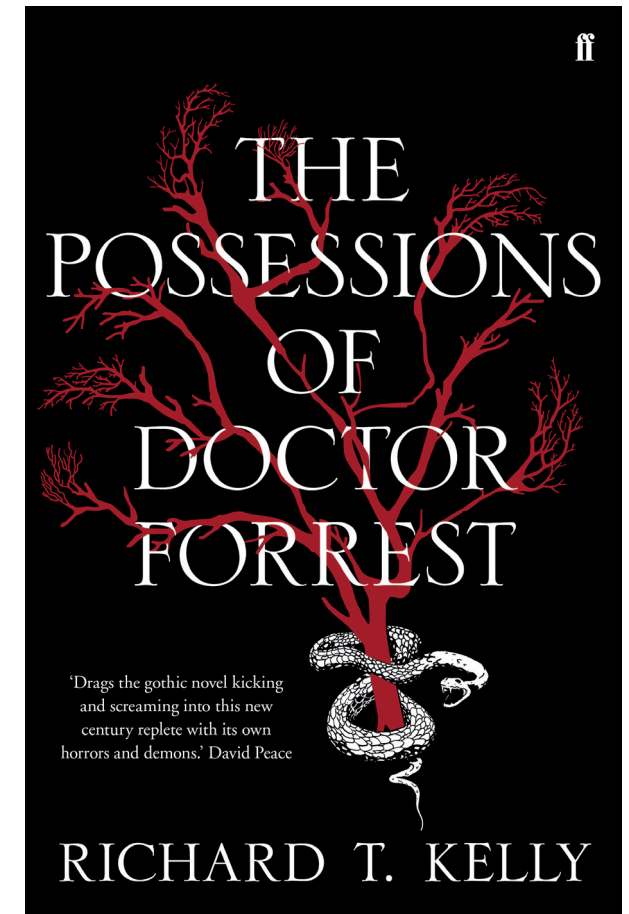
Ligeti became a towering figure of the avant-garde through 'sound mass compositions' such as *Lontano*, one great slow-building mood, full of dread, shudders and shivers.

Kate Bush, *The Fog (1989)*

Bush beautifully links childhood fears of the sea to the grown-up unease of losing oneself in love, 'deep and dark, like the water was'. Grave, elegant strings make a mist around the song itself.

Book group questions

- 1) What does the term 'gothic' mean to you in describing a story? Is it a style that you recognise? Were there things about this novel that felt 'gothic' to you?
- 2) Do you think Richard T Kelly's style of writing was appropriate to the sort of story he was telling? Did the novel feel 'old-fashioned' to you in any way?
- 3) As you went along, were you reminded of any other horror stories or supernatural stories that you've read previously?
- 4) How soon did you guess 'the secret' of what had happened to Dr Forrest? Was there a specific point in the story where you were sure you had cottoned on? What were the main clues that helped you to guess?
- 5) Why do you think Doctor Forrest accepted the 'bargain' offered him by Dijana Vukovara?
- 6) To what extent do you believe that the way we look, our physical appearance, defines who we are as people? If your appearance changed very radically, could you still be the same person? Or would something essential about who 'you' are have changed, too?
- 7) The three doctors – Forrest, Lochran and Hartford – are markedly different from one another. What do the choices they've made in life (their wives, their homes, professions, hobbies, enthusiasms) tell us about the sort of men they are?
- 8) Did the novel remind you in any way of your own friendships, or friendships you used to have? Do you think we forgive our oldest friends for behaviour that we wouldn't tolerate from other people? Or is it possible, as Hartford says of Forrest, for even one's oldest friends to 'lose the things we liked about them'?
- 9) Was the ending of the novel an appropriate, satisfying resolution to the story for you? Or would you rather it had ended differently?
- 10) Can you imagine what might happen next to Dr Forrest after the book's final page?
- 11) Looking back, do you think there was a moral to this book? Dr Forrest says he has had 'no end of a lesson.' Do you agree? If so, what sort of a lesson was he taught?



READING GUIDE TO THIS YEAR'S DURHAM READS TOGETHER BOOK

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Dear Reader,

Let me welcome you to 'the dark side' – the place, I daresay, from which my novel, *The Possessions of Doctor Forrest*, comes. I hope that the notes in this guide will be helpful to your reading and discussion of the book.



It's a tale of mystery and the supernatural, very influenced by the old literary style known as 'gothic', even though the story takes place in the present. But in writing the novel I wanted to see if that rather vintage style could still entertain modern-day readers – because it's always delighted me.

When I was a boy first discovering books I had the child's customary fascination with the uncanny and the macabre. Some of the first novels I loved were gothic classics of the 19th century – *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. All of these stories – indeed, most 'horror' stories – are really about our (very natural) fear of death, and our common yearning for a life beyond the expiry date of our bodies: that date unknown and yet assured...

I wanted to transplant the themes of these books, and their eerie atmospheres, into a 21st century story set in London, about a successful cosmetic surgeon – Doctor Forrest – who goes missing in strange circumstances. He has two dear old friends, Doctors Lochran and Hartford. They had suspected Forrest was already in a bad way and now fear something dreadful has happened to him. But as they attempt to investigate his disappearance for themselves they are drawn into a world of menace and threat, where they discover that their friend was not the man they thought.

A good gothic story should unnerve us by dint of its darkness. But there's also something in the dark that can be enveloping, and alluring. So I hope this novel will give you a fright – but that you find pleasure in it too.

Richard T Kelly

Other books by Richard T Kelly include the novel *Crusaders* (2008) and the biographies *Alan Clarke* (1998) and *Sean Penn: His Life and Times* (2004).

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Tales of the Unexpected: classic books that influenced *The Possessions of Doctor Forrest*

Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley (1817)

A visionary young doctor fashions a man from grave-robbled body parts and brings it to life, only to reject his grisly creation and so incite it to seek his destruction.

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson (1886)

The mystery of one doctor's divided nature and inner demon is a classic, hailed by Vladimir Nabokov as 'a fable that lies nearer to poetry than to ordinary prose fiction'.

Dracula by Bram Stoker (1897)

The story of how a bloodsucking foreign fiend invaded England so as to prey upon her womenfolk.

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde (1897)

Wilde's super-aesthetic, homoerotic variation on *Faust* sees a beautiful young man trade his soul for ageless beauty, such that years of debauchery leave their marks not on his face but on his portrait.

Doctor Faustus by Thomas Mann (1948)

Mann's great fable explores the life of composer Adrian Leverkühn through the eyes of his best friend, who comes to learn the terrible price paid for genius.

The Castle in the Forest by Norman Mailer (2007)

Mailer's epic imagination fires this narrative of Hitler's boyhood, recounted by an SS officer who is in truth an emissary of Satan.



Reel Terrors: films that inspired *The Possessions of Doctor Forrest*

Orphée/Orpheus (France, dir. Jean Cocteau, 1950)

Cocteau's low-budget retelling of the Orpheus myth in post-war France is one of cinema's great poetic works, graced by María Casares as the black-clad 'Princess'.

Night of the Demon (UK, dir. Jacques Tourneur, 1957)

Based on MR James' story *Castling the Runes*: a tough-minded psychiatrist tries to expose a leading Satanist, only to find the powers of darkness ranged against him.

Les Yeux Sans Visage/Eyes Without a Face (France, dir. Georges Franju, 1959)

The disfigured daughter of a surgeon is forced to live behind a mask and suffers her father's demented efforts to rebuild her face, in this lyrical masterpiece.

Lilith (US, dir. Robert Rossen, 1964)

Warren Beatty works at a secluded asylum where he develops forbidden feelings for lovely inmate Jean Seberg, who has all the dark allure of her mythological namesake.

The Exorcist (US, dir. William Friedkin, 1973)

Cinema's most powerful vision of the diabolical: a fight for the soul of a little girl, with two troubled priests pitted against a foul demon who possesses her body.

Deadringers (US, dir. David Cronenberg, 1988)

Cronenberg is a master of movies that explore our fears of identity, surgery and bodily alteration. *Deadringers*, in which Jeremy Irons plays twin gynaecologists, is his masterpiece.