

Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for “A Dark-Adapted Eye” by Barbara Vine
October 19, 2024

1. What is a dark-adapted eye in terms of biology? How does that concept relate to the title and story?
2. Ruth Rendell was known for writing a detective series and other relatively traditional mysteries in which a murder occurs at the beginning and the murderers identity is revealed towards the end. Rendell chose the pen name Barbara Vine to write a different style of mystery, which some consider “softer” or focused more on psychological drama. How effective is a (and this) mystery that begins with knowing who the murderer is vs a more traditional structure?
3. What is the meaning of the main character names? Do the names’ meanings represent their owner properly in terms of the story? (I.e. Vera, Vranni, Edith/Eden, Faith, Helen, Andrew, Jamie). How about various surnames (Chateriss, Hillyard, Langley, Severn, Pearmain)?
4. Is Faith Severn a reliable narrator?
5. Why do you think Barbara Vine chose to create such a confusing and labyrinthine family history? By the end of the book, did you feel like you understood the family structure better?
6. What is the impact of social classes on the book?
7. How did setting the story during and around World War II affect the events of the novel? If the novel had been set when it was released, in the mid-1980s, would the story have unraveled differently?
8. Did you find it odd that the writer, Daniel Stewart, decided to abandon the book project after finding out the family secret?
9. Who is Jamie’s mother and why do you think so? Does the author ever reveal the truth to the reader absolutely?

Interesting Blog Posts:

<https://www.criminalelement.com/the-edgar-awards-revisited-a-dark-adapted-eye-by-barbara-vine-best-novel-1987/>

<https://crimereads.com/queer-texas-barbara-vine/>

A community-produced family tree (not quite complete!):

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/83422.A Dark Adapted Eye/questions](https://www.goodreads.com/book/83422.A%20Dark%20Adapted%20Eye/questions)