

A River Runs Through It

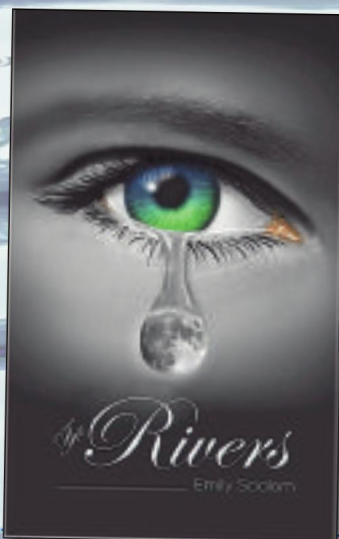


To mark the launch of her second novel, *The Rivers*, Cambridge author Emily Scialom reflects on the waterways both real and metaphorical which run through the story

The *Rivers* is primarily a love story, based between Cambridge and London, about a couple called Elizabeth Dalston and John Cross. The pair scale the dizzying heights of true love in the modern day, with all of its complications and concerns. There are discussions about terrorism as well as inter-personal friction, as increasing numbers of characters are introduced to the narrative: interspersed between the development of the central love story are snippets of poetry and descriptions of various broken and troubled lives. A plethora of individual problems and cultural issues are discussed, from pansexuality to gender in education.

For those of you curious to see descriptions of the town and gown sides of the city, there are colourful descriptions of the Mill Road communities as well as academic life. From cycle rides taking on the shape of the Tour De France ("a tournament of debatable importance between people who would surely not meet again") to shopkeepers smoking shisha in foyers, the familiarity of the city's depiction is almost palpable. The conclusion is that the people of Cambridge are, in general, "always ready to tute!" One of the key features of the novel is the connection to the rivers of the central cities involved: the Cam and the Thames. Scenes are often depicted involving the river Cam, in particular, as a meeting place or site of contemplation. I'm sure many of us can relate?

As one passage of the novel states: "The next morning, John sat in the shade of



The Rivers is out now, published by Austin Macauley. Priced £7.99, it's available at Heffers on Cambridge's Trinity Street. Emily is also the author of *The Religion of Self Enlightenment*. Visit emilyscialom.com for more.

the willow trees and waited for her. He used the blue eyes he had to watch the sunlight as it shone on the surface of the river." Thus, a typical Cambridge scene is depicted. Many are the lovers strewn along the riverside in the city throughout the summer waiting for their other halves. The conclusion the main male character, John, comes to while watching the Cam is: "There was so much to admire. The world was not unlike a dream." Many people have felt this way while

admiring the Harry Potter-esque scenery of Cambridge city centre. One can easily bump into a foreign student standing in awe on King's Parade. It can be the case, as John experiences in Paradise Nature Reserve, Newnham, that "a beautiful sense of wonder was created in his soul".

Therefore, the Cam can be the destination for personal pilgrimages as well as collective gatherings. "For some reason, the river was often his only companion," it states regarding John, and many of us can relate to the sense of oneness with nature as we admire the Cam's soothing currents. Going beyond the casual observer, John "had studied, he had investigated... the explicitness of its colours and shapes". This even involved painting the river, which one can see many budding artists trying to do on occasion along the Cam. The river Thames, meanwhile, assumes a prominent role in the opening chapters as well. Described as "historical and truly artful", the river "carried the infinities of all the dreams of literary icons and slaves through the evening's light". Its "dark and peaceful currents ran through the centre of London like a crooked spine". Again, the vastness of the Thames' expanse and its impact on the observer seem close enough to touch. However, the title of the book is also a metaphorical one. There are rivers of emotions and experiences which run through and between us. Therefore, *The Rivers* as a novel represents both the tangible and intangible worlds.

The conclusion to the novel states: "You've got a funny old mind
You think that all life's born to shine
It's such a beautiful thought
From a beautiful mind"

Who could disagree with that? It seems like a conclusion one would make whilst staring wistfully at the river Cam with a glorious sunset overhead.

The Rivers will soon feature in The Los Angeles Times Festival of Books in October and The London Book Fair 2021. I am thankful to have been able to capture some of the wonder I feel about the Cam, the Thames and their respective communities. The beauty of these rivers is something which deserves to be portrayed in literature and, indeed, all the arts.

