

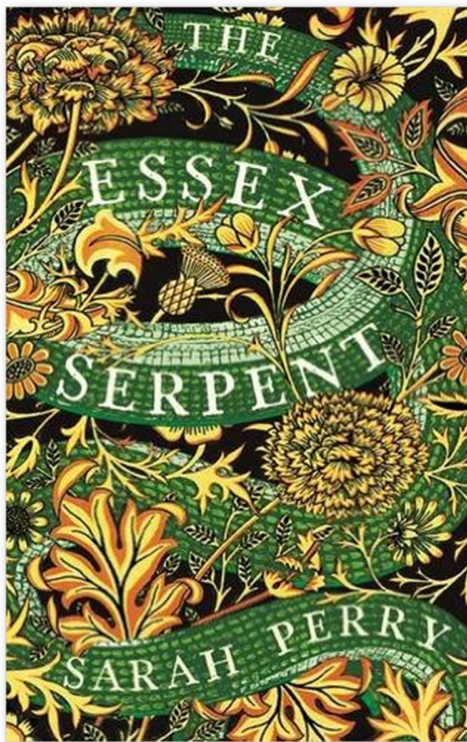


Helping you choose  
your next book

## LoveReading Reader reviews of **The Essex Serpent** by Sarah Perry



Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



### Vikki Patis

*What can I say about 'The Essex Serpent'? **From page 1, I was entranced, swept up and hauled back into late Victorian England** - which, as anyone knows, is one of my favourite historical periods. Don't get me wrong - I don't romanticise the era. But it was a fascinating time, with so many scientific discoveries and debates, and I can imagine people shouting, 'oh, what a time to be alive!', and it meaning something. But also, you know, cholera.*

*Anyway, 'The Essex Serpent' is a fantastic piece of literature. It oozes intelligence and wit, managing to fully capture the essence of living in the Victorian era, without falling back too harshly on stereotypes.*

*The host of characters are rich and full of life - Cora Seaborne, a fitting surname if there ever was one, buries her abusive husband with a secret smile and heads to Essex and the coast, to dig up fossils and broaden her mind. William Ransome, vicar to a small village, who, ironically, is blind to what he doesn't understand. His wife, Stella, the perfect picture of the Victorian wife, consumed with consumption. Even the supporting characters are enticing - Luke 'The Imp' Garrett, the brilliant yet misunderstood doctor; Martha, suffragist and campaigner for workers' rights; Francis, Cora's oddball son.*

*The narrative is probing yet gentle, knowing yet unconscious. It delves deep into*

*the minds, allowing the reader to explore more than even the characters know, which is a particularly clever way to tell a story, and one I always thoroughly enjoy.*

*It's difficult not to compare 'The Essex Serpent' to 'The Crimson Petal' and 'The White' by Michel Faber, the latter being my all-time favourite book, and the former not far behind. In short, 'The Essex Serpent' is a beautiful work of historical fiction, and to be likened to a work such as 'The Crimson Petal' is high praise indeed, in my humble opinion.*

*'The Essex Serpent' is **a complete work of genius. It's the kind of story every would-be writer aspires to write.** It's rich and full of beauty, raw and gorgeous. The story goes so deep and entwines so many themes and characters, it stretches across many miles and many months, and yet, it still ended too soon. 'Look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair!' indeed. **Perry should bask in the glow of this triumph.***

<https://dracarya.wordpress.com/2016/05/05/the-essex-serpent-by-sarah-perry/>

## **Ann Peet**

***Enthralling, evocative, thought-provoking....and a very good read.***

*Look out for this on the lists for book prizes this year! It is a wonderfully atmospheric, intriguing novel set in the 1890s. The core of the story is about two people with very different beliefs being attracted to each other but other types of love are also explored. There are big themes too - religion and superstition against new scientific knowledge, poverty and the need for housing reform, advances in medicine.*

*Cora, newly widowed, escapes from London society to Essex where rumours about a mythical serpent coming to life are terrifying people. She is an amateur naturalist, interested in fossils, and has no patience with superstition. Will, the local vicar, also tries to fight superstition but by bringing people to religion and true faith. Other characters are fascinating too - Martha, Cora's companion, with socialist views and concerned about poverty and equality; Luke, the clever surgeon in love with Cora; Luke's rich friend; Cora's withdrawn son; Will's beautiful, ethereal wife. The author doesn't tell you what to think about these characters. The reader gets to know them through their actions and interactions and sometimes through their letters.*

*Sarah Perry is excellent at creating atmosphere. You always feel as though you are in Victorian times and the eeriness of the misty coastal marshes is so well*

done. It is a clever, intelligent novel full of ideas that make you think, yet also with a good plot and memorable characters.

### **Joan Sidwell**

*Cora Seaborne, recently widowed, moves from London to Essex and meets The Reverend William (Will) Ransome, Vicar of the parish of Aldwinter. Both are aware of the tale of the mythical creature, The Essex Serpent, said to live in the marshes. As rumours abound through the village of the return of 'The Essex Serpent' Cora and Will's families and friends become entwined in their search for the truth. Cora is an unusual heroine for her time, courageous and strong and, whilst opposing Will's belief, their relationship develops as they are affected and haunted by the impact and consequences the story has on them and their loved ones.*

*Told over a period of almost a year, moving between Essex and London, the narrative occasionally punctuated with letters, it has echoes of H G Wells' 'War of the Worlds' with its supernatural late Victorian setting and is also reminiscent of similar Gothic novels of that period. The style of writing and descriptive narrative has a very real Victorian feel to it and the bleak Essex landscape is a moody atmospheric contrast with the dark narrow streets of London.*

***At its heart a love story of two completely different characters, I could admire the exceptional research and attention to detail in the writing and just maybe it needs to be read again (and again?) to appreciate and absorb it fully.***

### **Joy Finlayson**

***It is anachronistic – a novel of a previous era, voiced so confidently by an author of our time. It is a novel to really indulge yourself in this summer and beyond.***

*Cora Seaborne has moved to Aldwinter, an Essex parish, upon the burial of her husband. Rumours are rife that the Essex Serpent, a marsh-dwelling creature first seen in the 17th Century, has returned, leaving Cora intrigued. When residents disappear and spiral into madness, there is panic, much to the dismay of the local vicar who chooses faith over what looks increasingly like fact. His beliefs come into conflict with Cora at every moment, but, they grow increasingly close, knowing it must surely end in heartbreak.*

*The synopsis of 'The Essex Serpent' could mislead you into believing that this is a story motivated by plot, whilst it is, in fact, most captivating because of its characterisation. To see the development of relationships, especially between Cora and Will, the vicar, as well as the issues of the time, including the development of medicine and the gradual secularisation of Britain, plotted throughout, 'The Essex Serpent' is assured, gripping from the very first page and with a conclusion that will match any Victorian mystery.*

*This is a Victorian-era novel reminiscent of Wilkie Collins, with the gothic intrigue of Henry James. It is so absolutely certain of its place in time, filled with the images that automatically link us to the era, such as the wife with consumption, without seeming to stereotype. It is anachronistic – a novel of a previous era, voiced so confidently by an author of our time. It is a novel to really indulge yourself in this summer and beyond.*

[www.joyisabella.com](http://www.joyisabella.com)

## **Glenda Worth**

*The Essex Serpent is a mythical creature supposedly seen or heard by many but not come to light. An Essex village holds the key with its unusual residents and its links to London via Cora and Will.*

*'The Essex Serpent' is set in Victorian London and an Essex village where the serpent supposedly resides. The story is based around two people, Cora, a naturalist and Will a village vicar who fall for each other.*

*The rumours that the serpent has re-emerged sends Cora down to the village from London where she has just lost her husband. He was cruel and abusive so she was loving the freedom his death brought her. Bring in Will a local vicar who has a sickly wife and no love life and they are drawn to each other.*

*Will sees his parishioners fear of the serpent as a deviation from true faith while Cora is fascinated by the creature. They agree upon absolutely nothing but are drawn together again and again.*

*Bring into the mix a surgeon, a child with autism or the like and various other colourful characters and there is **a novel of love, heartache, and fear told in such a way it draws you in willing the story to unfold but not wanting the book to end.***

## **Tanera Simons**

***A beautifully written historical novel, Perry draws on her extensive knowledge of the Victorian era to present a richly intricate novel that debates the themes of religion and science.***

*Perry's novel draws us into the life of Cora: a recent widow who is relieved to be free from her mentally and physically abusive husband. Cora is fascinated by the concept of evolution and travels to Essex in the hopes of discovering the infamous 'Essex Serpent'.*

*Alongside her son Frankie and their housemaid Martha, Cora is soon introduced to Will Ransome: village clergyman of Aldwinter. Will proves himself worthy of Cora's scientific challenges and the two form an unusual bond. This relationship that does not go unnoticed by Cora's deceased husband's surgeon, Ed Burton: a groundbreaking surgeon, who is deeply in love with Cora.*

*I found this to be a fascinating novel and a hugely rewarding read. Through the characters of Ed and Will we see a wider debate form: that of science versus religion. Both men are continually vying to be declared superior by Cora, and this reflects the struggling development of science within a society that was reluctant to its controversial ideas.*

*I found myself transported to another era, and became caught up in the emotionally charged storylines. The characters are so vividly described they almost feel real – I felt myself transported back in time to the Essex moors and the London streets. This is a beautifully written and well-researched novel, and I can't wait to go back and read Sarah Perry's first book!*

## **Victoria Whish**

***A sumptuous, wildly addictive book that's evocative and richly written. It's about love, place, belief and scientific discovery all realised in a seasonal structure that frames the story perfectly.***

*This book is such a gorgeous beast of a book! It cleverly mimics the great Victorian novels but has a contemporary voice that's unique.*

*It's primarily about Cora Seaborne, who is an unhappily married wife and mother but is passionate about the natural world and the new discoveries that seem to be happening all around her in Victorian London. Although she is very much a true portrayal of her time and class, she is also recognisable to us from a contemporary perspective as she is torn between duty and freedom, progress*

*and belief etc. This is thrown into even sharper relief when she and her son, Francis move to the Essex village of Aldwinter following the death of her husband. Here she meets Will Ransome, the local vicar and his family and becomes caught up with the mystery of the mythical Essex serpent that seems to have made a reappearance at this place and time.*

*Sarah Perry cleverly gets you questioning; What is real? Who do we believe? Who can we trust? etc.*

*Aside from the will they/won't they nature of Cora and Will's burgeoning relationship, the cast of supporting characters are really interesting too, from; 'damaged' surgeon, Luke to Martha, Cora's class agitating maid and companion.*

*I also loved the way the novel was framed by the passing of the year and the changing of the seasons. Although this book's going to be released in the summer, I predict that aside from the sun loungers, it will be equally at home with a glass of something red around a roaring log fire.*

You can follow Victoria on twitter: @VicKWhish

### **Edel Waugh**

*The story begins with the death of Michael Seaborne, he leaves behind his son Francis and wife Cora. Cora is an unusual woman who is a keen naturalist which is unusual for the times she is living in. After the passing of her husband she leaves London and moves to Essex. Before her husband died, his doctor, Luke "The Imp " Garrett carried out house calls to them, then, after Michaels death a friendship develops between the two, and for one of them it has more meaning and so they keep in contact after her move through letters .*

*I thought Cora was a great lead character, she went against tradition of that time to do as she pleased rather than what society expected of her. She had unconventional interests and friendships and lived her life to the full and was liked even more because of the honesty of it. She was true to herself and it was impossible not to admire that about her. **I recommend this to anyone who likes a rebellious female lead character.***

### **Angie Rhodes**

*In the Essex countryside something is stirring, roaming in the marshes, something that can eat a human...Cora Seaborne a well-to-do widow is a rather*

*modern woman for the 1890s and is soon happily falling in love with Will the local vicar.*

*The village is afraid of venturing out at night but Cora, who is a keen amateur naturalist is thrilled that she might find a new species.*

*Full of colourful characters, the little village of Aldwinter will have you laughing and smiling at their antics and their thoughts on what the Essex Serpent could be.*

***It's a wonderful book. One that lovers of Dickens and Gothic Victorian novels will love!***

### **Marjorie Lacy**

***Sarah Perry is a wonderful writer, lyrical and poetic but able to make you feel you were there on the Essex marshes with her. Her description of the wet sea mists had me turning up the heating as my bones chilled! And the trees with their grasping branches waiting to catch the unwary. Scary stuff!***

*All the characters were well described, minor ones as well as the major ones. My favourite being Stella, the 'blue lady' she was so ill, and totally unaware of it. Living in her own world of blue treasures. The other broken person was Francis I felt sorry for him, he didn't relate to his mum Cora or, she to him.*

*Cora, the heroine of the book, a London society lady but happier in the marshes, wearing a man's coat and boots. Her Ladies Companion/housekeeper Martha, was another very strong female, in the time when ladies were not supposed to be.*

*In the cast of male characters, William Ransome was in the lead. He was a different kind of country vicar to what we have become used to - even to being a naughty vicar in some respects.*

*None of the characters could be described as normal, each had their own peculiarities. There was a lot of description of Stella's illness and her doctor's reaction to it.*

*Sarah Perry is to be congratulated in writing a book where the ending cannot even be guessed at.*

## Vanessa Wild

***An atmospheric, absorbing and quirky read, full of fascinating characters.***

*What a fabulously quirky and unusual book! Set in the Victorian era when scientific discoveries were being made and debates abounded, amateur naturalist Cora Seaborne, also a widow, moves to Aldwinter in Essex to further her studies. It is in the midst of village gossip about an enormous serpent which has supposedly returned to haunt the eerie Blackwater marshes. Cora meets the local vicar, William Ransome, and together they form a strange bond whilst trying to prove or disprove the mythical beast theory. This is mostly their story.*

*'The Essex Serpent' is impressive, entrancing and atmospheric, full of fascinating, interesting and well-drawn characters. I particularly love Cora, she has quite a sense of humour. It is very much a character driven tale. It is **beautifully written and extremely evocative of the era.** The descriptions are so vivid that I almost felt I was there! The story deals with a variety of themes from science to religion to politics and to love in all its guises.*

*An engaging, captivating and absorbing read, which I enjoyed tremendously. I can highly recommend it, especially to historical fiction fans. This is the first book I have read by Sarah Perry and it won't be the last.*

*Many thanks to Lovereading.co.uk for giving me the opportunity to read and review 'The Essex Serpent', which will be published on 2 June 2016.*

You can follow Vanessa on Twitter: @Butterflybiblio

## Nicola Kingswell

*An entwining character ensemble told against an evolving Victorian backdrop*

*The novel opens with the newly-widowed Cora Seaborne, struggling to find her place in the world. Cora's marriage was a difficult one so she struggles to mourn. Her husband's doctor, the strange but brilliant, Luke Garrett is in love with her. As is her faithful companion Martha. Cora is a keen amateur naturalist, with a love of fossils and geology. Cora, Martha, and Cora's son Francis leave London for Colchester to escape the bleakness of London. This allows Cora to abandon her widows-weeds and indulge in her passion for nature. At the suggestion of a family friend, the group relocate to the parish of Aldwinter which is being haunted by the rumour of the Essex Serpent, a sea creature that comes on land to claim the lives of the villagers. Cora dreams of uncovering the Essex Serpent to be a new scientific discovery, and propel her*



into the science texts. Here she meets the vicar, Will Ransome, and his beautiful wife Stella. Will and Cora develop a strong and sparing friendship based on admiration, challenge and respect. There are many elements to this story but essentially each character is trying to find their purpose in the world; Cora with a scientific discovery, Will with his parishioners, Martha with a housing revolution, Luke with medical advancements, while many strands of what it means to love and be loved are weaved throughout. **Beautifully written, intelligent and interesting, this is an unusual but wonderfully enveloping story.**

### **Evelyn Love-Gajardo**

*This is a very long and satisfying novel full of strange goings-on and interesting characters. The use of language is wonderful and it really seems like a Victorian novel. It beautifully captures the spirit of the age when scientific discovery was just starting to take hold, but it is also a love story and you really care about the two characters at its heart.*

***I would highly recommend this beautifully written novel - I haven't enjoyed a book so much in ages!***

### **Helen Lowry**

*Recently widowed, Cora Seaborne, takes the freedom granted by widowhood to seek out life in Essex and makes friends with the Reverend William Ransome. Both are aware of the Essex Serpent, a mythical creature living in the marshes, many have claimed to see the creature, but recently it has allegedly made a return to Essex.*

*Cora and Will are drawn to each other and their developing relationship draws notice from others known to them. Their shared belief in nature and avoiding superstition, Cora by science and Will by faith, leads to further depths of their developing friendship.*

*Cora and Will are the well-written leading characters, but also there is Martha, Cora's companion, another lady who knows her own mind. Then there is Francis, Cora's son, who is increasingly in a world of his own. Then there is the doctor, Luke, very much in love with Cora, on the quiet.*

*I liked Cora in that, for her time, she was very much her own person. Her unhappy marriage, her liking for men's boots, no frilly frocks for her! I loved the way the book took us through the changing of the seasons, in time with the*

*changing friendships of the characters.*

***Very well-written and enjoyable as a character driven, slightly Gothic novel!*** My thanks to Lovereading for the chance to read this delightful book.

### **Barbara Goldie**

***A great read, clever plot, good storytelling!***

*'The Essex Serpent' by Sarah Perry is such a well written novel I was sorry when the story ended. It brings 1890's to life with its scientific discoveries and debates. Cora was my favourite character, an amateur naturalist and William a local vicar are perfectly matched for the story and so well drawn, they stand together and alone so well. The language is easy, in my opinion poetic and the dialogue easy and readable. The descriptions are picturesque and vivid and there are lots of threads and themes throughout the story. The Essex Serpent is a marsh dwelling creature that has returned and local people have gone missing, it is a clever plot. I found the ending very satisfactory for the book and the cover was stunning. This is the first book I have read by Sarah Perry but hope it will not be the last.*

### **Catherine Price**

***If you haven't read 'The Essex Serpent' you have a treat ahead. This is a novel which beautifully crosses over between a historical setting and modern sensibilities, carried along by a cracking plot.***

*Victorian Essex and London are brought to life in the intertwining stories of Cora, a recent widow with an unpleasant past, and Will, the vicar of a small coastal village near Colchester where reports of a sea serpent are causing unrest verging on panic among the parishioners. Their complex stories come together in a love story that isn't a love story, and a mystery that has no crime, but mixes ancient and modern sensibilities in a fluid narrative.*

*The descriptions of Victorian people are vivid and fresh, the author has clearly researched the period extensively. Darwinism, socialism, scientific advances and the beginnings of female emancipation are all brought into play - without overwhelming the characters and their development. It is somehow tremendously enlightening to read about a world where the protagonists think, speak, suffer, love, joke and eat in ways that are so similar to the way as we do today - perhaps the Victorians were not so far removed from us as we have been*

*led to believe.*

*The setting is perfectly evoked, and as a Colchester resident I can vouch for the veracity of the descriptions of The George and the Red Lion hotels. This book is going to win prizes - and deservedly so.*

### **Nicola Underwood**

***This is a well written book which features many aspects of Victorian life. It is quite slow paced but has a quirky nature.***

*The blurb received for this book is intriguing and I didn't know what to expect from the story. Entitled 'The Essex Serpent' it seemed that it would be about a mystery serpent preying on the Essex residents, this wasn't the case. The book was mainly about a group of people from London and Aldwinter in Essex and their lives during the time of the Essex serpent. There isn't a great amount about the Essex serpent itself and the creature is only present in the fear of the creature. The story is well written but I didn't find that it grabbed my attention and it took a long time to get through it.*