



# Corpus

*Rory Clements*

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**Corpus** Rory Clements

**1936. Europe is in turmoil. The Nazis have marched into the Rhineland. In Russia, Stalin has unleashed his Great Terror. Spain has erupted in civil war.**

In Berlin, a young Englishwoman evades the Gestapo to deliver vital papers to a Jewish scientist. Within weeks, she is found dead, a silver syringe clutched in her fingers.

In an exclusive London club, a conspiracy is launched that threatens the very heart of government. When a renowned society couple with fascist leanings are found brutally murdered, a maverick Cambridge professor is drawn into a world of espionage he knows only from history books. The deeper Thomas Wilde delves, the more he finds to link the murders with the girl with the silver syringe - and even more worryingly to the scandal surrounding the Abdication . . .

## Corpus Details

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Author : Rory Clements

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# From Reader Review Corpus for online ebook

## Judy Lesley says

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley and Bonnier Publishing Zaffre. Thank you.

For my first time reading a Rory Clements novel I really picked a doozie! I love to read a mystery novel set in a previous time period just to see how the author will present the day-to-day setting for me. This 1936 feels absolutely right. Sometimes I forget how many British citizens were sympathetic to the Hitler agenda and how that sympathy crossed all class lines. You would have thought that couldn't happen since the elite classes and the lower classes were so divided, and yet each group thought that what Hitler was offering would be best for their country. The atmosphere of espionage permeating all layers of British society is very well developed and this is one novel where you have to go all the way to the end to be really sure you know which side some of the characters are really on.

Two young British women go to Berlin for the Olympic Games and for some vacation time. One of them has a mission to perform which will have ramifications she could never have imagined. Cambridge University is filled with men who have secrets they don't want revealed and a plot develops to make sure that Edward VIII remains on the throne so his belief in the cause of the German Nazi party will result in an unshakeable ally for Hitler. Unfortunately for Edward, he is being pushed to make a choice between the throne of England and Wallace Simpson. Not only is she considered unsuitable because of her divorce, but she is also a Nazi sympathizer. How will events unfold behind the scenes to give us the results we know from history?

Yes, this is a work of fiction, but that doesn't stop the ideas of what went on behind the scenes during this turbulent time period from capturing my attention from first page to last. This story can be confusing at times because many of the characters are publicly following one line of political belief while privately working for another one. All of Europe was seething during this time, Russia, Spain, France, Germany, Britain - all with tangled political politics both in public and behind the scenes. I really liked the Thomas Wilde character. He's really quite a well rounded fellow; an American with an Irish mother, a Cambridge professor of history, birdwatcher, motorcycle enthusiast and interested in boxing. All of those interests ensure that Thomas can stick his nose into pretty much any investigation the author wants him to in future books in the series. I don't know that this will become a series, but there is certainly enough historical material available to allow for that. Now that I've seen what a great author of mysteries Clements is I'm going to have to check out one of those John Shakespeare novels I've seen for sale.

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## Wendy says

The fallout of war casts its long shadow on 1930's England. While fragile teacups clink innocently against their saucers in houses up and down the country, the elements of conspiracy are frighteningly close and its darkening divide has the potential to alter the course of history as we know it. Yes indeed, *Corpus* is dominated by misdirection and kept me on my toes throughout.

Upon receiving his neighbour's plea for help following the premature death of a friend, a pioneer for the truth endeavours to pick up the torch and light the way. That man is Thomas Wilde. Widow, American, and respected history professor at Cambridge. He hasn't been to war, doesn't side in political debates, avoids the 'traditions' of the college at all costs, and he's one of the few people whose morals remain intact. This

gentleman also believes that opinions should be formed based on evidence not assumption, and encourages that approach from his students. Although he will have a hard time applying his philosophy as his judgement is tested throughout this story.

Wilde is a truly brilliant character who is no wannabe hero just a determined, level headed problem solver when the need demands, which will come in particularly handy in the minefield of political riddles he's stumbled into. There he finds a trio of friends distanced over time and their prominent families, two of whom have been tainted by sudden deaths. After connecting a few erratic dots Wilde is directed into the path of a mysterious journalist whose talents allude to events more instrumental than getting a scoop for *The Times*.

Manipulated current affairs play a crucial role in just about everything and the meticulously engineered motives of prominent figures reach across the ocean to Russia, Spain, Germany, and more alarmingly right under our noses. In the midst of a royal scandal that was King Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Simpson further obstacles are hurled in Wilde's way. With the frustrating lack of co-operation and every confidence that corruption will triumph despite his best efforts, the plot becomes acutely cloak and dagger until people closest to him are in grave danger.

This is an immensely engrossing novel where the security of any country and the devastation that could ensue from certain orchestrated events is depicted with a terrifying realism; the sharks are circling and have no hesitation in picking off anyone who threatens their cause, regardless of where they sit in the food chain.

***Corpus* is a remarkable chronicle of the treacherous game of poisoned politics, teasing the moves from its players with considerable skill to result in a thoroughly exhilarating fusion of espionage, intrigue and murder.**

(I received an ARC of this title from the publisher and Emily Burns with my thanks, and this is my unbiased review.)

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## Emma says

OK so before I get to writing about the book, I have to compliment the author for giving his main character, the Cambridge Professor Thomas Wilde, the perfect speech to explain why I love history.

Here, he is berating two students for letting political ideology sway their thinking:

*'Argue with me!' Wilde insisted. 'Make me prove my points, demand evidence, get as near the truth as you can. Re-examine everything you have ever been told and make your own mind up on the evidence you can find. And if there is not enough evidence, then keep an open mind. Become a detective- because if you don't, you'll never become a historian.'*

Yes, yes, yes. Exactly right. This is what history teaches you. Work hard for your opinions, search, evaluate, criticise, look for more, ask who benefits, challenge every assumption. Do this every day. Not just what people are telling you, but WHY. Look beyond what you are given, seek what is being hidden.

In historical research, this is an exciting prospect. In real life, essential. People have often asked me what application studying history has in real life. It is this: critical evaluation. History is about people, human behaviour, and decision making. Studying history is about sources and argument and lies and truths and

informed guesswork. And I use it everyday.

As for the book, I really enjoyed it. It's my first experience with Rory Clements, who has chosen a much more modern period than usual: the 1930s. It's the perfect foil for political intrigue: Nazis, spies, Cambridge professors involved in Communist or Nazi plots, the abdication of the King, murder, drugs, Spanish gold... Clements has thrown it all in. The plot was well done, the writing good, but the winner for me was the lead, Thomas Wilde. He's intelligent and capable without being a superman. Plus, I was won over by that speech early on and thankfully never had to change my opinion of the man as the story sped along. I will certainly be around for his next adventure.

Thanks to Netgalley for the opportunity to choose this book, all opinions are my own.

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## **Frances says**

Set in England 1936 conspiracies are planned with meticulous detail, while groups of Nazi sympathisers are roaming the streets with their own agenda. Three young women are unexpectedly caught up in the plot; one has disappeared, and another found dead with a silver syringe still stuck in her arm with questions unanswered as to an overdose or murder. Historical facts are introduced throughout the book with heavy emphasis on the abdication of King Edward who desperately wishes to marry Wallis Simpson. While some top officials would be happy to have King Edward remain on the throne and marry, others were scheming to have him removed. There are numerous characters introduced, and a few were tricky to follow their importance, if any to the story. If chapters were trimmed, *Corpus* would easily be a more interesting book. Overall the book has potential and other readers gave a much higher rating.

\*\* Thank you to Publisher Bonnier Books Ltd, and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this book in exchange for my honest review. \*\*

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## **Cathy says**

Find all my book reviews, plus fascinating author interviews, exclusive guests posts and book extracts on my blog: <https://whatcathyreadnext.wordpress.com/>

There were a couple of things that struck me as I was reading *Corpus*. The first was that, by chance, I was reading the book at the same time of year as the majority of story is set, namely the first few days of December (albeit quite a few decades apart). The second was that there were numerous parallels between *Corpus* and the author's John Shakespeare series (of which I'm a huge fan).

The obvious one is that the specialist subject of the protagonist of *Corpus*, Professor Thomas (Tom) Wilde, is the Tudor spymasters Sir Francis Walsingham and Sir Robert Cecil, who feature in the John Shakespeare books. Incidentally, the author gives us a few hints about Tom Wilde's back story, including that there is a tragedy in his past which we will no doubt learn more about in future books.

Drawn into investigating a suspicious death, Wilde approaches detection with the eye of an historian. As he

tells his students: “Argue with me! [...] Make me prove my points, demand evidence, get as near the truth as you can. Re-examine everything you have ever been told and make your own mind up on the evidence you can find. And if there is not enough evidence, then keep an open mind. Become a detective – because if you don’t, you’ll never become a historian.”

As I read on, I started to see other links between the world of John Shakespeare and the world of Tom Wilde. For instance, the covert action, spying, intrigue and plots that infected Elizabethan times are mirrored in the turbulent politics of 1930s Britain. As in the Tudor period, there are ruthless zealots prepared to die for a cause, men of cunning practised in the art of duplicity, and unknowing dupes drawn into plots through greed, ‘fake news’ or misguided adherence to organisations much more extreme than they appear on the surface.

And you have a clash of two different belief systems – in this case Communism and Fascism – with the adherents of each out to destroy the other. Finally the abdication crisis of 1936 sees a monarch in peril, with different political factions anxious either to preserve the status quo or to advance the fortunes of another candidate more sympathetic to their views. Where you have the Duke of York (later George V) in the case of Edward VIII, you have Mary, Queen of Scots in the case of Elizabeth I. As Wilde, an American of Irish heritage, ruefully observes, “You English haven’t really moved on much from the Middle Ages, have you?”

The storyline unfolds with plenty of twists and turns. There are action-packed confrontations and dangerous situations for our hero to navigate, including answering that crucial question: who can I trust? *Corpus* is a compelling historical thriller with a storyline full of plots and intrigue that melds actual and imaginary events in a plausible way. I really enjoyed it and cannot wait to read the next book in the series, *Nucleus*. A third outing for Tom Wilde is promised as well...

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### **Stephen says**

enjoyed this novel based in the time of crisis of the monarchy of Edward VIII as its time of tension. the plot is several murders and a suicide and the subplots of this spy thriller in the period of growing tensions within europe with political dimension and the movements of the prime minister. this is a slightly different move for the author but doesn't disappoint

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### **K.S. Marsden says**

History professor Thomas Wilde is dragged in to help when his neighbour's best friend dies. The police aren't interested, but it soon leads to a bigger plot, with the dark world of espionage on the brink of a second world war.

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I'm torn with this one. It has all the makings of a good book. It is well-written and is a solid historical fiction. We follow Thomas as he uncovers the mystery of Nancy's death, and gets caught up with Nazi-sympathisers, Russians, and very real danger around every corner.

The truth is I was bored, and struggled to read for more than twenty minutes without losing concentration,

and I don't know why. It is slow-building drama, perhaps I found it a little too dawdling and quaint.

The characters are, for the most part, interesting.

Thomas Wilde is an American, and a History professor at Cambridge. He's focused on his students reaching their full potential, by questioning everything they come across. And he is determined not to let himself be swayed by any of the propaganda and the increasingly impassioned and volatile politics.

The emphasis on the nations being swept up in a fury of righteous politics rang particularly true for what is going on here and now. Distrust is breeding; and morals bent or completely broken, for the greater good.

The mystery of Nancy's death stays at the centre of the book, as the story branches out with other murders and subterfuges.

Sometimes I felt that certain aspects of the plot were entirely irrelevant - the German mistress and her blackmail, and the scenes with the King. Yes, I know they are loosely connected to the drive of the bad guys, but I felt these scenes were lumped in, awkward, and unnecessary. They definitely took some of the focus away from what Thomas Wilde was facing.

The only other negative was how disappointed I was with the character of Lydia. She's pretty much the only female character in the main cast, and it is her best friend that has died; it is her insistence that Thomas Wilde help her; she is pegged as creative and smart... but after the first few chapters she quickly becomes part of the background. She's the token love interest, and damsel in distress, and defers completely to Thomas and the other male characters.

Overall, I would recommend reading this and deciding for yourselves; and I would be interested in reading Clements other work.

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### **Kate~Bibliophile Book Club says**

I feel I need to start this review by admitting that I don't generally read historical fiction as a genre, it's just not something I have ever gotten into so when the opportunity arose to read and review *Corpus* as part of the blog tour, I threw caution to the wind and said why not!

*Corpus* is also a crime thriller though, albeit in an era that I wouldn't be used to reading about. I found it to be quite engaging as it flowed quite well. It was relevant to the time period and political events that were happening at the time too.

With all of the political intrigue and some gruesome murders in there, the reader is drawn into the story early on and, along with the characters, goes on quite the journey between the pages. I won't go into the details of the plot, but it did go in directions I wasn't expecting .

*Corpus* is quite rich in history and detail within the plot, so there are many threads to follow. The author has done a great job of weaving it together cohesively and the end result is a highly intriguing read.

If you are a lover of historical fiction, then *Corpus* is definitely a book to add to your list!

Recommended!

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## **Susan says**

Author Rory Clements is obviously best known for his John Shakespeare series and I will admit that, although I have meant to read those books for ages, I have not yet got around to doing so. However, when I discovered he had written a new novel, set in 1930's Cambridge, I was keen to finally give this author a try and I was very impressed. Simply from the writing style, you can tell this is no debut novel – the author is obviously very accomplished and the writing style flows well.

We begin in Berlin, August 1936. A young woman, called Nancy Hereward, is on a mission to deliver some false papers to a Jewish physicist. We then move to Cambridge – it is November 1936 and we meet our main character, the history professor, Tom Wilde. Tom lives next door to Lydia, who was friends with Nancy and also another woman named Margot. When Nancy is found dead, from a supposed drugs overdose, Tom finds himself offering Lydia support. Lydia does not believe that Nancy's death was an accident and the pair find themselves embroiled in much more than the murder investigation of one woman.

Rory Clements has recreated the period of the 1930's well. It was a time of political extremes and he captures that perfectly. There are academics urging young men to go and fight in the Spanish Civil War, while others openly support the Nazi party. Meanwhile, there is a little matter called the Abdication about to explode in the British press and a series of murders which seem to be linked to Nancy's death.

This novel has a convoluted plot, with endless conspiracies and possible suspects. Through it all, Tom Wilde is the ideal hero – he is involved, yet slightly distant; practical and yet his feelings for Lydia give him a reason to be involved. I would certainly be interested to read another novel with him as the central character and hope this will be the first of another series. I really must go and read his Shakespeare series, as I enjoyed this very much... I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

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## **Kate says**

Such a good book! Not that I'd expect anything else from a writer as fine as Rory Clements. An excellent mix of politics, crime and conspiracy, set during the abdication crisis of 1936.

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## **Gram says**

A decent spy thriller centred on a plot concerning the abdication of King Edward VIII who proposed to marry Wallis Simpson, an American divorcee. Edward and Wallis were admirers of Hitler and this story revolves around a Nazi plot to ensure Edward continues as king. As the bodies mount, a few red herrings in the form of an alleged Communist uprising in Britain and murders blamed on Commie assassins. Meanwhile people in Britain's high places move to cement their power and prevent the abdication plan engineered by British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin.



Into this convoluted mix steps our hero - Tom Wilde - a young-ish history professor at Cambridge University. I didn't like this character much. He's pretty far up himself, seeming to think he knows everything and treating almost every other character in the story as stupid or naive. Tom hates Nazis and Commies equally, although, as the plot thickens, he tends to give some of the Commies the benefit of the doubt, possibly realising they're not all paranoid murderers like Stalin. The action occurs within the space of 1 week, so the story becomes pretty hectic as a couple of English country houses are turned into scenes of bloody killings. Luckily for us, Tom is aided by a journalist named Eaton, who handily turns out to be a British secret service agent. Tom also has an old chum who works at the US Embassy in London - someone he can turn to for occasional info on British and Russian spies and high ranking Brits who are slightly to the right of Adolf Hitler. Tom is also a former amateur boxer and rides a cool British motorbike. There's a sub plot involving Spanish Government gold - much of which was smuggled out of the country during Spain's Civil War and ended up in France and the Soviet Union.

There's love interest for Tom in the shape of Lydia, a young English woman who publishes volumes of First World War poetry and I thought she was a character worth developing but she ends up just another damsel in distress. The author, Rory Clements, has obviously boned up on his history of Europe in the 1930's which helps beef up a pretty far-fetched plot. I also felt Clements, despite his best descriptive efforts, didn't really capture the atmosphere of Britain in the late 1930's but the factual historical parts of the story make up for that. It seems that "Corpus" is the first in a series and I'd welcome a 2nd book - in the hope that Rory Clements can make his hero less of a smug know-it-all.

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### **Andy says**

Blackshirt sympathisers & communists C1936 Blighty, all to a backdrop of Cambridge University & the Kings (Edward) looming marriage/abdication (or not) to an American divorcee, this is our setting & scenario.

A murder/suicide/death by misadventure sets us on our way.....

It was alright, nothing to write home about nor overtly bad either..... jus a straight middle of the road novel having read better stories from the period/genre by the likes of David Downing & Michael Russell whose main characters are far more colourful with the text diving far deeper into the myriad of the politics of the time. This book lacks any real punch as it talks about the right & the left of central politics without really going into any substance & it ends up just a bog standard crime mystery is all. You hear about Mosley's Blackshirts & the Communist party of the era but thats it..... no background, no historical events tied in, no real personalities & its all a little bland for the most part..... there's nobody too really root for or boo hiss for that matter. You probably learn more about the history of the events in the final wrapping up's which is done in a piecemeal & overtly simplistic fashion.....

Its not awful by any stretch but it is a bit of a plodder at times & for the reasons above I give it a 3 stars.

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### **Paromjit says**

This is a historical thriller set in 1936 as tumultuous political events take place in Europe prior to the second

world war. In Berlin, Nancy helps a Jewish physicist only for her to apparently die of an accidental drug overdose in Cambridge a few weeks later. Three high level establishment figures meet and trigger a set of events aimed at changing the political landscape of Britain. We have the constitutional crisis with a King who looks on the Nazis in a favourable light and is intent on marrying the American divorcee Mrs Wallis Simpson. The battles between left and right are fought intensely in Cambridge and within the colleges.

Lydia Morris is convinced that Nancy's death is not an accident and convinces history professor, Thomas Wilde, to look closer into the matter. Connections are seen in the gruesome murders of the Langleys which ostensibly seem to be committed by the forces of the left. Other murders take place and for Wilde it seems that there might be more to the events than the left being responsible. We encounter Spanish Gold, Nazis, conspiracies, White Russians, treachery, betrayal, double crosses and the Intelligence Agencies. Thomas and Lydia have to fight for their lives as danger comes to engulf them. Events culminate into a thrilling finale.

This is a well written and exciting novel that easily holds the attention of the reader. The plotting may not always convince but it does entertain. The character of Thomas Wilde is strong and sufficiently charismatic enough to build into a series. It captures and utilises well a period of history where Britain and its Royalty is not immune to what is happening on the continent and where there are foreign interests that desire to influence events. An enjoyable read. Many thanks to Bonnier Zaffre for an ARC.

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### **G.J. says**

This is the first Rory Clements novel I have read, though he is well known for writing historical novels around the Tudor period. I found some parts of the book exciting with detail and pace just about perfect, other parts were muddled and therefore a bit boring, a pity really. It had several threads, again some of these enhanced the plot with interesting characters but one or two seemed surplus to requirements. To sum up, this is a good book which I enjoyed reading, but if he writes a sequel to *Corpus* I am not so sure I would read it.

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### **Susan says**

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