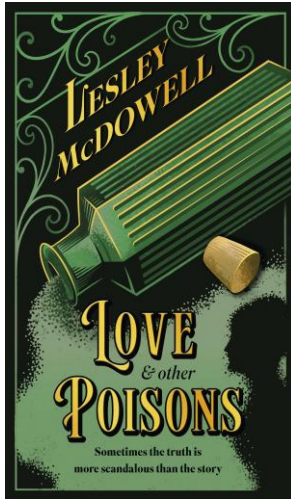


Book club questions **LOVE AND OTHER POISONS** by Lesley McDowell



1. 'Is she a Lucrezia Borgia, or is she only a boarding-school miss?' asked one newspaper after the trial that found Madeleine Smith 'not proven' of the murder of her lover. What do you think of that question? Do you think the news report sums her up quite well? Or is it a typical 'dual' depiction of women that says they must be either all good, or all evil?
2. What do you think attracted Madeleine to Emile? Why do you think she didn't run away from him the first time he threatened her in the alleyway? What do you think attracted Emile to Madeleine? Was it just about her money?
3. It's the novel's contention that Madeleine killed Emile out of fear for what he was going to do with her explicit letters. Do you think that is a strong enough reason? Do you think she killed him at all, or someone else did?
4. The novel suggests a particular way that Madeleine killed Emile. Do you think that is a possible way to kill a man? Did it convince you, or do you think that, if she killed him, she must have used another method?
5. Do you think the verdict of 'Nor Proven' was the correct one, and if not, why not?
6. What do you think of Madeleine's life after the trial? She married just four years later and went to live in London. Did you want to know more about her life amongst the Bloomsbury bohemian set? Why do you think she wasn't on the 1891 census? Where do you think she might have been?
7. Christina Haggart's blackmail threats to Madeleine later in life are an invention by the author. In truth, we don't know what happened to Christina after the trial. Why do you think that is? Do you think that a servant would have been judged more harshly if it was known she had been involved in the murder of Emile? Do you think a young Christina was afraid of being blamed at the time of the trial?
8. What do you think of Madeleine's younger sister, Janet? She was the only one who shared a bed with Madeleine. Do you think she knew more than she let on at the trial? And William Minnoch, Madeleine's fiance, lived next door to her on Blythwood Square. Do you think he couldn't have heard the rumours about her and Emile, before the night of the poisoning?
9. Who do you think the woman in New York is? Do you think it really is Madeleine, as her family always claimed? What things might make you think it's not her?
10. Do you think an explanatory Author's Note is helpful when a novel is about a true life case? Or do you think it spoils the mystery of the story?

11. Do you think Madeleine 'got away' with murder?