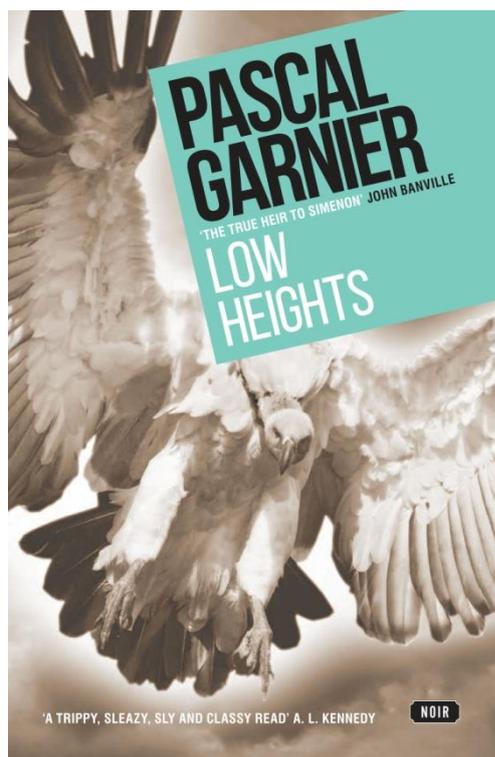


## Reading Group Guide to *Low Heights* by Pascal Garnier



**Vultures, clifftops, restless retirees, bizarre murder weapons and uncanny resemblances make for the ingredients of a classic Pascal Garnier noir.**

*At least vultures have the decency to wait until their prey's dead before picking it apart ...*

After losing his wife and suffering a stroke, cantankerous retiree Édouard Lavenant has moved from Lyon to a village in the mountains with his put-upon nurse, Thérèse. One day, a man comes to the door claiming to be Édouard's long-lost son. Édouard's temper seems to be softening, but it isn't long before the local vultures are circling overhead ...

### **Praise for Pascal Garnier**

'Garnier plunges you into a bizarre, overheated world, seething death, writing, fictions and philosophy. He's a trippy, sleazy, sly and classy read' A. L. Kennedy

'Horribly funny ... appalling and bracing in equal measure' John Banville

'A mixture of Albert Camus and JG Ballard' *Financial Times*

'Bleak, often funny and never predictable' *The Observer*

'A brilliant exercise in grim and gripping irony, it makes you grin as well as wince.' *Sunday Telegraph*

'Deliciously dark ... painfully funny' *New York Times*

'Guaranteed grisly' *ShortList*

### **About the author**

Pascal Garnier, who died in March 2010, was an award-winning novelist, short story writer, children's author and painter. From his home in the mountains of the Ardèche, he wrote fiction in a noir palette with a cast of characters drawn from ordinary provincial life.

### **Discussion points**

- In an interview with French magazine *Encres Vagabondes*, Garnier said, 'It's when life trips you up that fate can totter in another direction. Five minutes before jabbing a knife into his victim's back a criminal is still an innocent man. It's what causes fate to totter that interests me.' What causes fate to totter in *Low Heights*? To what extent are the characters doomed to their fate?
- 'Garnier's characters tend to isolate themselves from the present in ways or places that seem to protect them but are ultimately fatal.' How is this observation by writer John Taylor for *The Arts Fuse* true of *Low Heights*?
- To what extent is Pascal Garnier an existentialist or philosophical writer?
- To what extent is Garnier's writing a critique of bourgeois life?

- Why do you think Garnier is drawn to writing about older people, as he does too in *Moon in a Dead Eye*, for example?
- Garnier has been described as displaying 'gallows humour'. Did you find the book funny?
- 'The style of my writing, as it has been described – concise, with a liking for certain set phrases – is not something I chose,' said Pascal Garnier in an interview with *Encres Vagabondes*. Garnier came to writing relatively late in life, having begun by writing songs because, he said, he couldn't spell and he could write them using conversational language. He went on to write short stories, using the present tense to avoid problems with conjugating verbs. What is the effect of Garnier's pared-back style of writing?