



-News-

We are very excited about the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival that begins in a couple of weeks. We are having a work "outing" and going to the opening evening where we will hear Lionel Shriver, Colm Toibin, William Dalrymple, Emily Perkins and Thomas Keneally. Can't wait! Lots of new books are arriving in and one which is causing a bit of a stir is the new young adult novel 'Beautiful Malice' by Rebecca James. The Saturday Herald has a quote "Stephanie Meyer without the vampires". Should be interesting. We have put the photo of us with author Patrick Ness on the website. It's nice to hobnob with the rich and famous! The shop has now been open for three years and we have had a very busy and successful summer. So thank you to all our loyal customers – it's been a steep learning curve and but we've enjoyed every minute.

-Book Reviews-

***So Much For That* by Lionel Shriver** – Lionel Shriver will be speaking at the AKL Writers and Readers Festival in May and I can't wait to hear her. She is probably most famous for her book "We Need To Talk About Kevin" which was an amazing read, and I thought this new novel was equally as good. This is the story of Shep Knacker who has been saving for his "after-life". This after-life consists of living in a third world country where his money will go further and he can live in relative simplicity. On the day he decides to leave for the island of Pemba, with or without his wife Glynis, she announces that she has a very rare form of cancer. Because Shep has always prided himself on doing the right thing, he stays and looks after his wife, but in the process, despite having health insurance, steadily loses his "after-life" nest egg as he pays for her expensive and ultimately futile treatments. With this book I had to take my time and read every word (which I don't always do). I think it is a brilliant novel that asks the uncomfortable question: how much money is one life worth?

***blue eyed boy* by Joanne Harris** – 'Once there was a widow with three sons, and their names were Black, Brown and Blue. Black was the eldest; moody and aggressive. Brown was the middle child; timid and dull. But Blue was his mother's favourite. And he was a murderer.' Crikey – this book is very different to *Chocolat*! It is the story of 42 year-old BB who is still living at home with his mother. He likes to spend most of his time online where he runs a website called badguysrock. On this site he posts fictional stories where he kills people who have angered or maligned him in the past. At least, we think they're fictional ... As he stalks Albertine online, we learn about his troubled past and his relationship with his mother and brothers. Frankly, the family is less than savoury! Despite the nasty characters, I was drawn in and loved the twists and turns – an excellent thriller.

***Solar* by Ian McEwan** –Controversy always seems to rage over a new Ian McEwan in the bookclub I belong to: the subjects he tackles seem disturbing to some. "Solar" will probably be no exception, since it has global warming as a theme. But I highly recommend this novel as a wickedly funny character study of an awful, unforgettable man. Michael Beard is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, cruising through life on the basis of past glories. Hopelessly self-pitying when his infidelity wrecks his fifth marriage, arrogant but feeble in his ridiculous confrontations with his wife's lovers, cynical and self-serving in all his dealings, he is a wonderful creation, flawed and very human. I chortled and laughed throughout, and am not surprised to see it has been shortlisted for the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize For Comic Fiction. A real treat! (Sylvia)

***Serena* by Ron Rash** – I hadn't heard of Ron Rash before, but was attracted by the fact that his book had won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and decided it was worth a punt. I was well rewarded – he is an excellent storyteller.

“Serena” is set in the North Carolina mountains, in 1925, where there is a fortune to be made from the harvesting of the mature forest. The tension and pace of the tale are set from the opening page: Pemberton, who with two partners, operates the Boston Lumber Company, arrives back in camp with Serena, his wife of two days. She is a fascinating character- an unusual and driven woman, as obsessed by money and timber as is Pemberton himself, and intent on founding a powerful dynasty. But more than that, she is ruthless, and made dangerous by anything that thwarts her purpose. An edge-of-the-seat read! (Sylvia)

The Elegance Of The Hedgehog by Muriel Barbery – I had heard so much about this book, and a customer lent me her copy to read. What a beautiful story about two very distinctive characters. The first is Renee, the concierge of an apartment building in Paris. She is outwardly the epitome of every Parisian concierge – short, unattractive and stocky, with a temper and an addiction to television soaps. This is a cover however, as she is an autodidact who is superior in many ways to the snobbish and wealthy tenants. The other main character is precocious twelve year-old Paloma who lives on the 5th floor. She has come to the conclusion that life is not what it’s cracked up to be, and is planning to end her life on her thirteenth birthday. In the meantime, she is pretending to be the perfect average daughter and hiding her intellect behind a façade of pop subculture. Renee and Paloma discover each others true nature when a new tenant moves in and creates waves. This moving novel celebrates the quiet and self-effacing and is what I call “a keeper”. I am in the process of opening an account with an American distributor so we can access this fabulous book.

How long can this mild weather continue? I am sure we will pay the price with a grim winter – but that wouldn’t be too bad because that’s the best time to read!

Tracey, Sharleen and Sylvia

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