

Book Club choice for February, 2018. ~ Rosanne Hawke's 'The Messenger Bird'.

Virginia Woolf once said that every secret of a writer's soul is written large in their works. I wonder how much of this particular author's soul is revealed in 'The Messenger Bird'?

Often, when listening to favourite recorded music or watching favourite films on DVD, I have wished that I could enlist the assistance of a hypnotist, to enable me to listen to the music or watch the films as if *for the very first time*; that is without the years of enjoyment and appreciation they have given me since that *very first* occasion. How *would* I feel, listening and watching today, as if I'd *never encountered them before*? Would I immediately take them to heart or did my appreciation grow over time? It would be a fascinating exercise... and a lot of fun.

Well, I *really* would have liked to have engaged a hypnotist prior to reading this month's book club choice, simply in order to remove from my head the familiarity of
(A) the local depicted knowledge of our region.
(B) the fact that I have read the story before and
(C) that the author is not only known to me, but is in fact, someone I'd like to think of as a friend.

Without a hypnotist however, it will be quite difficult to separate myself from the above factors and to offer an un-biased and neutral critique... *but I shall try*.

The clever and simple technique of alternating Tamar's first person chapters with Gavin's makes for easy reading; and also later, when Glanville Park of the 1880's is added. It makes for good navigation, good signposting; and you *all* know how I approve of and appreciate good signposting in a book!

From early on in the novel it is necessary for the reader to suspend disbelief and accept the fact that Tamar can see, talk to *and* touch a long dead bloke called Nathaniel. We have to say to ourselves, if she can believe in his presence, then so must we.

Time travelling brings inherent difficulties and on p.94 this is touched on very well I thought, when Tamar considers that if she tells Nathaniel too much about the present time, she might, as she puts it, muck things up by telling him something he shouldn't know yet. Their topic, at this point is fertiliser and, if you recall much later in the story when she is informed about the older Nathaniel, that he actually did research the topic of fertiliser at Roseworthy and "had a lot to do with it being accepted around here and yields went up dramatically."

I also liked the juxtaposition of the Nathaniel / Emily plot line with the Tamar / Trystan and the Trystan / Traci revelations. Added to that was the brief story of Jack O'Reilly and his wife.

Then there is Phillip. I found all the characters credibly drawn, but I especially liked Phillip.

Nathaniel expressed his 'faith' at the bottom of p.213, when he said, "Perhaps God doesn't interfere as much as we think. He offers the gift of life but never forces us to take it. Perhaps we need *never* to understand why *anything* happens. We only have to trust." That brought to mind an old saying of my Godmother's, from when I was a small boy; If you worry you do not trust; if you trust you do not worry.

Later, near the end of the book, Nathaniel is standing in the creek with Tamar and he slowly fades into thin air. That passage was so 'crystal clear' visual; and really, that's the big plus with any good novel, that it should paint very clear images in your head as you read.

There was the cathartic breakfast scene with Tamar and her Mum and Dad and the revelations from old Mrs Schultz, who turned out to be Nathaniel Trevena's granddaughter.

The plot lines were excellently woven indeed.

The doctor's guidelines for handling grief ought to be mandatory reading for all people suffering from this burden. Each of the main characters felt burdened, didn't they and each had to come to terms with the millstone-like pressure it germinated and fertilised.

To me the two core elements of this book are

(a) Love; the three classical Greek kinds, namely family love, friendship love and the physical variety and

(b) Time; both the spanning of the 19th and 21st. centuries plus the time needed to heal hurt, both physical hurt and mental hurt.

The time taken for the cat's broken leg to mend was a simple but splendid allegory. The leg eventually healed and became useful again, if a trifle misshapen. One can only assume that the author's introduction of the cat's broken leg was purposeful.

Time and Love.

When I completed this book I was reminded of a line from Henry Morton Robinson's novel 'The Cardinal', which says;

"Love makes time Pass; Time makes Love pass."

This month's book club choice was enchanting with a capital E.

The characters, the local settings, the construction, the plot lines and the interweaving of all of these threads made for a most rewarding and touching yarn.

However...

However, I would have dearly loved to have employed the services of a hypnotist, because I was forever aware of viewing this particular novel through—not so much rose coloured glasses, but with Rosanne coloured glasses!

Mind you, I don't think for a single moment, that my critique and my appreciation would have been diminished in any way whatsoever,

but still, the hypnotic experience could have proved a hell of a lot of fun!

F.D. 27/01/2018.