

The Khandallah Literary Review

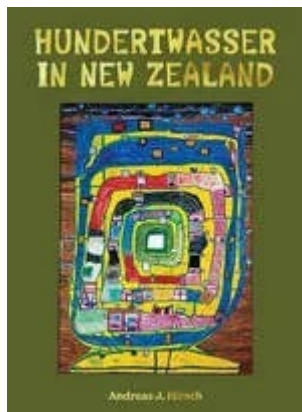


Welcome to the December edition of our monthly newsletter.

We'll review books, and some music, which appeal to us. Contributions also come from select library members and staff (basically, anyone who tells us about a Book, Movie or CD they like)

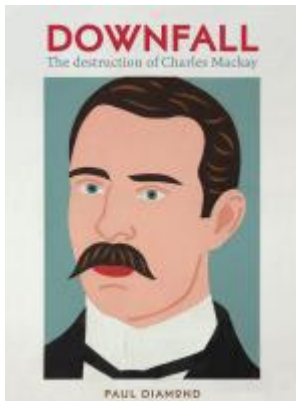
“A Room Without Books is Like a Body Without A Soul” (Cicero)

Hundertwasser in New Zealand by Andreas J. Hirsch (Non-Fiction)



This is the inspiring story of Friedensreich Hundertwasser, the Austrian born Architect, Artist, Conservationist and Humanist from his 1973 arrival in New Zealand. This amazing man was also a writer, a designer of Stamps, Medals, Clothing, Shoes and Flags, most notably the Koru Flag in 1983. The author, a lifelong friend and curator of his work, writes lyrically of his achievements here and overseas. Hundertwasser's exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1973 was a huge success, with the catalogue, a work of art in its own right, selling thousands of copies. The splendour of the public toilets at Kawakawa is highlighted, and Hirsch delves into Hundertwasser's philosophies to examine his preference for a 'birds eye view' perspective, the metaphor of 'Five Skins' and the significance of water in his works. There are stunning colour reproductions of his art and designs, especially his preserve at Kaurini where he planted 150,000 trees and started to experiment with the idea of a grass roof. He did not live to see his dream of the Hundertwasser Art Centre and Wairau Māori Art Gallery in Whangārei come to fruition as he died on the water aboard the QE2 in 2000. The name Wairau is the translation of 'one hundred waters' in Te Reo Māori, the same meaning as 'Hundertwasser' in German. This is a beautiful and uplifting book, fully worthy of its inspiring and creative subject. Greg

Downfall by Paul Diamond (NZ Social History (Non-Fiction))



The residents of genteel, prosperous 1920's Whanganui, still excited by the recent visit of the Prince of Wales, were shocked when their Mayor, Charles Mackay, was accused (and convicted) of the attempted murder of a 24-year-old poet Darcy Cresswell.

Author/Historian Paul Diamond (Ngāti Hauā, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi) is Curator Māori at the Alexander Turnbull Library and he has spent years researching the story which has been called “Whanganui’s dark secret.” Despite the author’s extensive research not all aspects of the Mackay/Cresswell case were solved (was Mackay the victim of a plot by local businessmen to remove him? Was it the RSA?) and tantalising questions remain unanswered.

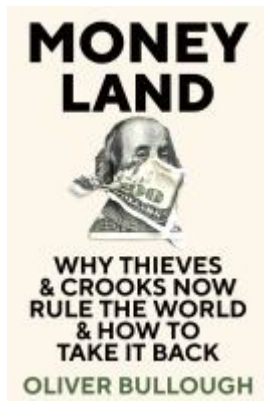
This book is more than the story of attempted blackmail and murder, a trial and a scandal which still has echoes today in Whanganui. It is also a riveting social history about small town politics and the homophobia which made the existence of gay men vulnerable to threat. It is also the biography of a man who, despite a very public “downfall”, managed to find meaning and purpose in his incarceration and after his release successfully reinvented himself in England and Berlin. It’s a fascinating story and I hope someone turns it into a movie. David

Our Wives under the Sea by Julia Armfield (Fiction)



This is the story of Miri and Leah, a couple whose marriage is collapsing after Leah's return from a deep-sea research mission. Exactly what happened on the voyage unfolds slowly over the course of the novel, but in the meantime, Miri is confronted with the unsettling after-effects. Leah barely talks or eats, spends hours in the bath, and starts to experience bizarre physical changes. I enjoyed the subtle, slow burn horror, the sense that something is very wrong but no clear notion of what it might be. The small number of settings and characters gives it a claustrophobic feel, both above and below the waves. That said, I'm not a fan of first-person narration in general, and here it's used for both main characters. It makes them feel less distinct from each other than they could've been, particularly as their narrative voices are not markedly different. I still liked the novel though, and if you're in the mood for something sinister and sad it's worth checking out. Charlotte

Money Land: Why Thieves & Crooks now Rule the World & How to Take It Back by Oliver Bullough



This is a fascinating and very entertaining look at how the mega-rich create and conceal their wealth, and the countries that enable them. The book throws a spotlight on the methods and practices used, but it's light on how to actually take back the world from them. Moneyland is a concept used to describe a virtual place where the very wealthy cherry-pick the laws and regulations that benefit them the most. Bullough also delves deep in to the physical locations that facilitate greed, the Jersey Isles, the Cayman Islands, St Kitts and Nevis, London and New York. Published in 2018, the author uses Ukraine as one

of the examples of political leaders looting a nation, and the effect that has – *“Corruption, when it takes up 90% of the country, that’s not corruption, that is the State”*. Bullough captures the infuriating truth that many of the methods used are legal, if not ethical. Impressively detailed, he has elicited a wealth of information from some of the gate keepers of this murky world and presents it clearly and with great wit. Greg

Beneath a Scarlet Sky by Mark Sullivan (Reader’s Choice Fiction)



1943 - An Italian teenager wants nothing to do with the war effort or the Nazis, so joins an underground railroad helping Jews escape to Switzerland. Forced by his parents to enlist in the German Army he becomes the personal driver of a Nazi General. “Really very Good” Jules (Ngaio)

Recipe for a Perfect Wife by Karma Brown (Fiction)



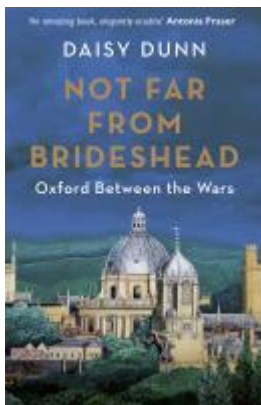
A vintage cookbook from a 1950s housewife fascinates a would-be writer. An intriguing story of two women living 60 years apart and the similar struggles they face. “I enjoyed this book. Very Funny”. Vanessa (Khandallah)

Harbouring by Jenny Pattrick (NZ Fiction)



This is the bestselling author's 10th novel and the first to be set in her hometown of Wellington. Many of the books written about colonial New Zealand have been focused on the prominent people of the time, the Wakefields, Spain and Shortland, but as Pattrick notes in a foreword – 'This novel attempts to imagine the lives of those at the bottom of the heap at that time – both Māori and Pakeha'. She succeeds admirably. The story is told with three voices, Huw Pengellin, his wife Martha and Māori woman Hineroa, and brought to life with their different viewpoints and tribulations. Through their lowly station Pattrick is able to encapsulate the realities of life in the slums of Wales and in colonial New Zealand. Huw is a factory worker, Martha a housewife struggling to raise a feed a family on a pittance, Hineroa is recently enslaved after her tribe is defeated. How they come together and form relationships is a moving story beautifully told. Fully realised characters are interwoven seamlessly with historical figures and real events and Pattricks' use of the Māori language is exemplary. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Greg

Not Far From Brideshead: Oxford Between the Wars by Daisy Dunn (Non-Fiction)

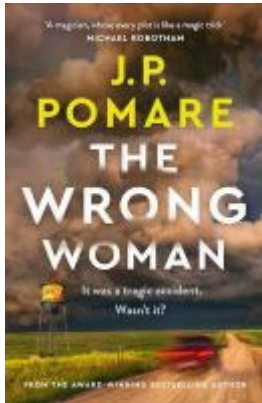


This book is about life at Oxford University in the 20s and 30s, a time of colourful people and a society undergoing significant change. It's well-written and everything it covers is interesting - the problem is, it tries to cover too much. It's supposedly centred on three influential classicists, but frequently detours to talk about other, more famous people, as well as subjects like contemporary politics, women in academia, occultism after WWI, modern literature, the appropriation of classical myth by the Nazis, Jewish professors fleeing persecution, and so on. Any of these subjects could've taken up a whole book on their own, and the effect of having all of them in one, rather short volume is to feel like you're not getting enough material about any of them. I really wanted to learn more about the classicists, since I hadn't heard of them before, and their rivalry over the prestigious Regius Professor of Greek appointment was entertaining. Overall, a lively introduction to the era but without enough depth to do it justice. Charlotte

Author Event Planned

Another Wellington writer, and Khandallah library customer, is Navina Michal Clemerson whose book “There Was a Garden in Nuremberg”, a moving family saga, has just been published and copies are available at the library. In the new year we plan to host an event where Navina will talk about the book and the personal story behind it.

The Wrong Woman by J P Pomare (Fiction)



Disgraced cop returning to his hometown as a private investigator and running afoul of his former colleagues is familiar territory, but the kiwi author manages to invest this story with a fresh approach and an evolving plot. Reid is back in town to investigate a fatal car crash, offered enough money by the insurance company to overcome his misgivings. The story starts the year before with Eshana, the sole survivor of the crash, narrating life with her philandering husband. Chapters alternate between Reid conducting his investigation, and Eshana and her husband’s progression to the point of impact. I liked the way the two viewpoints added depth to the story and the ‘reveals’. Add in the disappearance of 2 local girls, a possible romance with a hunky waiter and the hostility Reid encounters and you have an intelligent thriller with surprising twists which actually make sense. This is the first I’ve read of Pomare’s five books but it won’t be the last. Greg

Peninsula by Sharon Came (Fiction)



Sharon Came serves up a slice of true rural New Zealand in her captivating debut novel Peninsula. Every sentence is full of small details layered upon layer that reveal more about the family and characters at the heart of the book and make the stoic characters almost appear in front of the reader. At first glance it appears to be a homage to a way of life in Northland that’s stayed the same for many decades, affected only by the changing seasons. Stoic Jim and Di Carlton have been running their farm forever and will be there until they die. Then the stories of new characters are interwoven – there’s their former daughter-in-law Kiri who moved back to Northland for family and seems trapped there. And her tree-loving school friend Ritchie who’s moved to Brisbane to run an ecology consultancy and has returned to connect with friends. Then small changes start to creep in like the new subdivisions encroaching on the edges of the village and farm bringing urban life closer to their rural idyll.

The plot and the pace meanders so roll with it and enjoy the slow unfurling of the characters. I haven't read a book that captures the people, conversations and lives of rural New Zealanders as well as this. It transported me right back to the interactions and experiences I had when I lived in rural Canterbury. Peninsula is a beautifully written book that will stay with you. Fiona (Khandallah)

Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus (Fiction)



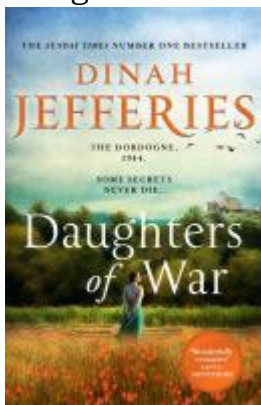
1960's California – A much put-upon female scientist ends up becoming the host of a TV cooking show. “Best book I’ve read this year. It’s Funny, It’s Sad, it’s got everything”. Barbara (Khandallah)

The Axeman's Carnival by Catherine Chidgey



Tama the Magpie can talk, and his fame is growing. Rescued by Marnie he learns of her violent marriage. The worlds of bird and human are coming together. ‘Thought it a bit weird at first, but really enjoyed it. Funny and sad at the same time. It brings in social media. Tama the Magpie has his own Twitter account so check that out online. Hilarious!’ Marie, (Khandallah)

Daughters of War by Dinah Jefferies (Fiction)



This sweeping historical novel, a story of sisters, secrets and bravery in war-torn France, is the first in a planned trilogy (The second book in the series, The Hidden Palace, is on order and available to reserve). “This is such a good book from a great author. I couldn't put it down! “. Carole (Karori)

Diana's Wedding (DVD Norwegian)



On the same day as Charles and Diana's wedding there is another in Norway. Present is their new-born daughter, also Diana. This is marriage as viewed by that baby as she grows up. "A funny take on ordinary life compared to the Royals in the 60s and 70s. Quirky and very funny, Hilarious in places".
Brenda, (Khandallah)

New Books by Old Favourites

Michael Connelly	Desert Star
Stephen King	Fairy Tales
Kate Atkinson	Shrines of Gaiety
Barbara Kingsolver	Demon Copperhead
Fredrik Backman	The Winners: A Novel
Felix Francis	Hands Down
Nicci French	The Favor
Elly Griffiths	Bleeding Heart Yard
Robert Harris	Acts of Oblivion
John Irving	The Last Chairlift
Witi Ihimaera	Pounamu, Pounamu
Cormac McCarthy	The Passenger
Ian McEwan	Lessons
Ian Rankin	A Heart full of Headstones

Years Best Aotearoa New Zealand Science Fiction and Fantasy vol. 4

May you find some wonderful books over the Christmas period, and the time to read them!

From all of us at Khandallah, Cummings Park and Karori Libraries.