

What we've been reading

At MultiLit, we are not only interested in teaching reading but we are also avid readers ourselves. In this regular feature, we ask members of the editorial team what they've been reading recently and to share their thoughts with our readers.



Sarah Arakelian

I had previously enjoyed reading, on recommendation from a friend, *The Philosopher and the Wolf* by Mark Rowlands and, in similar vein, I have recently read *What the Dog Knows* by Cat Warren. While both books deal with the harder aspects of life, both are lovely accounts of our relationships with our furry friends. I have also very much enjoyed *The Christmas Mystery*, written by Jostein Gaarder and translated by Elizabeth Rokkan and, more for laughs than inspiration, *100,000 Baby Names* by Bruce Lansky.

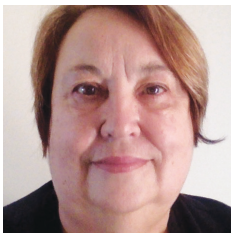
As a team, we have also been following Timothy Shanahan in many of his recent posts on his blog, *Shanahan on Literacy*.



Alison Madelaine

My recent reading has included *Into the Water* by Paula Hawkins, *The Chalk Man* by C.J. Tudor, *Stella and Margie* by Glenna Thomsom, *The Woman in the Window* by A.J. Finn, *The Lesser Bohemians* by Eimear McBride, and *The Monkey's Mask* by Dorothy Porter.

While I am not normally a big reader of biographies, I did read *Unbreakable* by Jelena Dokic. This was very good, although some of the content was difficult to read. Two books I did not enjoy and therefore did not finish were *4321* by Paul Auster and *That Deadman Dance* by Kim Scott. On a more positive note, I have been reading the Geronimo Stilton series to my six-year-old son. These are quite fun and he enjoys all of the made-up words like 'fabumouse'.



Meree Reynolds

My current bedtime reading is *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles, historical fiction set in the period from the 1920s to the 1950s. I am enjoying this uplifting story that revolves around a remarkably resilient aristocrat who is held under house arrest in a hotel throughout years of great change in Russia.

Other books that I have read recently are *The Yellow House*, a debut Australian novel by Emily O'Grady and *The Woman in the Window*, a thriller by A.J. Finn. I found both books very compelling with many twists and turns in the plots that kept me up turning the pages late at night.



Kevin Wheldall

In his latest offering in a series of 'diet' books, Dr Michael Moseley offers us *The Clever Guts Diet*, as an easy to read summary of current thinking on the role of the gut in our lives. We are repeatedly told that there are as many neurones in our gut as in the brain of a cat (which might explain the peculiar growls and yowls sometimes emanating from my abdomen) and that the gut regulates appetite, the immune system and, not least, mood. All very well until you get to the ghastly recipes appended when it becomes clear that this approach is clearly intended for those who do not really like food.

My abiding interest in the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts and Crafts movement has been fed by two books of late: William Gaunt's classic text *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* (in a beautiful Folio Books edition) and a new novel by the celebrated Australian author, Kate Forsyth, *Beauty in Thorns*. It is always dangerous to find out too much about one's heroes and my uneasiness about Dante Gabriel Rossetti has now become a suspicious dislike. My fondness for William Morris, however, warts and all, remains intact.

I have also re-read Agatha Christie's *And Then There None*, again in a handsome Folio edition (no, they don't pay me). Almost



unbelievably, to modern ears, it was originally published in the UK in 1939 as *Ten Little Niggers* and later as *Ten Little Indians* (i.e. native Americans or First Peoples), hardly an improvement. Regarded as Christie's masterpiece, it has not stood the test of time. Crime fiction enthusiasts expect rather more depth of characterisation and social commentary these days.

Two short story collections, both published posthumously, *Sleep No More*, by P. D. James, and *A Spot of Folly*, by Ruth Rendell, serve to remind us of our great loss, not only to crime fiction but also to serious fiction period, following the deaths of these two grandes dames of the literary world in recent years.

I am enjoying biographies more these days and have recently read *Evelyn Waugh: A life revisited* by Phillip Eade. After reading this, any baby boomer claiming to be a wild child of the late '60s might have pause for thought as to whether their antics were really quite so, well, wild and certainly not so very new and different. Waugh himself comes across as a complex character, his biographer struggling bravely to convince us that he was not quite as obnoxious as is commonly believed. Reading this biography prompted me to read (re-read?) Waugh's famous novel, *Vile Bodies*. Suffice to say that Waugh seemed incapable of writing anything less than pitch perfect prose while at the same time treating the reader to a master class in humorous writing.



Robyn Wheldall

Having long had a fascination with the Pre-Raphaelites and also as a great admirer of the work of William Morris, I was excited to read the novel *Beauty in Thorns* by Australian author Kate Forsyth. The novel deals with the turbulent personal lives of the artists William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris, including the affair that influenced all of their lives. I loved this book. It was at times difficult to read in terms of the turmoil and agony suffered by the trio. But I was pleased that by the end of the book, I still liked and admired William Morris, who seems to have been a thoroughly nice man.

Other recent titles I've read include *News of the World: a novel* by Paulette Jiles. Essentially a western, it is a great and quirky read set in the post-Civil War period in Texas. The book details the unlikely relationship between a former military man – now curator and reader of the news of the world for local audiences at public readings – and a young white girl who had been 'rescued' from native Americans after living among them for several years. Her experiences with the Kiowa people shaped her in enduring ways. The book itself is a beautiful artefact; a small paperback that is a pleasure to hold and feel. Joanna Trollope's *An Unsuitable Match* entertained but fails to live up to her previous much-loved titles. Trollope has an acute sense of people and relationship dynamics and communicates them so well. This means that she is always an engaging read but this one left me a little disappointed.

The book I have just finished reading is the journalist James Jeffrey's autobiographical *My Family and Other Animus*. One of those books that I didn't want to end, it is a collection of recollections and reflections of his family life. Jeffrey tackles some pretty difficult stuff, including family breakdown, but does so in such a way that his love for his family – both of origin and of creation – is clear and enriching. Beautifully written, it is a book that made me laugh out loud but also made me cry.