

Clive's Book Reading Log

Updated 11th Apr 2010

TITLE: Patron Saint of Liars
AUTHOR: Ann Patchett
DATE: Apr 2010
PLOT: Three separate narrators take you into the lives of the inhabitants of a Catholic home for unwed mothers in the US. First Rose, then her second husband 'Son', and finally her daughter Cecilia. Secrets weave them together as characters slip out of your grasp.
COMMENT: Beautifully written, real human characters you care about and desperately want to see resolved in your hopeful, ideal world. A superb novel which held me the entire journey and moved me greatly. My best book of 2010 so far.

TITLE: The Road
AUTHOR: Cormac McCarthy
DATE: Mar 2010
PLOT: Post apocalyptic America, a bleak, grinding meditation on humanity and death. A man and a boy wandering a road through total desolation. You are not told who they are, why or where they are going, only surrounded by the feeling you are at the end of the world.
COMMENT: The absolute opposite of a suitable boy. An oddly written and unsatisfying read thankfully very short.

TITLE: A Suitable Boy
AUTHOR: Vikram Seth
DATE: Mar 2010
PLOT: An Indian family finding a suitable boy to marry their daughter Lata – however the story details the lives of four families in the period after Independence. It involves politics, business, culture, love, intrigue and every aspect of Indian life in Cities and villages.
COMMENT: A vast novel confirming Seth as an outstanding literary figure, his writing is poetic flowing and extremely descriptive sometimes in minute detail. As I am not a quick reader the novel at 1500 pages was too long. An education and literary milestone if you dare.

TITLE: Run
AUTHOR: Ann Patchett
DATE: Feb 2010
PLOT: It is Winter. Boston family ex Mayor with adopted black sons involved in car accident. Black woman saves life of a son, ends in hospital leaving athletic young daughter stranded.
COMMENT: Yet another unique and searching novel from this author who finds a different angle every time. However, my high expectations were not fulfilled. The story was not strong enough and slightly implausible – where was the grip of Bel Canto?

TITLE: Fludd
AUTHOR: Hilary Mantel
DATE: Feb 2010
PLOT: Set in strongly catholic North Country village of Featherhoughton, a new curate arrives to assist the incumbent priest but acts as a catalyst. Intrigue, scandal, relationships change to embroil the village in mystery – is he a saint or the devil?
COMMENT: A quaint little novel, well worth reading.

TITLE: Havan Bay
AUTHOR: Martin Cruz Smith
DATE: Jan 2010
PLOT: Fourth in the series about Moscow detective Arkady Renko this time in Cuba, sinister menace with lashings of blood and seedy locations.
COMMENT: Sort of thing to read on a plane when you've got nothing else to do. Not memorable but boys own stuff.

TITLE: Animal Dreams
AUTHOR: Barbara Kingsolver
DATE: Jan 2010
PLOT: Young woman returns home to south west US and traditional Spanish and Indian influences effecting the modern world. She searches for her roots and future via tragedy, love and frustration. There is a dream like quality which draws comparisons between human emotions and animal instincts.
COMMENT: Barbara Kingsolver weaves words with the ease and artistry, a moving and evocative read. Recommended

TITLE: An Experiment in Love
AUTHOR: Hilary Mantel
DATE: Dec 2009
PLOT: Lancashire girl rises out of elementary education through grammar to university. We are taken through the development from child to woman and adventures away from home.
COMMENT: Held by the story telling, a nice easy style with many observations which brought back childhood memories. Very much a description of the exploration of life we all go through, I liked this book even though it is very female orientated and was sorry it came to an end leaving the rest of Carmel's life yet to come.

TITLE: Cold Comfort Farm
AUTHOR: Stella Gibbons
DATE: Nov 2009
PLOT: A 1930's parody on many classic novels – society girl with little inheritance descends on remote farming kin in Sussex to find the most bizarre and hilarious characters living out a life of primitive hell which she sets about changing.

COMMENT: Should be compulsory reading for everyone who begins to take novels too seriously – a classic of its genre.

TITLE: Countdown to War
AUTHOR: Richard Overy
DATE: Nov 2009
PLOT: Factual account of the few weeks leading up to the invasion of Poland and outbreak of WWII
COMMENT: Clearly written, informative and interesting to read the major influences acting on all the major players and how close it might have come to being totally different in outcome.

TITLE: Remembering Babylon
AUTHOR: David Malouf
DATE: Nov 2009
PLOT: Australia mid 19th C, extreme limit of settlement in Queensland. A ragged figure appears out of the wilderness – the story is the reaction of the settlement to this arrival.
COMMENT: I quote – “It is like finding a spirit painting in a 19th C locket – full of wisdom and magic – the most delicate tracing of a profound and elliptical history.” - “The poetry of Malouf’s vision is needle sharp.” A wonderful and moving book.

TITLE: Notes from an Exhibition
AUTHOR: Patrick Gale
DATE: Nov 2009
PLOT: Description of present day family and characters around Rachel Kelly a disturbed artist who lived in Cornwall and has died.
COMMENT: This book failed to do anything but annoy. Unexpected leaps in time do not help to gel the too numerous and unengaging characters who appear. After page 100 I was still waiting for something to grab me sadly it had not happened by the end. Maybe I like books to be a little more than simply about relationships – I could not see why this book was written.

TITLE: Guernica
AUTHOR: Dave Boling
DATE: Oct 2009
PLOT: Leading up to bombing of Guernica, destruction of families, establishment of anti Franco movement and Basque nationalism. Network for escaping airmen during WWII
COMMENT: The prose was plodding, the characters were two dimensional and the plot predictable. A good understanding of why so much hatred caused by the treatment of the Basques by their own people. Not my favourite book.

TITLE: A Passage to India
AUTHOR: EM Forster
DATE: Oct 2009
PLOT: Set in pre war India, the arrival of a young English woman not prepared for the rarefied way of life in the colony leads to a disastrous breakdown of decades of the establishment culminating in a trial for rape.
COMMENT: An excellent story carefully built and beautifully written. The British Imperial might in all its arrogance completely cross grained with Indian culture. Undertones of the inevitability of independence. Superb.

TITLE: The Cellist of Sarajevo
AUTHOR: Steven Galloway
DATE: Sept 2009
PLOT: Sniper sets out to protect the cellist who has become an icon.
COMMENT: Gave up half way. Too much death and fear without any sympathy with the characters also predictably out of Day of Jackall mould but not so original or spell binding.

TITLE: Brideshead Revisited
AUTHOR: Auberon Waugh
DATE: Sept 2009
PLOT: Life and torment with wealthy Sebastian Flytte and his eccentric family between the wars. Characters torn by the power of Catholicism and family ties.
COMMENT: Beautifully set in end of era opulence but found hard going when read slowly.

TITLE: The White Tiger
AUTHOR: Aravind Adiga
DATE: Aug 2009
PLOT: The tongue in cheek journey of an Indian “boy” from poverty to owning his own business as an “entrepreneur” by way of rebelling against tradition and murdering his boss.
COMMENT: Entertaining read written as if he is writing letters of explanation to the President of China who is to visit India. Amusing and well worth reading.

TITLE: The Magician’s Assistant
AUTHOR: Ann Patchett
DATE: Aug 2009
PLOT: A Magician has died (present day.) His wife who was his assistant discovers he had kept secret a family living in Nebraska – for good reason. She meets them and a whole can of worms is opened in a touching discovery of each others lives and history.
COMMENT: Quirky, spellbinding, different and absorbing. An excellent novel written with dream like sequences. Recommended.

TITLE: The Luminous Life of Lilly Aphrodite

AUTHOR: Beatrice Colin
DATE: July 2009
PLOT: Adventurous life of Lilly from childhood in a German catholic orphanage to fame in Hollywood spanning two world wars. A very colourful and exciting journey.
COMMENT: A gripping yarn easily readable gives a shocking sense of Germany as the Great War progressed and the situation leading to the I/WW. I could not put the book down. Recommended.

TITLE: A Pale View of The Hills
AUTHOR: Kishuo Ishiguro
DATE: July 2009
PLOT: Japanese woman living in England with her daughter and memories of first daughter who committed suicide. She is haunted by her life in post bomb Nagasaki and an acquaintance who had fallen into poverty and seemed to not care for her own daughter.
COMMENT: For me nothing happened. An air of mystery hangs over the novel which uses the mundane of everyday life as a canvas for something which I must have missed.

TITLE: On The Other Hand
AUTHOR: Chris Cleave
DATE: July 2009
PLOT: An incident in Nigeria involving two locals and a "normal" UK couple lead to soul searching depths, illegal immigration, conflicts of interest and give glimpses of horror.
COMMENT: A lively writing style. Tragic, blackly comic, thought provoking and a really good read.

TITLE: My Cousin Rachel
AUTHOR: Daphne du Maurier
DATE: June 2009
PLOT: Who is the mysterious cousin from Italy, is she an enchanchtress, a scheming murderer or the victim of suspicion and fate?
COMMENT: A very finely crafted novel, keeps the reader guessing from the first sentence to the last. Outstanding.

TITLE: Fire in The Blood
AUTHOR: Irene Nemirovsky
DATE: June 2009
PLOT: Tale of village people in central France, their true feelings hidden for years are revealed to expose violence, adultery and secrets in a pastoral setting.
COMMENT: A tiny book, much acclaimed by many but did nothing for me.

TITLE: The 19th Wife
AUTHOR: David Ebberhoff
DATE: May 2009
PLOT: Story woven around present day murder and history of Church of Later Day Saints in USA and it's belief in polygamy.
COMMENT: A fascinating read and extraordinary history of the Mormon offshoot. Has an "academic" structure to the writing which is intriguing. Recommended.

TITLE: Night of the Iguana
AUTHOR: Tennessee Williams
DATE: April 2009
PLOT: The Play. Set in West coast Mexico 1940, a tour bus arrives at a jungle fringed hotel, the action revolves around the patron Maxine and her guests, Shannon the driver who is a hopeless drunken case, a pitiful couple clinging to past glories and the unseen forgotten tourists.
COMMENT: TW's surgical insight into the character of people and convincing observations, the play however does not have the power of Streetcar or Tin Roof.

TITLE: Revolutionary Road
AUTHOR: Richard Yates
DATE: Mar 2009
PLOT: "Nice" young family couple living in a "nice" NY suburb have their aspirations and dreams slowly torn apart by everyday life.
COMMENT: This is a masterpiece. An outstanding novel on every level, astonishing observation of people and their environment. Phrase and description to die for. Yates story hooks the reader from page one and stirs every emotion in this brilliant tragedy. Exceptional.

TITLE: The Reader
AUTHOR: Bernhard Schlink
DATE: Feb 2009
PLOT: Young man seduced by older woman, she disappears, he grows up, re-encounters her in dramatic situation, he is haunted by her and circumstances until the last page.
COMMENT: Superb story, beautifully written, gripping, haunting and provokingly questions the difference between right and wrong. Outstanding.

TITLE: A Mad World, My Masters

AUTHOR: John Simpson
DATE: Jan 2009
PLOT: His adventures around most of the danger spots in the world along with a BBC news crew. Told in lots of small bite sized yarns.
COMMENT: He writes well and entertains easily, comes across as an interesting grumpy old man, the bites sized yarns mean there is no overall thread – like life really.

TITLE: The Age of Wonder
AUTHOR: Richard Holmes
DATE: Dec 2008
PLOT: Life History of Banks, Herschel and Davy leading through their discoveries and enlightenment of science in 18/19th C
COMMENT: Heavy going, too much mundane family detail padding out the discoveries.

TITLE: The Book Thief
AUTHOR: Markus Zusak
DATE: Dec 2008
PLOT: Story told of a child and her family in German city from 1936 to 1944. Narrated by Death.
COMMENT: An interesting angle with the narrator and the Jewish situation, could have been less pages but good for quick readers.

TITLE: The Secret River
AUTHOR: Kate Grenville
DATE: Oct 2008 – In progress
PLOT: Life of earliest settlers in Sydney from condemned London convict. Hardships and struggle with blackfellas
COMMENT: If you didn't know the history it might appeal but been there done that many times before – nothing new.

TITLE: The Wave
AUTHOR: Morton Rhue
DATE: Sep 2008
PLOT: US teacher uses strict regime to demonstrate the power of Hitler's Nazi Party but it all goes wrong and runs out of control.
COMMENT: Weak writing and not believable although oddly it actually did happen.

TITLE: A Thousand Splendid Suns
AUTHOR: Khaled Hosseini
DATE: Sep 2008
PLOT: More a life story than a plot. How life was and is for a female in 21st C Afghanistan
COMMENT: Well written, well worth reading, shocking and thought provoking.

TITLE: Sweet Bird of Youth
AUTHOR: Tennessee Williams
DATE: Aug 2008
PLOT: The Play. Philanderer Chance Wayne and faded film star Del Lago cling to past success but time relentlessly brings them down.
COMMENT: Not as deep as his other plays, less stimulating.

TITLE: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
AUTHOR: Tennessee Williams
DATE: Aug 2008
PLOT: The Play. Set in 1950's Mississippi. Very rich cotton planter diagnosed ill, family circle around each other for the kill, almost every human virtue and sin, hope, greed, jealousy..
COMMENT: A master of the spoken word. Totally believable characters speaking as people speak in a superbly crafted family setting. The words are wonderful. Play runs in real time. Excellent and gripping.

TITLE: Eugene O'Neil
AUTHOR: Long Journey Into Night
DATE: Aug 2008
PLOT: The Play. Set in 1912 Upper East Coast US. Harrowing autobiographic description of addiction, illness and human failings between the protagonists.
COMMENT: – Hope hangs temptingly throughout but the inevitability of it all is tragic. Deep and well written

TITLE: The Crucible
AUTHOR: Arthur Miller
DATE: July 2008
PLOT: The Play. 17th C US Pilgrim settlers in witch hunt amongst themselves.
COMMENT: Brilliant description of early settlers life, horrifying story of belief in the Devil and its use to further political positions and settle old scores dependant on the word of children. A masterpiece.

TITLE: Not Quite the World's End
AUTHOR: John Simpson
DATE: May 2008
PLOT: Autobiography
COMMENT: Well worth reading, gives a good understanding of the "truth" behind Afghanistan and Iraq, well written.

TITLE: Crimes of the Heart
AUTHOR: Beth Henley
DATE: May 2008
PLOT: The Play. Three Mississippi sisters, , one shoots her husband. Mother had hung herself and the cat. Black humour.
COMMENT: Story seemed to end abruptly without resolution. Extremely detailed stage / props directions.

TITLE: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf
AUTHOR: Edward Albee
DATE: May 2008
PLOT: The Play. US University couple have new Biology teacher and wife back for drinks after a late night party. Family row builds to outright hatred and devastation.
COMMENT: Nothing to do with VW! Development of matrimonial row outstanding and use of "the son" secret strings you along all the way. Chilling study of mental cruelty.

TITLE: Any Human Heart
AUTHOR: William Boyd
DATE: May 2008
PLOT: The widely varied whole lifetime of 20th C Brit Logan Mountstuart, writer, spy, socialite, failure. Sent on fallguy mission to Switzerland in the war.
COMMENT: I struggled with the diary / journal format. At times boring, then really good. Glad I read it but hard work.

TITLE: Mr Pip
AUTHOR: Lloyd Jones
DATE: Apr 2008
PLOT: The only white man in land of black locals on Island in Pacific, story told by young girl of discovery and tragedy.
COMMENT: Excellent, highly recommended. Dickens Great Expectations cleverly woven through story, observant and very readable.

TITLE: Great Expectations
AUTHOR: Charles Dickens
DATE: Apr 2008
PLOT: A mysterious benefactor raises Pip from poverty and changes his life
COMMENT: A masterpiece without question. Get in tune with the language and it is easily readable. Touches every human emotion, unparalleled observation of the human character.

TITLE: Johnno
AUTHOR: David Malouf
DATE: Mar 2008
PLOT: Reminiscences of an Australian childhood to early adulthood
COMMENT: Absorbing, skilful observation of ones inner self, no unlikely drama - just life really but I wanted to read on and on. Even better if you've been to Brisbane.

TITLE: May Contain Nuts
AUTHOR: John O'Farrel
DATE: Feb 2008
PLOT: Neurotic mother takes 11plus exam in place of daughter.
COMMENT: Light reading, entertaining but story oddly moves from farce to moralising

TITLE: Imperium
AUTHOR: Robert Harris
DATE: Feb 2008
PLOT: Rise of Cicero in Roman Empire seen through eyes of slave.
COMMENT: Readable, interesting, informative, not as good as Pompeii, worth reading.