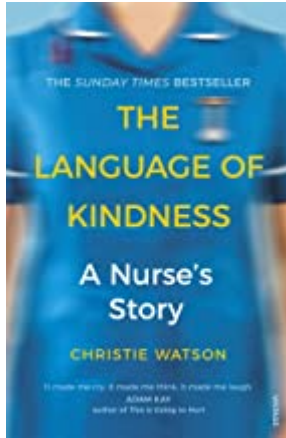


## Realm of Books reviews for May

**Christie Watson**

***The Language of Kindness***

**This is a book rather appropriate for the current times as it dwells on the NHS and nursing.**



### **William**

by Christie Watson

The book reflects the author's twenty years of personal experiences when nursing in the NHS. *The Language of Kindness* is a well-written story of nursing: the good, the terrible, and the day to day. It provides a remarkable insight into healthcare practices but also reflects how many of us view society. In some examples the anecdotes are harrowing: neglected children and elderly people, but many are uplifting, compassionate and caring and how being able to find the right words at the right time can be crucial. Most of the book left a lasting impression but *Chapter 8 'Small Things, with Great Love'* was particularly graphic especially the part that chronicled Charlotte's story (pp 236 - 241). The book also acknowledges the potential consequences generated by the pressures on nurses and doctors in today's society. Most worryingly the incidence of drug addiction and high risk of suicide. What I found surprising and despicable was the fact that some patients stole personal possessions from nursing staff. The author also reminds us that it is not only in hospital that we see people who are at risk. We walk past homeless teenagers. We cross the road to avoid men sleeping rough under a bridge. A junior colleague of the author is suffering violent physical and mental abuse at the hands of her partner but nobody interferes. I read excerpts from the book to my sister who was a ward sister in the 1950s and she didn't recognise or experience many of the issues chronicled in the book. When she was nursing there were no male nurses and only two female doctors (both assigned to the gynaecological arena) working in a very large city centre hospital. I also knew a lawyer who was frequently representing clients' interests and successfully suing the NHS for 'negligence'.....

The quote from Mahatma Gandhi is most apposite:

*'The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members'.*

### **Jean**

This book was not for me! It emphasises why I never wanted to be a nurse. Yes, it is well written, but came across to me, at times, as a nurse's manual. I found it dry in places and was disinclined to finish the novel. During my husband's six months in a local hospital, I found the male nurses kinder and gentler than the female nurses who could be hard and unkind. On the positive side, I liked the quotes at the commencement of each chapter. Also, I don't like novels written in the first person and the present tense! Apologies for sending in a negative review!

### **Chris**

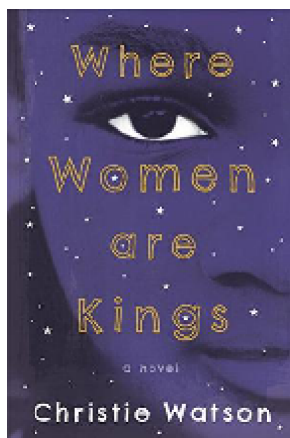
Although we chose this author last year *The Language of Kindness* was strangely a propos current times. This is a memoir of a nursing career over twenty years and expresses and promotes what we are all so grateful for when we meet illness and need help, kindness. Christie Watson describes in a very factual way experienced by a nurse the medical conditions and treatments, training and way of life for for a breadth of hospital staff and patients and takes us from childbirth and paediatrics to elders and geriatrics, life and death. She delves into the history of nursing, follows her career from terrified trainee to expert professional, through various wards and levels of expertise, explains gruesome medical conditions and outcomes factually but all the time caring deeply. The latter chapters are especially harrowing, describing the death of her father and the emotional toll for both family and nurse. I found the book touching, a little harrowing in parts, and her message of empathy and compassion a tribute to her undervalued profession.

### **Ann**

Sometimes if I think a suggested Book is likely to be challenging, an effort to read or make me feel miserable, I put off reading it! I approached this book with trepidation, hospitals, operations and suffering not cheery subjects for me. However, when I plucked up courage to tackle it, I read it quickly, finding it informative and revealing. If only I had the compassion and competence to help vulnerable people in this way 'with kindness'. It was a remarkable book, but I don't think I shall be reading it again.

### **Christie Watson**

*Where women are kings*



### **Margaret**

The story is beautifully told through the eyes of Elijah's birth mother, Deborah, Elijah himself and Nikki and Obi who adopt him. Nikki and Obi, upset that they were unable to have children of their own, adopted Elijah, a lovely but extremely troubled boy. We gradually learned that after Deborah's husband was killed she became unable to cope and this was made far worse by her consulting a religious leader who she thought she could trust. He told her that her son had a wizard inside him and that he could remove it but it would cost her. He continued extracting money from her and suggesting dreadful treatments for the boy. Eventually Elijah was taken into foster care and then adopted by Nikki and Obi who truly loved him and appeared to be getting on fine until Nikki found out that she was pregnant. The ending was devastating but also moving.

### **Sharon**

#### **Christie Watson**

##### ***Tiny Sunbirds Far Away***

This is told in the voice of Blessing, aged 12 - beautiful and very convincing. Blessing, her mother and brother had to leave their luxurious life in Lagos when her father left the family for another woman. Their only option was to return to her maternal grandparents in a very rural area in the Niger Delta, which life Blessing initially found primitive and very difficult. The book addresses many issues (the role of big business and oil in oppressing the local people, poverty, gender politics, patriarchy, racism, female genital mutilation). Above all, it is about family relationships, the small family's love for each other and Blessing's growing love for her grandparents and their way of life in spite of the difficulties. Her brother, Ezekial's story is no less strong and really well developed. There is tragedy but also laughs along the way. I wondered how a British nurse could have researched the way of life so deeply but it turns out that Christie Watson's partner is Nigerian so I wonder if she has experienced some of it first-hand. It was a book I wanted to get back to and, for a change, had a satisfactory ending. I would definitely recommend it.

### **Stephanie**

#### **Also somewhat appropriate for the current times as it is about 24 years of lockdown!**

**'A gentleman in Moscow' By AMOR TOWLES** a very sensitive and touching story about a former aristocrat in Moscow who is sentenced to house arrest indefinitely by the Bolsheviks. He has to move from his rather luxurious suite in a large hotel to a small attic room in the same hotel. The tale follows his life over the next 24 years or so as he adapts splendidly to his, what is essentially, a very long term lockdown. He is a true gentleman with an amazingly positive outlook on life. He forms some wonderful friendships and essentially, although unofficially, a guardianship over a young girl abandoned by her mother. Wonderful reading especially during our own lockdown period.

### **Doreen**

#### **Also appropriate as it deals with WWII traumas**

**'Operation Mincemeat' by Ben Macintyre.**

Who ever wrote, 'Fact is stranger than Fiction' , must have had 'Operation Mincemeat' in mind.

This was a WW2 spy story that succeeded despite impossible odds. The plot sounds simple; dress a dead body in military uniform and float it in the sea near the coast of Spain so that it will eventually fall into German hands who will believe the documents carried on the dead body are genuine. Against their better judgement, they believe an Allied invasion will take place anywhere but Sicily, which is, consequently, left undefended when the invasion occurs. Begs the question did the Germans have something in their psychological make up that made them so gullible ? Would the British have been so easily hoodwinked ? Perhaps the meticulous preparation the British employed in the operation was a testament to its ultimate success. I was aware of the true events exposed in this story because I was born in Gosport under the shadow of the premier Naval port of Portsmouth so I grew up with submarines, aircraft carriers and military uniforms. My father worked at the RN aircraft repair yard at Fleetlands near Fareham and as a 'Key Worker', never saw action except in the uniform of the Home Guard ! I knew the story of 'Operation Mincemeat' well before I read the book. I had also seen the film, 'The Man who never Was' , and the programme, recently repeated, of Ben Macintyre retelling the story, so, for me, the element of surprise was missing. I felt that I was reading about details I was already familiar with --and there were lots of details which meant reading at night helped me to fall asleep ! No doubt Ben Macintyre has researched his subject in great forensic depth and he is a master storyteller. However, I rather suspect 'Operation Mincemeat' will always have a greater appeal to those with military backgrounds and connections with WW2 and espionage.

### **Angela**

#### **'The Mirror & the Light' by Hilary Mantel**

I was alerted to the existence of this book by a TV interview which Hilary Mantel did on its release. I decided first to read *Wolf Hall* and its sequel *Bring up the Bodies* (the first two parts of the trilogy) which tell the story of the rise to prominence of Thomas Cromwell and the rise and subsequent fall of Ann Boleyn. I thought the writing pure genius. It captured beautifully (although I don't know how accurately of course) the atmosphere of Henry VIII's English court and Tudor England in general and I was absolutely hooked by the historical setting and the development of the characters, in particular the relationship between Henry and Cromwell. Cromwell is wonderfully drawn, so human and vividly complex; it is as if we see into the workings of his mind. I was thus completely beguiled and ready for this, the final part of the trilogy and it did largely hold my interest but at times I thought it over long, it dragged rather and my interest began to flag. I still enjoyed the light shining on unfamiliar (to me) history and I thought the finale couldn't have been more sensitively and skilfully written. An added bonus was that to mark the launch of this book there was a rerun of the BBC TV dramatization of *Wolf Hall*, which I had never seen, and I thought (having read the books) was inspired in its casting. Overall I would definitely recommend *The Mirror and the Light* for fans and to complete Cromwell's story but *Wolf Hall* remains my favourite of the three.