

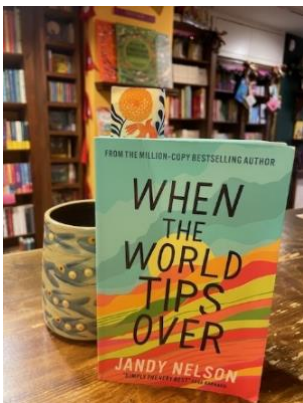
## ***My Year in Books 2024***

Here is my year in books. Some I have reviewed, some I haven't, most I loved and a few I didn't. But this is what I read throughout the year.



***Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan finished December 11<sup>th</sup>.**

A breathtaking Christmas story of compassion. A small book but a must read.



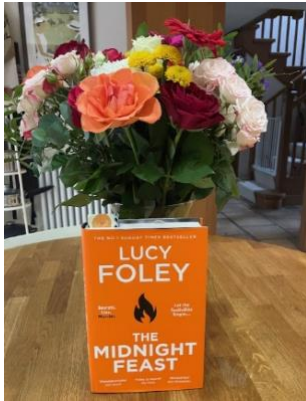
***When the World Tips Over* by Jandy Nelson finished December 10<sup>th</sup>.**

Quite simply the best YA book I have ever read. Beautiful in every way. I savoured this book and will really miss all the colourful characters within it. With camper vans, vineyards, a souffle specialising restaurant, a very special dog and a story of long ago that will forever change the future. But most importantly a love story of colours, music and magic, and never giving up hope.



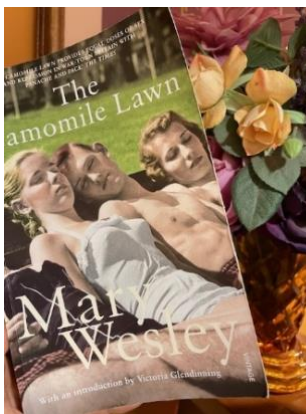
***The Ice Children* by M.G. Leonard finished November 10<sup>th</sup> (for ages 7 to 12 years).**

The Ice Children wowed me. Everyone should read it. Not only children but grown-ups too. Based on the fairytale of the Snow Queen, we learn we must save Winter to save our planet and stop climate change. Magical and meaningful, this shows how a story is able to teach us. An integral message for our time.



***The Midnight Feast* by Lucy Foley finished November 7<sup>th</sup>.**

This book was so atmospheric and irksome. Lucy Foley is one of the best thriller writers there is. I highly recommend it.



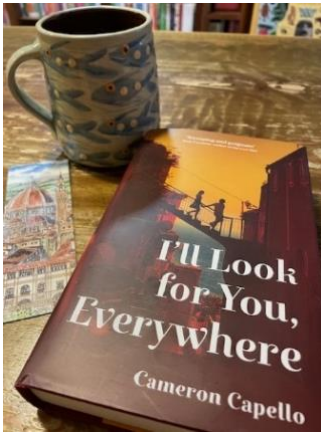
***The Camomile Lawn* by Mary Wesley finished October 11<sup>th</sup>.**

A charming book. Despite being set during the war, it bursts with love, lust and humour.



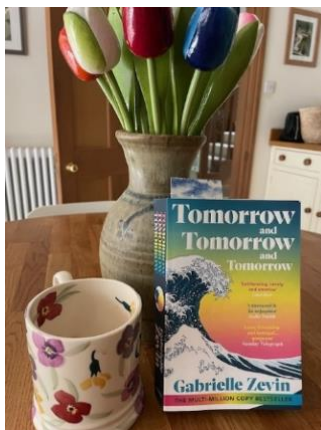
***Turtle Moon* by Hannah Gold finished October 4<sup>th</sup> (for ages 8 to 12 years).**

When I first came across Hannah Gold's debut, *The Last Bear*, I couldn't believe how poignantly she portrayed the plight of polar bears as a result of global warming and the melting of the ice caps. It's a story that has stayed with me. As will *Turtle Moon*, her latest book. I learnt so much about sea turtles but also really enjoyed the adventure element. I love how her passion for saving animals and the importance of raising awareness in the next generation is told through such wonderful, vivid stories. This one also teaches us to be true to ourselves and to believe in all we are and do.



***I'll Look for You, Everywhere* by Cameron Capello finished September 20<sup>th</sup>.**

Quite the love story. So much tension. I loved it.



***Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin finished September 6<sup>th</sup>.**

I thought I wouldn't like it because of all the hype and computer games. I really, really liked it as it happens.



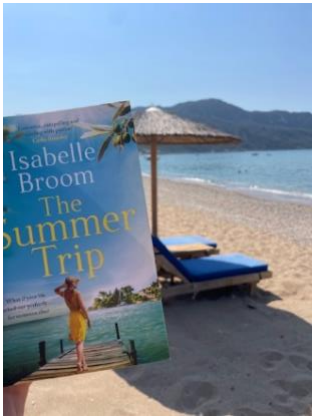
***The Red Notebook* by Antoine Laurain finished August 20<sup>th</sup>.**

Compact and bijou. This book really is a Parisian gem. J'adore.



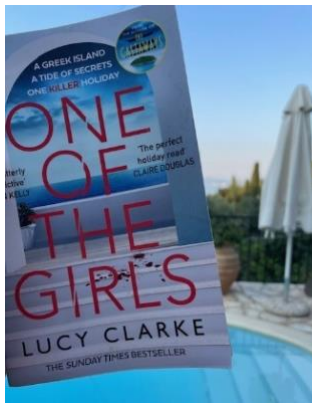
***It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover finished on August 15<sup>th</sup>.**

I had to know what all the fuss was about. Upsetting but worth reading.



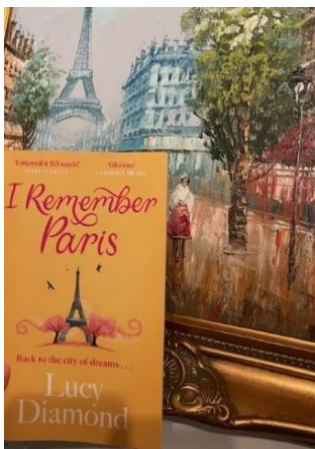
***The Summer Trip* by Isabella Broom finished on August 10<sup>th</sup>.**

I took this book to Corfu as a light beach read. However, there was much more to it and I really enjoyed it. Better still, it was set exactly where we were staying. The beach I read it on and the restaurant we frequented for lunch (Thomas's Place on Kalimi beach) were often the settings for various scenes. I would recommend this book for some great escapism. It has plenty of family feuds and drama but is also a lovely love story.



***One of the Girls* by Lucy Clarke finished on July 31<sup>st</sup>.**

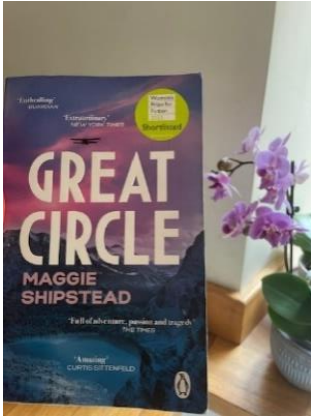
One of the Girls is a gripping thriller and the perfect Corfu holiday read. What happens on a hen weekend, stays on a hen weekend...



***I Remember Paris* by Lucy Diamond finished on July 20<sup>th</sup>.**

All my favourite things. Art, Paris, some cracking characters and a super story. I was waiting to read this in Paris but was tipped off by a customer who had just read it that it contained an acknowledgment for me and Octavia's Bookshop. A BIG THANK YOU to Lucy Diamond and now I feel like I've been back to the City of Light too. I loved 'I Remember Paris' and will recommend it endlessly to customers.



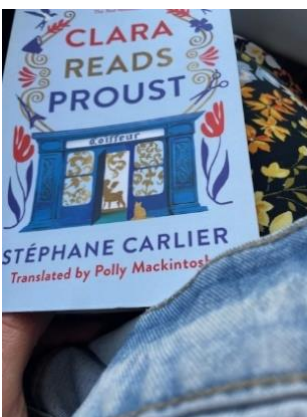


***The Great Circle* by Maggie Shipstead finished on June 27<sup>th</sup>.**

I had always steered clear of this book due to my fear of flying and also of larger novels. However, when my mother finished reading this, and promptly wanted to read everything Maggie Shipstead has ever written, I decided perhaps it was time to give it a go. It was sensational. A truly epic journey. The extraordinary story of both a woman pilot with an obsession for flying and a movie star in the present day playing the part of her in a film. Marian Graves is a fascinating, complicated character. Unsure about so much in life and love but never at odds with her desire to fly. A pilot from an early age and during the war, Marion goes on to attempt the greatest circle of all: passing over both North and South Poles. She is an ambitious, ruthless, ground-breaking aviator who leaves behind both a legacy and a mystery to be uncovered.



***The Garnett Girls* by Georgina Moore finished on May 25<sup>th</sup>.**



***Clara Reads Proust* by Stéphane Carlier finished on May 15<sup>th</sup>.**

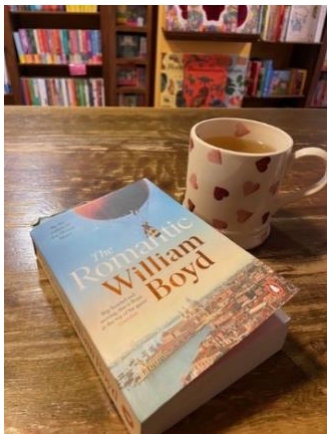
A short, but very fulfilling, story of how a book can be life changing.



***The Marriage Portrait* by Maggie O'Farrell finished on May 9<sup>th</sup>.**

I took *The Marriage Portrait* with me to read during a long weekend in Florence in the Spring where we stayed in a fresco-covered stone apartment within a private museum. I love taking a book to read which is set in the location I am travelling to. This book was so sensory, portrayed with the artistic detail and emotive energy of a Renaissance painting. Paintings which are so symbolic within the story. The story begins in the Medici palace.

The palace which I was lucky enough to visit whilst there. Lucrezia, the much-overlooked daughter of Cosimo and Eleanora Medici, is sent to marry Alfonso of Ferrara at a very young age. A beneficial partnership for both affluent, leading families. Her husband, she believes, is trying to kill her. I will say no more. But what I will say is that this is a mesmerising novel that brings to light some uncomfortable historical truths.



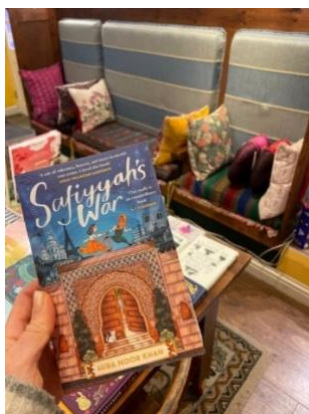
***The Romantic* by William Boyd finished on April 26<sup>th</sup>.**

I adored the extraordinary journey of Cashel Greville Ross. All in the name of love. Following one's heart, rather than one's head, is a risky business. From Cork to London, to the romance and culture of Italy's Pisa and later Venice. From life on a farm in America and, even further yet, to discover the source of the Nile. Putting his life in great danger in exotic, uncharted territory. An unforgettable and stunning story. Completely immersive, charismatic, and charming. A must-read.



***Pineapple Street* by Jenny Jackson finished on April 16<sup>th</sup>.**

A guilty pleasure. Gossip Girl for grown-ups.



***Safiyyah's War* by Hiba Noor Khan finished on April 12<sup>th</sup> (for ages 8 to 14 years)**

Even though this book is meant for children, it really moved me and I learnt so much. Based on real events, it tells the story of the Muslims in the Grand Mosque in Paris and how many Jews they saved during the war. They made papers for them, they warned them of danger, they even went as far as to hide them within the safety of the walls of the Mosque before guiding their escape through the underground networks of Paris. Such a compassionate and eloquently written story, it vividly brings to light the plight and courage of those perhaps forgotten despite the magnitude of their brave actions.



***Behind the Scenes at the Museum* finished on March 29<sup>th</sup>.**

This is an extraordinarily entertaining debut novel. The story tells of the lives of four generations of women in Ruby Lennox's family. Ruby must find herself by piecing the pieces of her past back together. With poignant flashbacks of love and loss, it is sometimes a story of great sadness. However, the day-to-day life of Ruby and her sisters, above the family pet shop in York, complete with a grumpy shop parrot, an even grumpier mother and a wayward father, make for some seriously amusing observations. Kate Atkinson's voice is witty, heartfelt and brilliant.



***The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah finished on March 15<sup>th</sup>.**

Kristin Hannah is an author who never fails to portray the courage and resilience of outstanding women living through particularly desperate times in the past. The Depression in the dustbowl of the Great Plains is something I knew nothing about. This story tells of the plight of the farmers and their families surviving with next to nothing during the years of droughts and dust storms that destroyed crops and homes, killing their livelihoods and loved ones. Some fled to California with hope of a fresh start in its fertile land only to find themselves as outcasts once again struggling for survival. This is a heartbreaking but wonderful book.





***The Wind in the Willows* illustrated by Inga Moore finished on March 14th.**

A delightful retelling of a classic, complemented by the most beautiful pictures of the countryside.



***The Star of Kazan* by Eva Ibbotson finished on March 4<sup>th</sup> (for ages 8 to 14 years).**

Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea*, is one of my favourite children's stories. However, having just read *The Star of Kazan*, I think it is quite possibly superior still. Annika is an orphaned girl bought up in a house of eccentric professors in Vienna in the late nineteenth century. Despite dreaming of meeting her long-lost mother, her life is a happy one. Vienna is bursting with culture, music, sumptuous food and art and, of course, the famous Spanish Riding School. Home to the stunning Lipizzaner horses, the emperor's white dancing stallions. Her life is forever changed when she inherits a chest full of mysterious costume jewellery from an elderly neighbour who she has befriended and kept company. Both tell each other magical stories, or memories in the case of Annika's surprising new friend. A mysterious, beautiful adventure story for eight olds and over, but as a grown up, I think it would be such a shame to have not read this.



***Shrines of Gaiety* by Kate Atkinson finished on February 20<sup>th</sup>.**

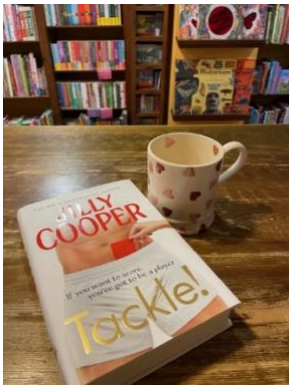
I love books set in the Roaring Twenties and so couldn't resist this story of Soho's seemingly hedonistic, glamorous night life in 1926, and the dark world that lies beneath its glittering veneer. Kate Atkinson's writing style is quite brilliant, with an extravagant use of vocabulary and her ability to create compelling, colourful characters in a seriously atmospheric, almost Dickensian setting. The world of Nelly Cocker, her clubs, bonkers family and connections to London's criminal underbelly make for a great backdrop to what is a story of disappearing girls. Girls with stars in their eyes, who long to dance on the stage, but instead end up dancing in seedy nightclubs or worse still, floating lifeless in the Thames.





***The Otherlands* by Steve Skinley finished on January 23<sup>rd</sup>.**

I utterly enjoyed *The Otherlands*. Steve Skinley wrote this story, set in and around Cirencester, where we are lucky enough to live. The story is brimming with a child's imagination of fairytale characters, both good and bad. It is a thrilling adventure to lands you could only dream of. A story of friendship and bravery. Of facing up to what our mind has created for us to fear. It also beautifully portrays the natural world around us with some fascinating historical asides about our local area and landmarks. This book is a must-read for children who love a good adventure story, but also for grown-ups who haven't quite grown-up.



***Tackle* by Jilly Cooper finished on January 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

Jilly Cooper's latest book was a joy to read. I galloped through it, even though instead of horses, it was about football. The cast is still full of old favourites, including the star of the show, the dashing Rupert Campbell-Black, who buys the local football team, the Searston Rovers. Full to the brim with gossip and intrigue, more money than sense, club rivalry and revelry, a motley crew of footballers, and their hysterically funny and conceited WAGS, but also some much loved four-legged friends. This was thoroughly entertaining.