

ERL BOOKCLUB TITLES U-Z

VANDERBES, Jennifer **Easter Island** **320 pages**

It is 1912. Elsa Pendleton, a young Englishwoman, is forced by circumstance into a marriage of convenience. Her one consolation is that she can now fulfil a great dream: to visit Easter Island and study its mysterious history. But as Elsa becomes bewitched by the island and engrossed in her work, she doesn't realise that her beloved sister Alice is also caught up in desires of her own. Nor, in their isolation, do the two sisters realise that Britain and Germany have declared war, and that the catastrophic effects will be felt even in their quiet corner of the South Pacific. Sixty years later American botanist Greer Faraday, recently widowed, arrives on the island. Troubled by unhappy secrets, Greer wraps herself up in her work, rejecting the friendly approaches of her colleagues. But as she explores the island, her story becomes irresistibly entwined with Elsa's, and she is forced to confront some unwelcome truths.

VEITCH, Kate **Listen** **250 pages**

On Christmas Eve in 1967, a London woman unhappily transplanted to the Australian suburbs makes a decision that will change forever the lives of her four young children. Forty years on, those children are adept at concealing their shared pain. Deborah has a demanding political career, James is a successful artist, Robert a respected school principal. Only Meredith, the baby of the family, seems stuck. But as their father begins to lose his grip on reality, they find themselves floundering in an unfamiliar sea. And their past is about to reach into the present in ways that will shock and challenge them all.

VEITCH, Michael **Flak** **288 pages**

What went through the minds of all the pilots, navigators and gunners who flew during the Second World War? That's a question that has intrigued Michael Veitch to such an extent that he set about collecting stories from RAAF veterans about their experiences of combat in World War 2. And the result is *Flak: True Stories From the Men Who Flew In World War Two*. It is a book that is as much about war's strange illumination of fear and humour as it is the fulfilment of the author's personal obsession. It took him a year to track down the 25 former fliers included in the book and towards the end of the project, he asked one what they wanted now. 'To be remembered,' he replied. 'That's it. Just sometimes to be remembered.'

VICKERS, Salley **Instances of the number three** **320 pages**

Salley Vickers' novel *Instances of the Number Three* is set in London and Shropshire. It describes the relationship between a dead man, his wife and his mistresses and is illuminated by philosophical ponderings on Hamlet and his ghost, and the poetry of Dante, Gerald Manley Hopkins and John Donne. Peter Hansome is the dead husband who walks through the pages of the novel, appearing to his wife Bridget in "his old tweed jacket and cords. He was, in fact, exactly, but without the disfiguring cuts and bruises of the accident, as she had seen him last--in his coffin.

VICKERS, Salley

Mr Golightly's holiday

368 pages

Many years ago Mr Golightly wrote a work of dramatic fiction which grew to be an international best-seller. But his reputation is on the decline and he finds himself out of touch with the modern world. He decides to take a holiday and comes to the ancient village of Great Calne, hoping to use the opportunity to bring his great work up to date. But he soon finds that events take over his plans and that the themes he has written on are being strangely replicated in the lives of the villagers he is staying among. He meets Ellen Thomas, a reclusive artist, young Johnny Spence, an absconding school boy, and the tough-minded Paula who works at the local pub. As he comes to know his neighbours better, Mr Golightly begins to examine his attitude to love, and to ponder the terrible catastrophe of his son's death. And as the drama unfolds we begin to learn the true and extraordinary identity of Mr Golightly and the nature of the secret sorrow which haunts him links him to his new friends.

VICKERS, Salley

The other side of you

320 pages

'There is no cure for being alive.' Thus speaks Dr. David McBride, a psychiatrist for whom death exerts an unusual draw. As a young child, he witnessed the death of his six-year-old brother and it is this traumatic event which has shaped his own personality and choice of profession. One day, a failed suicide, Elizabeth Cruikshank, is admitted to his hospital. She is unusually reticent and it is not until he recalls a painting by Caravaggio that she finally yields up her story. We learn of Elizabeth Cruikshank's dereliction of trust, and the man she has lost, through David's narration. As her story unfolds, David finds his own life being touched by her account and a haunting sense that the 'other side' of his elusive patient has a strange resonance for him, too.

WATERS, Sarah

Fingersmith

560 pages

Divided into three parts, the tale is narrated by two orphaned girls whose lives are inextricably linked. It begins in a grimy thieves kitchen in Borough, South London with 17-year-old orphan Susan Trinder. She has been raised by Mrs Sucksby, a cockney Ma Baker, in a household of fingersmiths (pickpockets), coiners and burglars. One evening Richard "Gentleman" Rivers, a handsome confidence man, arrives. He has an elaborate scheme to defraud Maud Lilly, a wealthy heiress. If Sue will help him she'll get a share of the "shine". Duly installed in the Lillys' country house as Maud's maid, Sue finds that her mistress is virtually a prisoner. Maud's eccentric Uncle Christopher, an obsessive collector of erotica (loosely modelled on Henry Spenser Ashbee) controls every aspect of her life. Slowly a curious intimacy develops between the two girls and as Gentleman's plans take shape, Sue begins to have doubts.

WATERS Sarah

The night watch

480 pages

Moving back through the 1940s, through air raids, blacked out streets, illicit liaisons, sexual adventure, to end with its beginning in 1941, *The Night Watch* is the work of a truly brilliant and compelling storyteller. This is the story of four Londoners - three women and a young man with a past, drawn with absolute truth and intimacy. Kay, who drove an ambulance during the war and lived life at full throttle,

now dresses in mannish clothes and wanders the streets with a restless hunger, searching ...Helen, clever, sweet, much-loved, harbours a painful secret ...Viv, glamour girl, is stubbornly, even foolishly loyal, to her soldier lover ...Duncan, an apparent innocent, has had his own demons to fight during the war. Their lives, and their secrets connect in sometimes startling ways. War leads to strange alliances.

WAUGH, Evelyn

Brideshead revisited

336 pages

The most nostalgic and reflective of Evelyn Waugh's novels, *Brideshead Revisited* looks back to the golden age before the Second World War. It tells the story of Charles Ryder's infatuation with the Marchmain family and the rapidly disappearing world of privilege they inhabit. Enchanted first by Sebastian at Oxford then by his doomed Catholic family, in particular his remote sister, Julia, Charles comes finally to recognize his spiritual and social distance from them.

WEARING, Deborah

Forever today

338 pages

Clive Wearing has one of the most extreme cases of amnesia ever known. In 1985, a virus completely destroyed a part of his brain essential for memory, leaving him trapped in a limbo of the constant present. Every conscious moment is for him as if he has just come round from a long coma, an endlessly repeating loop of awakening. A brilliant conductor and BBC music producer, Clive was at the height of his success when the illness struck. As damaged as Clive was, the musical part of his brain seemed unaffected, as was his passionate love for Deborah, his wife. For seven years he was kept in the London hospital where the ambulance first dropped him off, because there was nowhere else for him to go. Deborah desperately searched for treatments and campaigned for better care. After Clive was finally established in a new special hospital, she fled to America to start her life over again. But when she tried to build new relationships, she found she could never love another the way she loved Clive. Then, in their regular transatlantic phone calls, she noticed Clive's memory unaccountably beginning to improve, ten years after the illness first struck. She returned to England. Today, although Clive still lives in care, and still has the worst case of amnesia in the world, he continues to improve. They renewed their marriage vows in 2002. This is the story of a life lived outside time, a story that questions and redefines the essence of what it means to be human. It is also the story of a marriage, of a bond that runs deeper than conscious thought

WELDON, Fay

Auto da Fay

366 pages

From the 1930s to the 1990s, Fay Weldon has seen and lived our times. As a child in New Zealand, as young and poor in London, as unmarried mother, as wife, lover, playwright, novelist, feminist, anti-feminist, spag-bol-cook, winner-and-diner, there are few waterfronts that she hasn't covered, few battles she hasn't fought. An icon to many, a thorn-in-the-flesh to others, she has never failed to excite, madden, or interest. Her life and times cover love, sex, babies, blokes, poverty, work, politics, and Very Famous Names. Moving from New Zealand to London to Scotland, from the UK to points east and west, Weldon has sipped, gulped, and sometimes spat out the things that make us what we are today. This is her autobiography.

WEST, Rebecca

The return of the soldier

112 pages

A soldier returns from the front to the women who love him. Shell-shocked, he can only remember Margaret, his first love, of 15 years before. His cousin he remembers as a childhood playmate; his wife he remembers not at all. They have a choice: to leave him where he wishes to be, or to "cure" him.

WHARTON, Edith

The age of innocence

368 pages

A story of high society in New York in the 1870's. Newland Archer, a young lawyer, is engaged to May Welland, a very suitable young lady. When May's cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, returns from Europe after leaving her husband, Newland's feelings are stirred. He begins to question everything in his life, including his feelings for May.

WHITE, Patrick

The tree of man

304 pages

At the turn of the century Stan Parker takes a wife and makes a home as a small farmer in the wilderness of Australia. Amy bears his children and time brings him a procession of ordinary events –achievements, disappointments, sorrows and dreams.

WIESEL, Elie

Night

126 pages

Describing the tragic murder of people from a survivor's perspective, this book presents an account of the Holocaust. It offers a description of the ever-increasing horrors endured by the author, the loss of his family and his struggle to survive in a world that stripped him of humanity, dignity, and faith.

WILDE, Oscar

The picture of Dorian Gray

304 pages

A lush, cautionary tale of a life of vileness and deception or a loving portrait of the aesthetic impulse run rampant? Why not both? After Basil Hallward paints a beautiful, young man's portrait, his subject's frivolous wish that the picture change and he remain the same comes true. Dorian Gray's picture grows aged and corrupt while he continues to appear fresh and innocent. As Hallward tries to make sense of his creation, his epigram-happy friend Lord Henry Wotton encourages Dorian in his sensual quest with any number of Wildean paradoxes, including the delightful "When we are happy we are always good, but when we are good we are not always happy."

WILLETT, Marcia

The birdcage

409 pages

It was Felix who first called it The Birdcage - that strange and quirky household in Bristol with its close, loving women including the superbly flamboyant Angel. Angel's daughter Lizzie had loved living there as a child - and she had also loved Felix, the nearest she had to a father, whose loyalties had been strained to the limit by his deeply jealous wife Marina. Lizzie was always aware that Felix had another life at

beautiful, mellow Michaelgarth, the family home on the edge of Exmoor where he tried to bring up his son Piers in a loving and peaceful environment. When Lizzie, many years later, comes at last to Michaelgarth and meets Piers for the first time, she finds a family which is in trouble - and which, miraculously, needs her to help them to heal.

WILSON-HOWARTH, Jane Glimpse of eternal snows

428 pages

When Jane Wilson-Howarth's son, David, was diagnosed with serious medical problems, the family faced the tough decision of whether to stay in England, or return to their home at the time, in remote Nepal. This is a moving story of this mother's determination.

WINTERSON, Jeanette

Lighthousekeeping

240 pages

Motherless and anchorless, Silver is taken in by the timeless Mr. Pew, keeper of the Cape Wrath lighthouse. Pew tells Silver ancient tales of longing and rootlessness, of ties that bind and of the slippages that occur throughout every life. One life, Babel Dark's, a nineteenth century clergyman, opens like a map that Silver must follow. Caught in her own particular darknesses, she embarks on an Ulyssean sift through the stories we tell ourselves, stories of love and loss, of passion and longing, stories of unending journeys that move through places and times, and the bleak finality of the shores of betrayal. A story of mutability, of talking birds and stolen books, of Darwin and Stevenson and of the Jekyll and Hyde in all of us, Lighthousekeeping is a way in to the rooms of our own that we secretly inhabit.

WINTERSON, Jeanette

Oranges are not the only fruit

276 pages

Jeanette, the protagonist of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* and the author's namesake, has issues-- "unnatural" ones: her adopted mam thinks she's the Chosen one from God; she's beginning to fancy girls; and an orange demon keeps popping into her psyche. Brought up in a working-class Pentecostal family, up North, Jeanette follows the path her Mam has set for her. This involves Bible quizzes, a stint as a tambourine-playing Sally Army officer and a future as a missionary in Africa, or some other "heathen state". When Jeanette starts going to school ("The Breeding Ground") and confides in her mother about her feelings for another girl ("Unnatural Passions"), she's swept up in a feverish frenzy for her tainted soul. Confused, angry and alone, Jeanette strikes out on her own path, which involves a funeral parlour and an ice-cream van. Mixed in with the so-called reality of Jeanette's existence growing up are unconventional fairy tales that transcend the everyday world, subverting the traditional preconceptions of the damsel in distress.

WINTON, Tim

Dirt music

480 pages

Georgie Jutland is a mess. At forty, with her career in ruins, she finds herself stranded in White Point with a fisherman she doesn't love and two kids whose dead mother she can never replace. Her days have fallen into domestic tedium and social isolation. Her nights are a blur of vodka and pointless loitering in cyberspace. Leached of all confidence, Georgie has lost her way; she barely recognizes herself. One

morning, in the boozy pre-dawn gloom, she looks up from the computer screen to see a shadow lurking on the beach below, and a dangerous new element enters her life. Luther Fox, the local poacher. Jinx. Outcast. So begins an unlikely alliance. Set in the wild landscape of Western Australia, this is a novel about the odds of breaking with the past. a love story about people stifled by grief or regret, whose dreams are lost, whose hopes have dried up.

WINTON, Tim

The turning

200 pages

Seventeen overlapping stories of second thoughts and mid-life regret set in the brooding small-town world of coastal Western Australia. Here are turnings of all kinds - changes of heart, nasty surprises, slow awakenings, sudden detours - where people struggle against the terrible weight of the past and challenge the lives they've made for themselves. Beautifully crafted, and as tender as they are confronting, these elegiac stories examine the darkness and frailty of ordinary people and celebrate the moments when the light shines through.

WOLFF, Tobias

Old school

195 pages

At one prestigious American public school, the boys like to emphasise their democratic ideals - the only acknowledged snobbery is literary snobbery. Once a term, a big name from the literary world visits and a contest takes place. The boys have to submit a piece of writing and the winner receives a private audience with the visitor. But then it is announced that Hemingway, the boys' hero, is coming to the school. The competition intensifies, and the morals the school and the boys pride themselves on - honour, loyalty and friendship - are crumbling under the strain. Only time will tell who will win and what it will cost them.

WOOD, Danielle

Alphabet of light and dark

348 pages

After her grandfather's death, Essie returns to Bruny Island, Tasmania and to the lighthouse where her great-great-grandfather kept watch for nearly 40 years. Beneath the lighthouse, she begins to write the stories of her ancestors.

WOOLF, Virginia

Mrs Dalloway

248 pages

Clarissa - Mrs Dalloway - prepares for one of her evening parties. Yet as the evening approaches, the unexpected arrival of her first lover, Peter Walsh, triggers vivid memories of the past until, piece by piece, Clarissa retells the story of her life.

ZABLE, Arnold

Café Scheherazade

224 pages

"In Acland Street, St Kilda, there stands a cafe called Scheherazade." Thus begins Arnold Zable's haunting meditation on displacement, and the way the effects of war linger in the minds of its survivors.

In this deeply moving book we meet Avram and Masha, proprietors of the cafe, and hear the tales that they and their fellow storytellers have to offer: of Moshe stalking the streets of Shanghai and Warsaw, of Laizer imprisoned in the Soviet city of Lvov, and of Zalman marooned in Vilna and Kobe. And we learn how Avram and Masha met and fell in love and came to create their Melbourne cafe together.

ZUSAK, Markus

The book thief

552 pages

It is 1939. Nazi Germany. The country is holding its breath. Death has never been busier, and will become busier still. Liesel Meminger and her younger brother are being taken by their mother to live with a foster family outside Munich. Liesel's father was taken away on the breath of a single, unfamiliar word - Kommunist - and Liesel sees the fear of a similar fate in her mother's eyes. On the journey, Death visits the young boy, and notices Liesel. It will be the first of many near encounters. By her brother's graveside, Liesel's life is changed when she picks up a single object, partially hidden in the snow. It is The Gravedigger's Handbook, left there by accident, and it is her first act of book thievery. So begins a love affair with books and words, as Liesel, with the help of her accordion- playing foster father, learns to read. Soon she is stealing books from Nazi book-burnings, the mayor's wife's library, wherever there are books to be found. But these are dangerous times. When Liesel's foster family hides a Jewish fist-fighter in their basement, Liesel's world is both opened up, and closed down.