



# Gold Coast Book Lovers

GCBL Volume 6, Issue 6

June 2010

## Our June Meeting by Claudia

This month we met at Denise's place due to the June public holiday. The atmosphere was very convivial and we enjoyed a wonderful spread. Thank you Denise!

We kicked off discussing what our options were for 2011 and we're leaning towards selecting 4 groups of 3 books by genre. At the moment our selection is free and we thought we could do something different. It's for all us to think about and come back with feedback. Once we make a decision we will accept proposals for books. The deadline for this decision is September but the moderator would prefer it to be earlier than that to be able to publish the 2011

reading list ASAP. Having an early list ensures that after we get hold of enough copies, we get enough time to read them all. An important requirement is that the selections have to be well represented in the Gold Coast City Library. Our new [website](#) is online and we're very proud of it. We hope that our members will be more inclined to use it and post blog topics.

We had an interesting discussion about **The Remains of the Day** by Kazuo Ishiguro, universally liked with passion. Had a lot to talk about in spite of not being a controversial book or one that generates dissent. The themes were all interesting:

servitude and oppression, the clarity of an outsider (Ishiguro) to display the mechanics of the great English houses and how it can be dangerous to just obey orders when there are political matters involved that can affect innocent people. Beautiful story and superb writing: a real gem. Check out our website's [Articles](#) section for an interesting one about this book.

Next month we get together to discuss **Gilead** by Marilynne Robinson, it should make for an interesting discussion. Plenty to disagree on in that one. See you all next month and happy reading!

## About us

We are a discussion group dedicated to enhancing our enjoyment of well-written books by developing our literary knowledge and reading skills, by sharing our impressions and opinions and by expanding our reading experiences among other book lovers. Our aim is to satisfy our passion for the written word.

We meet from 7 to 9 PM on the 2nd Monday of every month EXCLUDING PH at CERAMIC HOUSE located on Bischof Park, Nerang Street (next corner White St), Nerang, next door to shops at 54 Nerang Street.

A small contribution is required towards the rent of the room. The amount depends on the number of people attending.

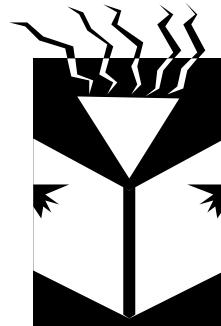
One book title is chosen each month and we all read that book. There is a 'host' who introduces and co-ordinates the discussion. The role of host is rotated around the group so that each member has the opportunity to nominate their book (it could also be an author, theme or genre). The host also acts as chairperson for that meeting.

Although we are not a social club—we are readers—we occasionally attend literary events, relevant movies or plays here at the

Gold Coast, Brisbane or Byron Bay.

We conform to basic meeting practices and everyone has an equal opportunity to express their opinion. Everyone's interpretation is valid, as long as it's expressed respectfully.

We welcome any new members who share our aims and are happy to contribute to our group. Newcomers are not required to have read the book to attend the first meeting and no contribution is required the first time.



## Upcoming Books

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12/07/10

**Gilead** by Marilynne Robinson

Hosted by Claudia

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9/08/10

**Kingdom Come** by J.G. Ballard

Hosted by Dianne

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13/09/10

**The Transit of Venus** by Shirley Hazard

Hosted by Deb

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11/10/10

**Document Z** by Andrew Croome

Hosted by Alexa

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## Contact Details

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For more information, please contact Claudia on 0403 480 575 Or email us [gcbc05@yahoo.com.au](mailto:gcbc05@yahoo.com.au)

<http://goldcoastbooklovers.wordpress.com/>



# Books of the Month

## The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro – Denise

The story revolves around Mr Stevens (first name unknown). He is an aging butler who has spent the best part of his life and career working for Lord Darlington of Darlington Hall. Lord Darlington is a distinguished and upstanding part of the English aristocracy.

Stevens' service under the Lord was in the years between WW1 and WW2. Now Lord Darlington has died, and the house in the in ownership of an American - Mr Farraday.

Mr Farraday is a man mostly oblivious to the strict mores that dominate and have directed the behavior of Stevens. His bantering, and Stevens attempts to respond, create one of the few humorous moments . Farraday plans to be away from the Hall for a while, so suggests Stevens takes the car and goes on a trip. Stevens agrees justifying and reasoning that he will go to see Miss Kenton (Hall's ex-housekeeper) who has just written a letter to Stevens. Always focused on duty, or deluding himself this is his pure motive, Stevens hopes to recruit Miss Kenton back to Darlington Hall. At this point in his life Stevens is reflecting on his career, the values he believes in, and the choices he has made.

Over the series of days in the journey we grow to despise, to love and to feel such frustration with this man. We lurch towards the penultimate meeting with the housekeeper and the true importance of that meeting is gradually revealed as casual anecdotes are pasted together.

This is not a typical love story gone wrong - there are complexities making it almost a farce - ridiculous if taken out of context. Part of Ishiguro's brilliance here is his ability to build such a large and powerful tale from small details. Historical Context is a key aspect of this novel.

The time setting is in the years leading to WW1. Major sections of the novel consider Lord Darlington's response to

various climaxes of the Great War, specifically the Treaty of Versailles, which he felt unfairly punished Germany and set out to ruin the country economically.

Germany was forced to pay reparations and to dismantle its military. It was forced to give up its colonies and most of its means of trade (trains, merchant ships etc) With the 1919 Treaty of Versailles putting forward such strong punitive terms many suggested is undermined hopes of lasting peace by discouraging Germany's recovery and its return to any place in the European community. Lord Darlington was amongst those who felt Germany was being treated too harshly. The writing suggests that this man was involved in major aspects of this crisis in international affairs, while at the same time the events symbolize the deterioration of the "old Britain". Steven's employer seems to be a sympathizer of Hitler, something Stevens needs to consider as an employee.

Ishiguro, in having the events and characters examine the aristocracy's place in England, is less of a critique on imperialism than it is a statement of struggle to evaluate its legacy. The novel's title serves to highlight the decline of British aristocracy (specifically linked to an act of Parliament levying inheritance tax). It can also refer to Steven's return to Darlington Hall to serve out the remains of his days in restrained servitude. Ishiguro's first two novels were set in Japan, so this book is a departure in the author's work. Still, it is consistent with his writing style in that the book is told from a first person point of view by a person who faces past self deception and regret.

Further, in his carefully wrought first person accounts the tone is so controlled, but not so that it deters from the clarity of the deep soul searching of the speaker. The language is carefully crafted, and the themes revolve around the position of an individual within society. While some critics maintain that although Ishiguro's setting is not Japan,

the book retains a strong sense of the author's Japanese heritage, Ishiguro is quick to disagree. He responds by saying that most of his life experience has taken place in England and that his fictional influences are Britain's writers. Ishiguro's choice of subject matter in this book - and the realism with which he depicts it, demonstrate the importance of England's past and culture on him.

Yet many maintain that Japanese heritage does deeply influence the novel - note the themes of service, discipline and duty - so Japanese in nature. Is this a Japanese vision of England or an English version of Japan? Note how, when Steven's admires the English landscape, his descriptions neatly fit the Japanese criteria for beauty, Stevens also has an attention to detail, an insistence on ritual, a stoicism in performing duties, loyalty to the master, and conflicts with his humanity – all prominent aspects of the collective Japanese psyche.

In a criticism of style, some suggest that the notion of narrative irony is trite, and that Steven's voice is 'coaxed' to achieve this irony, and thus lacks integrity. Some suggest that the novel is too much a *roman à these* (a novel written to illustrate a social doctrine) and is too judgmental. I consider has written with astounding narrative sophistication.

*Compiled by Denise*

**Ratings out of 5 :** Alexa 4.5, Claudia 5, Dawn 4, Deb 4, Denise 5, Di 4.5, Kim 4, Leonore 4.5 & Nicola 4.5.



# Books of the Month

## The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro – Denise

### About the Author

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, on 8 November 1952. He came to Britain in 1960 when his father began research at the National Institute of Oceanography, and was educated at a grammar school for boys in Surrey. Afterwards he worked as a grouse-beater for the Queen Mother at Balmoral before enrolling at the University of Kent, Canterbury, where he read English and Philosophy. He was also employed as a community worker in Glasgow (1976), and after graduating worked as a residential social worker in London. He studied Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, a member of the postgraduate course run by Malcolm Bradbury, where he met Angela Carter, who became an early mentor.

He has been writing full-time since 1982. In 1983, shortly after the publication of his first novel, Kazuo Ishiguro was nominated by *Granta* magazine as one of the 20 'Best of Young British Writers'. He was also included in the same promotion when it was repeated in 1993.

In 1981 three of his short stories were published in **Introductions 7: Stories by New Writers**. His first novel, **A Pale View of Hills** (1982), narrated by a Japanese widow living in England, draws on the destruction and rehabilitation of Nagasaki. It was awarded the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. It was followed by **An Artist of the Floating World** (1986), which explores Japanese national attitudes to the Second World War through the story of former artist Masaji Ono, haunted by his military past. It won the Whitbread Book of the Year award and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction.

Ishiguro's third novel, **The Remains of**

**the Day** (1989), is set in post-war England, and tells the story of an elderly English butler confronting disillusionment as he recalls a life spent in service, memories viewed against a backdrop of war and the rise of Fascism. It was awarded the Booker Prize for Fiction, and was subsequently made into an award-winning film starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson. His next novel, **The Unconsoled** (1995), a formally inventive narrative in which a concert pianist struggles to fulfil a schedule of rehearsals and performances in an unnamed European city, was awarded the Cheltenham Prize in 1995.

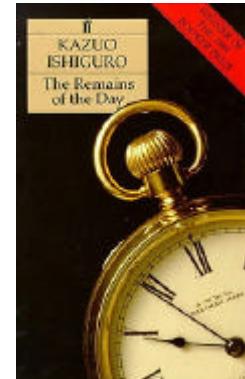
Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, **When We Were Orphans** (2000), is set in Shanghai in the early part of the twentieth century, and is narrated by a private detective investigating his parents' disappearance in the city some 20 years earlier. It was shortlisted for both the Whitbread Novel Award and the Booker Prize for Fiction.

He has also written two original screenplays for Channel 4 Television, **A Profile of Arthur J. Mason**, broadcast in 1984, and **The Gourmet**, broadcast in 1986. He was awarded the OBE in 1995 for services to literature and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He was awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government in 1998. His work has been translated into over 30 languages.

Kazuo Ishiguro lives in London with his wife and daughter. His latest novel is **Never Let Me Go** (2005) and he collaborated with George Toles and Guy Maddin on the screenplay for **The Saddest Music in the World**, a melodrama set in the 1930s, starring Isabella Rossellini. In 2009, his first short story collection,

**Noctures: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall**, was published.

*From the Internet*





## Lovesong by Alex Miller – Alexa

This book is one of six on the shortlist for the 2010 Miles Franklin Literary Award (the prize was awarded to **Truth** by Peter Temple). Once again, we have an author called Ken as a character in his own story. (Miller comments that Ken is a caricature of himself.)

When a new pastry shop opens up in the neighbourhood, Ken strikes up a friendship with the co-owner and school teacher, John Patterson, and has the urge to write about John's experience in France, believing that he would be able to write it down better than John could. This raises the fascinating question of who owns a story after its retelling (as everyone has a story and gladly relates it) and whether a writer can record another person's story

after its retelling.

When John was a young backpacker, he lands in a Tunisian café in working-class Paris and falls in love with the exotic Sabiha upon seeing her there.

The story includes Sabiha's aunt, Houria, and how Sabiha comes to be living with her is charming and the Tunisian flavour of their surrounds in Paris add to the appeal of the story. John marries Sabiha, but their inability to produce a child complicates their relationship and prevents them from moving to Australia, because Sabiha will not leave until she can introduce her child to her father before he dies. Albeit a pleasant read, there are many unanswered questions to this moral dilemma and lots to wonder

about Sabiha's new life and emotional state after establishing her new pastry shop in a Melbourne setting. As a female reader, I now wish to hear Sabiha's story in her own words.

I recommend listening to Alex Miller read an excerpt and comment on this book at the ABC Radio National's The BookShow at

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2009/2739337.htm>

*Comment by Alexa*

Rating : 3.5/5



## The Winter of Our Disconnect by Susan Maushart – Diane

How three totally wired teenagers (and a mother who slept with her iPhone) pulled the plug on their technology and lived to tell the tale.

For any parent who's ever text-messaged their child to the dinner table - or yanked the modem from its socket in a show of primal parental rage - this account of one family's self-imposed exile from the Information Age will leave you ROFLing with recognition. But it will also challenge you to take stock of your own family connections.

When journalist and commentator Susan Maushart first decided to pull the plug on all electronic media at home, she

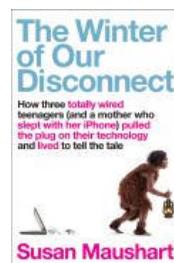
realised her children would have sooner volunteered to go without food, water or hair products. At the simplest level, *The Winter of Our Disconnect* is the story of how one family survived six months of wandering through the desert, digitally speaking, and the lessons learned about themselves and technology along the way. At the same time, their story is a channel to a wider view - into the impact of new media on the lives of families, into the very heart of the meaning of home.

This is a very readable, very funny, and very interesting account of those fraught six months - what it meant for

family, what it meant for friends, what it meant for work. And this account of one family's self-imposed exile from the Information Age will leave you gasping with recognition.

Rather than try to explain the book, I'll give you some excerpts to chew over:

"Our media habits had reached a scary kind of crescendo. The girls were becoming mere accessories of their own social-networking profiles, as if RL (Real Life) were simply a dress rehearsal (or, more accurately, a photo op) for the next status update, and his homework, which he'd insisted he needed a quad-





## The Winter of Our Disconnect by Susan Maushart – Dianne

core gaming computer and high-speed broadband to complete, was getting lost in transmission."

"My abiding image pre-The Experiment was of the back of Bill's head as he sat, enthroned before his PC in the region formerly known as the family room."

"My own patterns were getting a little weird too. I never thought I'd be the kind of single mother who'd openly sleep with her iPhone, but . . . yeah. (I told myself it was no different from reading a book in bed – which, if I hadn't been watching feature-length movies and shopping for underwear, may well have been true.) In fact, if I didn't drag my laptop, a pair of speakers, my digital recorder and a camera in too, I sometimes felt a little lonely"

"They were still having friends over, but more and more of their socialising took the form of little knots of spectators gathered around the cheery glow of YouTube – or, worse, dispersed into separate corners, each to his own device. Their sleep patterns were heading south too – hardly surprising given the alerts from their three cellphones were intermittently audible through the night, chirping like a cadre of evil crickets."

"And there were other things they'd hit the pause button on. Music – either playing it or listening to it as anything other than the background buzz to an instant messaging exchange. Books. Exercise. Conversation. And that other

thing. Whaddaya call it? Oh, yeah. Life."

"Boundary-setting can be so hard, especially if, like me, you are secretly just a little intimidated by people who are more powerful, better looking and wealthier than you are. Sure, they're your kids and you love them. But they can still be pretty scary. As far as I can see, most parents of my generation – from the tail end of the Baby Boomers to the tender tip of Gen X – don't really rule the roost. We sort of scratch around it apologetically, seeking consensus.

We are bad at giving orders. But we are wonderful at giving options, and it's a habit that starts right from the git-go. 'Milk, sweetheart?' we wheedle like some obsequious sommelier. 'Our specials today are cow's, sow, breast or goat's.' We ask our children to cooperate. We don't tell them to. And when there is an objection, we negotiate. So it's no wonder children today have a lively sense of entitlement. Today, most middle-class educated parents have reversed their priorities. Children are no longer the fringe-dwellers of family life, but stake their claim to sit at the VIP table, even if they have to do it in a booster seat."

"Even my agent Susan sounded a little worried when I first approached her with the idea for this book. 'I love the idea,' she wrote to me in an email. 'But are you sure you want to do this to your kids?' As if a child's right to internet access and a cellphone plan were akin to her right to food

and clothing and shelter and anti-frizz serum. Information-starvation, the prevailing attitude suggested, was a form of child abuse!"

And the results of The Experiment:

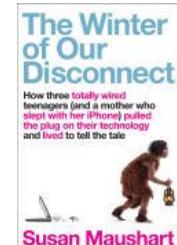
"As my eldest daughter said, it was like we suddenly realised, 'Hey, there are people here. Let's talk to them!' My son went from never reading anything more challenging than the back of the Rice Bubbles box to reading fat, complex, postmodern novels. And in place of his beloved gaming, he started fooling around with his old saxophone. My youngest daughter caught up on probably three years of accumulated sleep debt, and became, in her own words, 'smarter, sort of.' She started keeping a journal for the first time since she was in year two, and then started writing a novel ... in collaboration with her sister, no less. My eldest lost her fear of the can opener, and learned to cook actual food with real ingredients."

But above all, the family proved that you can come to terms with:

"that little ping of satisfaction you feel when an email or an SMS message arrives with the good news message that you do, in fact, exist. You are still in the loop."

*Comment by Dianne and review from The Internet*

**Rating 4/5**





## The Lighted Rooms by Richard Mason – Nicola

I read this book after listening to an ABC Bookshow interview with the author - a young (British educated) South African. He was interested in exploring old age, the tension between the elderly and their middle-aged offspring. He also wanted to highlight the dark history of the treatment of the boers of South Africa by the British in the concentration camps during the Boer War.

I was delighted by this book - not just the themes it covers but by the writing as well. This is Mason's 3<sup>rd</sup> published novel and although young, he

is a very accomplished writer, weaving the stories of Joan in her late 70s, her ancestors in South Africa, her daughter - a highly stressed commodities trader and a young man Joan befriends from the local library.

It's the "story of an elderly woman on the verge of senility and her daughter, who is juggling career with familial duty. Written with astounding intelligibility and description, credible in its delineation of emotional anguish, love, and susceptibility,

**The Lighted Rooms** brings to

mind the writing of Hemingway and Steinbeck" according to Stephen Davenport from the Independent Weekly 24 Jul, 2008.

*Comment by Nicola, and review from the Internet*

**Rating : 4/5**



## The 10PM Question by Kate de Goldi – Nicola

My whole family was thoroughly entertained by this story which Mike read to us over breakfast each weekday morning over the course of a month. It's written by a New Zealander and was very popular there when first published in 2008, having several weeks in the NZ bestseller list Adult Fiction and awarded the New Zealand Post Book Awards Young Adult in 2009. It has an unashamed antipodean setting although covers universal themes of friendship and self-identity, family relationships and adolescence.

It's the story of "an endearing twelve-year-old Frankie Parsons, beset with daily worries, but supported by an eccentric, loving family and two special friends, Sydney (a girl) and Gigs (a boy).

The story is easy to read, fast paced, and both poignant and funny. While Frankie's days revolve around the ordinary: school (work experience, book project, science report, bus trips) and home (fighting with siblings, shopping for his mother, visits by the aunts), the characters make the ordinary become extraordinary. Who could resist friends who have invented their own language, which includes such gems as "Gravits plodney, malet tarlick weasels" ("Dark curses on useless parents."), or made a multicultural army of 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants from Fimo or installation art from used bus tickets? Other delights include a brother who drives a truck for a document shredding company and a teacher who is obsessed with improving his students' vocabulary,

and who laces his conversations with witty examples.

The 10pm Question covers four months in Frankie's life and each chapter ends with his '10pm Question', his nightly ritual in which he confides his concerns to his mother. As the story progresses, a number of family secrets are partly-revealed, and the tension and pace created by these mysteries counterbalance the humour and joyfulness in the characters' everyday lives exceptionally well."

*Comment by Nicola and review from the Internet*

**Rating : 3.5/5**

