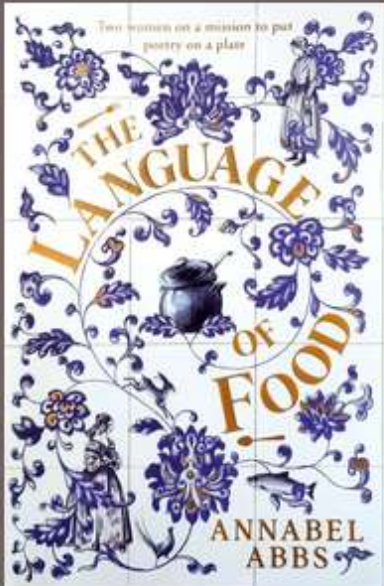


April 2024



The Language of Food by Annabel Abbs was published in 2022 and is the fictional story of real life, Eliza Acton one of the first cookery writers. The story is set in Victorian England and is told as a dual narrative between Eliza Acton and her cooking partner and kitchen maid Ann Kirby. The two women have a complex relationship, at times showing the familiarity of friends but at others keeping the clear distinction of class separation. The novel intertwines the external lives of the two women with their partnership in the kitchen. Eliza has a burning ambition to be a poet, but her publisher declines her book of poems and tells her to write a

cook book instead. Eliza's family have lost their fortune and her father has had to flee the country because of bankruptcy. His disgrace forces Eliza and her mother to open a boarding house where Eliza takes on the role of cook. Ann Kirby, while she was Eliza's cooking partner at Bordyke House, is an entirely fictitious character created by Abbs because there is no historical information on her. In the novel Ann's father is an alcoholic and struggles to hold a job.

Ann's mother is struggling with a mental health condition (possibly dementia) and is placed in an asylum also by the Reverend. Ann's brother worked in a restaurant in London, so it was to Ann (like Eliza) that the support of the family falls.

The book is very light read and the lack of historical fact on Eliza Acton and the shortening of the time period, means the novel lacks depth at times. The dual narrative carries each woman's story, showing their character growth through the 10 year period of the novel. The

woman's story, showing their character growth through the 10 year period of the novel. The addendums at the end of the book provide the reader with clarifying information to create a more rounded picture of Eliza Acton the world's first culinary goddess.

The verdict of the group was lukewarm with members acknowledging the light read as lacking depth. Members liked the historical information on cooking and recipes and felt that the dual narration was a good device for this novel. They did not like the contrived character of Ann Kirby and the missed opportunity to by the author to explain how Eliza was able to go from not being able to boil an egg to becoming a talented cook. The story had a lot of loose ends but for most members it was an easy read.

Ratings: Pauline 3, Lynda 3, Sandy 3, Nicola 2, Debbie 3, Margie 1.5, Jenny 3, Kim 2, Sunita 2.5, Dianne 3, Hetta 3, Cheryl 2.5 and Janet 3.

With thanks to Group members who so kindly shared their responses, and to the Internet.

We look forward to seeing you again at our next meeting 6:30pm on Tuesday 14th of May 2024, **Room 2.1 in the 2nd floor of the Robina Community Centre**, when we'll talk about ***The Fraud by Zadie Smith***. Hope to see you there and Happy Reading!

Other Books We Read

April 2024

The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak, 4

The Things We Live With: Essays on Uncertainty by Gemma Nisbet, 3.5

Euphoria by Elin Cullhead, 3.5

Flourish by Antonia Case, 4.5

Up at the Villa by Somerset Maugham, 3.5

The Bee Sting by Paul Murray, 4.5

Kids Run the Show by Delphine Devigan, 2.5

Day by Michael Cunningham, 4

Question 7 by Richard Flanagan, 5

When God was a Rabbit by Sarah Winman, 4

21 Lessons for the 21st Century by Yuval Noah Harari, 2.5

Out Stealing Horses by Per Petterson, 4

Mullumbimby by Melissa Lucashenko, 3