

The Khandallah Literary Review

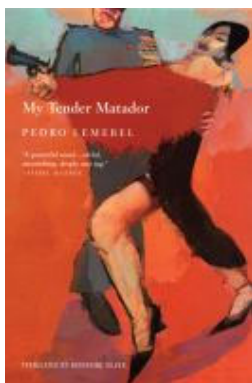
Welcome to the June edition of our monthly newsletter.

We'll review books, and some music, which appeal to us. Contributions also come from select library members and staff (basically, anyone who tells us about a Book, Movie or CD they like)

“In my experience, well-read people are less likely to be evil”.
Lemony Snicket.

My Tender Matador by Pedro Lemebel (Historical)

A Tender Dance of History and Fiction



Pedro Lemebel's 'My Tender Matador' is a compelling tapestry of love, resistance, and history, beautifully translated from Spanish into English. Lemebel, is a renowned Chilean writer, artist, and LGBTQ+ activist. The novel is set in the 1980s, during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile. As historical fiction, it creates a tale around the real-life attempted assassination of Pinochet by the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front in 1986. In this context, it presents a love story between the Queen of the Corner, a drag queen in her late forties, and Carlos, a young revolutionary. This unlikely pair forms the heart of the narrative.

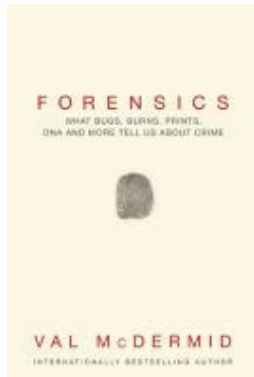
The characters, particularly the Queen of the Corner, are crafted with such depth and authenticity that they leap off the page. Her vibrant personality and tender heart make her a truly unforgettable character. Despite the harsh reality of their circumstances, Lemebel's characters show an undying spirit of resistance and a deeply human vulnerability. Lemebel's prose is as stunning as it is touching. This translated version is must-read for anyone interested in historical fiction, LGBTQ+ literature, or anyone interested in exploring the intersection of personal narratives and larger socio-political landscapes.

'My Tender Matador' is a novel that will stay with you long after you've turned the last page. Isabel

[E-book available on Libby](#)

For Isabel's review in Spanish of this book go to the last page

Forensics What Bugs, Burns, Prints, DNA, And More Tell Us About Crime by Val McDermid (Non-Fiction)



Bestselling author McDermid has written 29 crime novels which have been translated into 16 languages. Her stories featuring criminal profiler Tony Hill were the basis for the TV series *Wire in the Blood*. The use of science to solve crimes features strongly in her books, and here her journalistic skills have produced an absorbing archaeological dig into the history and new developments in forensic science. From a wide-ranging group of expert scientists and investigators, some of whom have been sources for research over the years, McDermid has drawn on their first-hand experiences and knowledge to uncover the amazing advances made. Starting with “The Crime Scene” and ending with “The Courtroom”, each chapter focuses on a particular field: Entomology, Toxicology, Blood Splatter and DNA, Facial Reconstruction among others. McDermid also relates her own experience as a journalist covering the Stardust Disco Fire in 1981. There are many fascinating stories, such as the first recorded use in 1247 in China of insects to solve a crime, the 1024 pigeonholes used to store the physical cards in Bengal’s police headquarters fingerprint file, or the use of ‘Dastardly Deeds’ that led to the arrest of ‘The Mad Bomber of New York’. Highly readable, as you would expect from a novelist, informative but not for the squeamish. Greg

Trends in Books

We have been talking about a trend we have noticed in publishing this year. Greek Mythology.

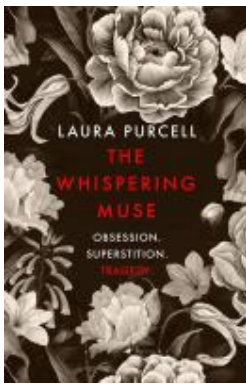
Looking at new books in the library you will see stories featuring Greek goddesses such as Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, legendary figures like Clytemnestra and retellings of Greek myths and legends such as the Trojan Wars in “A Thousand Ships” by Natalie Haynes and Pat Barker’s “The Silence of the Girls” and “The Women of Troy”. Madeline Miller’s retelling of the Iliad “The Song of Achilles” set a high bar a decade ago. Other recent titles retelling Greek myths include “Ariadne” (Jennifer Saint), “Circe” (Madeline Miller again) and the gender flipping “Orphia and Eurydicus” by Elyse John. Younger readers have responded to the myth centred stories of Rick Riordan’s “Percy Jackson” series.

The stories we are used to have often (mostly) been told from the male viewpoint-the God, the King, the hero-warrior and these new interpretations value the voice, and the perspectives, of the women in the story making them the central figures. The themes in these stories are timeless and full of flawed characters, grand passions and high drama which offer both a moral lesson as well as insights into human nature and our understanding of the world. Many of us have grown up with these sagas and so perhaps, in turbulent times there is a level of familiarity and predictability which is

comforting, much as we have turned once again to cosy crime and writers like Agatha Christie, Georgette Heyer et al.

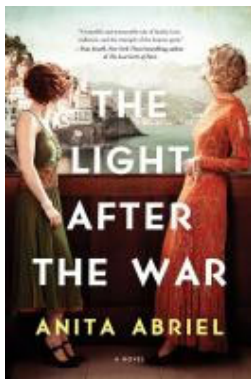
So prolific has been the surge in this genre that publishers and retailers are warning that the market is reaching over saturation. Authors and the buying public show no signs of their interest waning, however. Excitingly for the growth of this genre, while the space has been dominated by Western mythologies, authors of other cultures such as Sue Lynn Tann and Vaishnavi Patel are retelling and reinterpreting their own culture's myths. David

The Whispering Muse by Laura Purcell (Gothic Fiction)



In winter I am drawn to gothic fiction, mysteries and suspense when the short Winter days and long Winter nights makes us more susceptible to the “things that go bump in the night”. This is another work that draws on a figure from Greek Myth. Rumour spreads throughout a theatre in Victorian London that star actress, Lilith, has made a Faustian pact to become a great actress with Melpomene, Greek muse of tragedy. The theatre owner's wife, jealous of Lilith, pays the dresser Jenny to watch the actress. When strange and tragic events happen within the theatre Jenny wonders if the rumours are true and just what horrific price is to be paid when Melpomene calls for payment. This perfectly meets everything I wanted for a Winter's night read - atmospheric, chilling, and suspenseful with believable, multi-dimensional characters. David

The Light After The War by Anita Abriel (Fiction)



I didn't realise this was a true story until I got to the end because this was written as a novel, which made it even more amazing. Two Jewish girls are thrown off a train on the way to Auschwitz and they begin their struggle for survival. The experiences these two girls go through is almost beyond belief, except we know these things happened. The author researched her mother's life and was able to put it into words for the rest of us to wonder about. The resilience of these people is inspiring. Carol

Meredith Alone by Claire Alexander (Fiction)



This a charming book with a sweet main character who you'll want to triumph and be happy by conquering her fears. It's also desperately sad in places. Meredith hasn't left her house in three years after a panic attack one day as she got ready for work. There are deeper reasons though for Meredith staying within the safety of her four walls and these are gradually revealed as the plot gently unfolds. We start to understand how Meredith becomes a recluse as we get glimpses of a tough childhood, a self-absorbed mother and a strong older sister who was Meredith's biggest supporter – until she wasn't.

We are also welcomed into the life she shares with her beloved rescue cat Fred and old school friend Sadie. A life where time goes slowly and is dedicated to working remotely as a writer, baking, jigsaw puzzles and exercising by running up and down the stairs.

While the plot takes its time it definitely pulls the reader in and ratchets up the tension and Meredith's inner conflict at times, as she experiences panic attacks and deep-seated anxiety triggered by a traumatic experience.

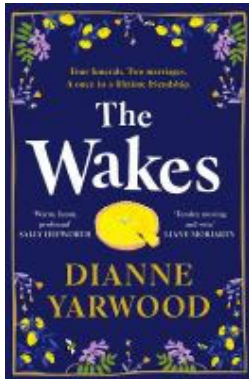
It's the characters that ultimately make this a book you want to keep reading and remember long after you've read the final page.

All of the key characters are well-rounded, and all have their challenges – some aren't even very likeable. Meredith the main character is beautifully written, and as a result she is the one we really connect with as a reader and have great empathy for. We cheer her on as she grows her connections with the outside world including her new friend Thomas and want her so badly to take that first courageous step beyond her front door.

Overall, this is a moving and uplifting book that will fill you with compassion and understanding for people in Meredith's situation. It was a bit of a departure from the type of book I would usually go for, but I recommend it. Fiona R

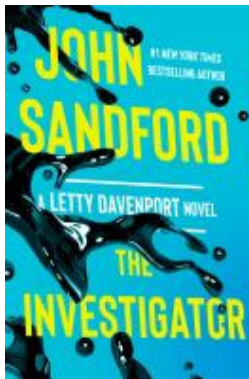
Fun Fact: A book was recently returned to a Californian library almost 100 years overdue. The book, a history of the United States, borrowed in 1927 would have accrued fines of \$1756 but luckily, like Wellington City, the library had abolished fines.

The Wakes by Dianne Yarwood



“The thing about death is that it makes life matter.” A debut novel by Australian writer Dianne Yarwood, this is a book of life – and death, friendships, marriages, separations, disappointment, joy and missed chances. Initially I found the stories of the different characters on multiple timelines, a little hard to follow, but once I got into the swing of things, oh, how I loved this book. At the centre, new friends and neighbours, Claire, reserved and on a career break from a successful job in the pharmaceutical industry, and Louisa, a casual gardener and one time chef, with a pretty loose social filter, are persuaded by a funeral director friend to cater for a small wake. The success of their chicken sandwiches (with a never disclosed but much discussed secret ingredient), exquisite lemon tarts and their spurning of soggy quiches leads to repeated business, and the earlier storylines slowly come together. Yarwood’s writing feels like catching up for a chat with a group of people you really like, and weaves philosophical musings into the narrative. References to music and recipes, and, most significantly, for me, to “The Uluru Statement From the Heart” – an invitation to the Australian people from First Nations Australians to walk together to build a better future – left me googling long into the night. Warm, thought provoking and witty – I loved it. Fiona M

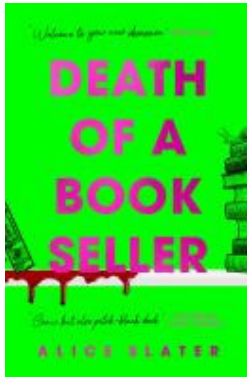
The Investigator by John Sandford (Thriller)



The author has written over 50 books, 27 which feature Detective/Special Investigator Lucas Davenport. His adopted daughter Letty is following in Davenport’s footsteps. As a senatorial assistant and researcher, Letty is bored. Breaking into a building to get more information is the most fun she’s had. Offered a job as an investigator for Homeland Security, the big attraction is to get to have a carry permit. One of Sandford’s strengths is his dialogue. This is typical of the repartee with her ex-Delta partner after a meeting with a female contact *“gonna call that girl up when I get back to D.C. ‘If you need any advice about how to talk to women, I’m always here’, Letty said. ‘Believe me, you do need that advice’. ‘Au contraire, as we say down in Terrebonne Parish. With the right women, I speak poetry.”* An intriguing plot features missing oil and domestic terrorists in the form of militia group with a rabid anti-immigration viewpoint. Led by a woman, Sandford delves into her background and paints her as a sympathetic opponent. The main character’s intelligence shines through as does her violent streak, pragmatism, and dry wit *“After she blocked the peephole, she went to her laptop and did a Google search on peephole*

intrusions – and learned that women were not only watched but had actually been filmed through the peephole as they undressed inside their locked rooms. Yet another reason, Letty thought, that all women should be issued guns at birth.” Excellent. Greg

Death of a Bookseller by Alice Slater (Fiction Suspense/Psychological Thriller)



This debut novel is the story of two women working in a bookshop (the author managed a Waterstones Bookshop in London) who find themselves in an uncomfortable relationship when True Crime devotee Roach becomes obsessed with workmate Laura as she recognises that they share a mutual darkness-but for very different reasons. This fascination and determination to infiltrate her colleague’s life leads to a twisted, dark obsession. The story is intriguing and suspenseful with characters who are deftly written and well defined which is important as alternating chapters are written from the two characters

points of view

I’m always a bit wary of books described as “darkly comic” as in my experience they tend to be mostly dark and with little or nothing comic. This book is intriguing, suspenseful and the inside look at the day to day running of a bookshop is interesting, but any humour eluded me. I would definitely read Alice Slater’s next book though!

This book does raise interesting questions about the True Crime genre; why are we so fascinated by it and who are we exploiting by indulging this often prurient interest? David

Device Free Weekend by Sean Dolittle (Thriller)



Invite six of your closest friends to an isolated island, take away their cell phones and laptops, get rid of the staff and make sure your friends can’t leave. So far so ‘Ten Little Indians’ or ‘Glass Onion’, but your guests aren’t here to solve a crime or a murder. As Billionaire founder of the world’s biggest social media network, you want them to make a decision. Either they tell you to blow up your company, literally, and destroy your life’s work, or they pick another equally unpalatable option. An intriguing plot about a carefully crafted plan that doesn’t hold together, because even your oldest friends

can sometimes surprise you. Secrets are revealed, alliances are formed, and hundreds of millions are at stake. The reveal is a tad abrupt compared to the unfolding drama, but an enjoyable read with fully formed characters.

Greg

East of West by Jonathan Hickman (Graphic Novel Series)



Jonathan Hickman created this post-apocalyptic, pseudo-biblical, sci-fi, dystopian, horror, oriental-western tale about an apocryphal message prophesying the reincarnated Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and the dynasties and political powers contriving to end the world! Completely original concept and storyline. Unique characters... with DEATH portrayed as a pale white gunslinger on a mechanical-alien headless-canon horse. I did not expect this series to be so captivating, so unique and original. Several narrative arcs are coming into their own trajectory that imply an ultimate convergence.

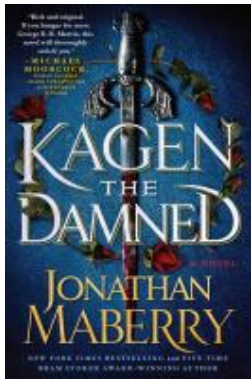
Politics, economics, power, law, religion, magic, tribal identity all imbue this characterization of mythical worldviews regarding life, death, famine, conquest and the pre-eminence of gods.

THE best final showdown of any story, of any medium!

Fitting conclusion, who would have thought... Love wins out!

Redemption in its purist form. Phenomenally epic series. Well done. Andy

Kagen the Damned by Jonathan Maberry (Science Fiction and Fantasy)



This is Game of Thrones territory, with shades of Conan the Barbarian, and elements of Lovecraft and Keats. Yes, there is a dragon but only one. There are strange religions, mystical beings, and the usual elements of a quest, unlikely allies, and an enchanted Tower. Maberry's forte is contemporary supernatural novels, so this is a bit of a departure from his Joe Ledger series, and he shows a real world-building knack. The Silver Empire, which ruled for a thousand years, is no more, destroyed in one night by ancient enemy Hakkia, who they had destroyed to start their reign. Kagen is the son of The Poison Rose, who with

her husband and children are the last in a long line of defenders of the Royal Family. The story is dark and violent right from the start with the attack on the capital city, and this is carried throughout, although Kagen does find time to fall in love, albeit with a woman not quite human. The plot is propelled with short chapters that switch between Kagen's search for redemption, two nuns seeking safety in another country and the fledgling resistance movement to the Witch-King of Hakkia. The dialogue is earthy and sometimes very crude, and the odd modern turn of phrase can be jarring, but Kagen, and the other characters, are real individuals with their own personalities. An excellent start to the series. Greg

Raptor: A Sokol Graphic Novel by Dave McKean



This book is really .. something else. It can only be read first-hand; a review is insufficient. Having just read some Edgar Allan Poe stories this carries a similar haunting introspection. I give this a rare 5/5 stars.

"The tide and skyline bleed, a grey smear."

"Some of us haunt the woods, looking for our old lives amongst the bract and foliole. And some of us are brought here. To leave little thank yous, tokens, benedictions. What better way to pass on one's thoughts and prayers than in the pages of a book.

Others are handwritten in pencil, or in fever, or tears.

Or delirium, or grief."

"Do your work, my little message in a bottle, tossed into the ether, published, read, rippling out into hearts and minds and souls."

"you know, grief hits us in all manner of different ways – it can be confusing."

"The mirror is the door, the book is the key." Andy

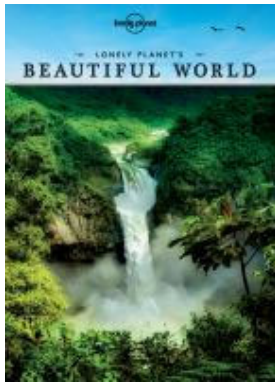
"The Art and Soul of Blade Runner 2049" by Tanya Lapointe, Denis Villeneuve (Foreword)



This is awesome. Fascinating insight into the passion and commitment that went into dreaming and creating this epic film. Weta Workshop, you legends!

Andy

Lonely Planet's Beautiful World [isbn 9781743607879]



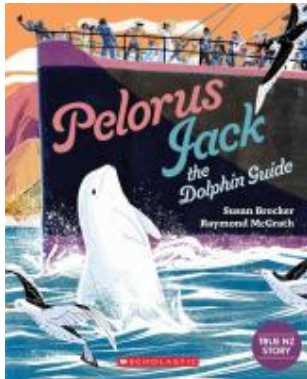
Journey to the planet's most magnificent places and see the world as you've never seen it before through the lenses of Lonely Planet. Forty years of passion and experience has been poured into this thought-provoking portrait of our beautiful world.

Exquisite and breath-taking perspectives of our incredible planet.

Andy

{Reviews by Ena (age 11)}

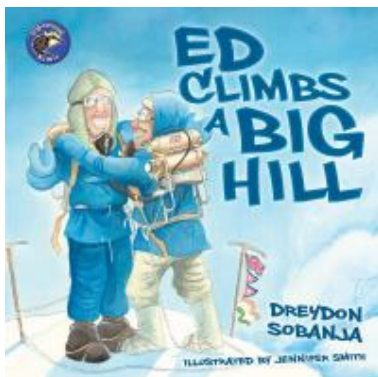
Pelorus Jack the Dolphin Guide by Susan Brocker, Raymond McGrath (Illustrator)



A true New Zealand story of a dolphin that captured the hearts of passengers in the 1880s. This is the heart-warming tale of Pelorus Jack, a rare white Risso's dolphin who delighted passengers over 100 years ago as he guided steamships through the rough waters of French Pass into the calm waters of the Marlborough Sounds. Passengers from around the world, even royalty, came to see him and it is believed he became the first sea creature to be protected by law in any country. A life-size bronze statue of Pelorus Jack stands at Collinet Point, overlooking French Pass

Delightful story of NZ's famous white dolphin. Beautiful and sad.

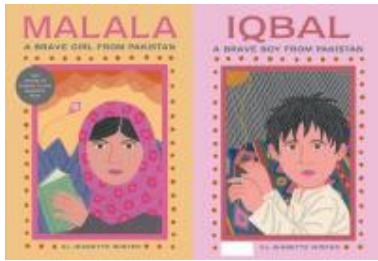
Ed Climbs a Big Hill by Dreydon Sobanja, Jennifer Smith



Fictional story about the life of the New Zealand mountaineer Edmund Hillary. Edmund dreams of climbing mountains as a child. Finally, he grows up to realise his dreams, and climbs Everest, the biggest mountain of all.

Delightful mini bio of how the famous NZ'er climbed Everest.

Malala: A Brave Girl from Pakistan / Iqbal: A Brave Boy from Pakistan" by Jeanette Winter



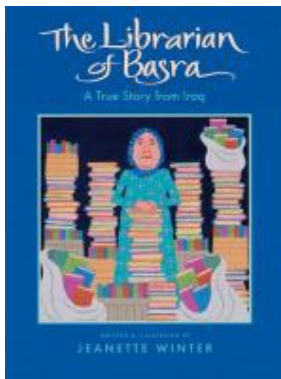
One country: Pakistan. Two children: Iqbal Masih and Malala Yousafzai. Each was unafraid to speak out. He, against inhumane child slavery in the carpet trade. She, for the right of girls to attend school. Both were shot by those who disagreed with them--he in 1995, she in 2012. Iqbal was killed instantly; Malala miraculously survived and continues to speak out around the

world.

"The extremists are afraid of books and pens."

Wonderfully inspiring.

The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq by Jeanette Winter

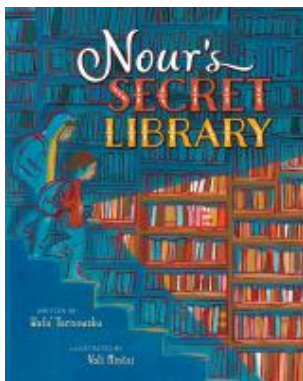


Alia Muhammad Baker is a librarian in Basra, Iraq. For fourteen years, the library where she works has been a meeting place for those who love books. Until now. Now war has come, and Alia fears that the library--along with the thirty thousand books within it--will be destroyed forever. In a war-stricken country where civilians--especially women--have little power, this true story about a librarian's struggle to save her community's priceless collection of books.

"Can you help me save the books?"

Great story, so inspirational

Nour's Secret Library by Wafa' Tarnowska & Vali Mintzi



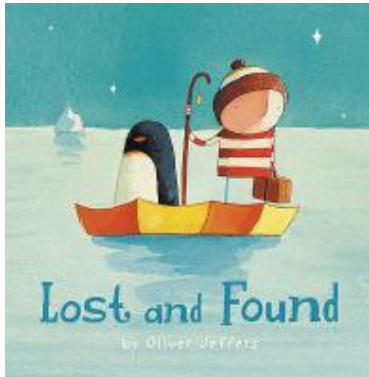
Forced to take shelter when their Syrian city is plagued with bombings, young Nour and her cousin begin to bravely build a secret underground library. Based on the author's own life experience and inspired by a true story, Nour's Secret Library is about the power of books to heal, transport and create safe spaces during difficult times. Illustrations by Romanian artist Vali Mintzi

Beautiful book of a true story.

"Whenever there was a lull in the fighting, Amir started picking up books he found in the streets."

"Books don't fight with each other like people do."

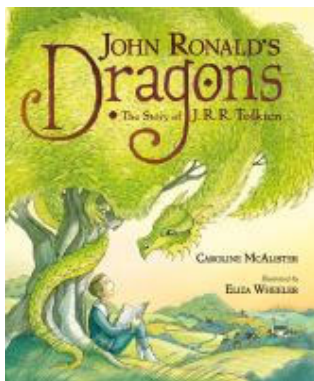
"Lost and Found" by Oliver Jeffers



Once there was a boy who found a penguin at his door . . . he didn't know where it came from or who it belonged to. The penguin looked sad and the boy thought it must be lost. So he decided to help it find its way home, even if that meant rowing all the way to the South Pole.

"He asked some birds if they knew where the penguin came from. But they ignored him. Some birds are like that." :)

John Ronald's Dragons: The Story of J. R. R. Tolkien



A captivating picture book biography of a boy who imagined a world full of dragons and grew up to be beloved author J. R. R. Tolkien.

Before epic 'Big Dreams, Little People' book series there was THIS book!

"At school John Ronald made good friends. The boys held secret parties in the library with tea and biscuits. The librarian scolded them for dropping crumbs on her books." (p6)

The author's notes and the illustrator's notes are well worth reading.



Wiping Library Fines Encourages Teen Reading

Good news for the libraries in our capital city. Wellington has seen a 48 percent increase in teenagers using library cards since the scrapping of late fees.

RNZ

Last year Wellington City Councillors voted unanimously to wipe more than \$500,000 worth of overdue library charges and scrap future fees altogether.

Councillor Rebecca Matthews, who introduced the amendment, told Afternoons the move helped libraries serve their purpose more effectively, and helped break down barriers to reading and learning.

Wellington libraries found that when they compared a three-month period from before the change to three months after, they measured:

- More library cards owned and used
- A 48 percent increase in library use by 13- to 17-year-olds
- A 9 percent increase in library use for adults

Books returned late increased from 8 percent to 16 percent, "but with a reminder they still come back", Matthews said.

"One third of our library users are saying coming to a library is less stressful than it was when there were overdue fines," the councillor said.

Any lost books were still chased with a replacement fee, "but that is less than 1 percent and it hasn't gone up".

Tengo miedo torero de Pedro Lemebel

En 1986, el año que nací, se orquestaba en Chile un ataque a Augusto Pinochet, el dictador que llevaba más de 10 años en el poder. Ese evento se convirtió en el acontecimiento histórico que Lemebel reimagina en su novela *Tengo miedo torero*.

La novela nos presenta la historia de una relación inesperada. Carlos, un joven guerrillero del Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez se refugia por casualidad en la casa de la Loca, una extrabajadora sexual queer en un barrio pobre de Santiago. Este inusual encuentro es el centro de esta historia llena de sombras, vulnerabilidad y belleza.

En paralelo, la vida imaginada de Pinochet y su esposa antes del ataque fallido ponen en perspectiva las diferencias y fracturas de un país herido, ansioso por la caída de la dictadura. Lemebel es un escritor con una capacidad natural para retratar la vida urbana, la brutalidad de las calles, los rincones de una sociedad fragmentada y, a la vez, regalarnos momentos de ternura y amor que iluminan todo alrededor.

Así es la relación que forman Carlos y la Loca, ambos personajes encantadores que permanecen más allá de la lectura. Este libro es, sin duda, una de las novelas imperdibles de la literatura LGTBQ+ y una puerta de entrada al mundo del genial Pedro Lemebel. Isabel