

May 2025

From the Librarian

Kia ora koutou,

It has been a wonderfully busy month here in the library. The event on the 8th was well attended, with around 65 people joining us from all parts of Otago. It was such a treat to hear our guest speakers read and share their stories of the library and the Octagon.

A very warm welcome to our twenty-nine new members! Bringing our total membership up to ninety nine! If you would like to use the library for meetings, clubs or educational purposes, we are very open to hearing from you. Please email me or come in and have a chat.

Happy reading!

- Holly Fletcher

What's Happening

We are grateful to have received a generous donation of eleven poetry books by Ruth Dallas.

Thanks to Ruth Dallas Estate Literary Executor, Hannah Brady and to Karen at the Naseby Athenaeum Library. We are excited to be the custodians of these exceptional books.

Author Annie Villiers will be holding some lunchtime readings on Tuesdays, during June. More details coming soon!



Book Review by Alyce Stock

Beautyland

Marie-Helene Bertino

I've never been much a fan of sci-fi, and especially not the aliens and space type of sci-fi. So, I was mildly surprised at myself for venturing into the science fiction section of the City Library to get my hands on *Beautyland*, by Marie-Helene Bertino.

Despite some shining reviews on Goodreads, I was pretty uncertain about reading a novel that has an alien as the main character. Luckily for me, there is very little about extraterrestrials in this book and even less about space and far flung planets.

Beautyland begins with the birth of the story's protagonist, Adina, in 1977 suburban Philadelphia. She has supposedly been sent to Earth to report back on humankind, becoming aware of her mission at 4 years old following an incident of domestic abuse. Using an old fax machine that her mum pulled out of the trash, Adina sends her ethereal

alien leaders messages trying to make sense of humans and human society.

Adina continues these transmissions through her childhood and adolescence, and into adulthood. In a certain sense, not a lot really happens plot-wise. We just follow Adina through her mostly quite unremarkable life.

However, I was struck by this book's relatable and often funny observations, served to us through the lens of a young woman trying to make sense of this world. I was also really endeared by the use of subtext.

Some reviews have suggested that this is a book about a neurodivergent person, while others are adamant that it really is about an alien. The beauty of reading is that no two people ever have the exact same experience of the same book.



We must filter the writing through our own minds to create meaning. This is heightened in *Beautyland*. Who is Adina? What is she? What is this book even about? Have a read and decide for yourself.