

Dunedin Athenaeum
& Mechanics' Institute
Newsletter

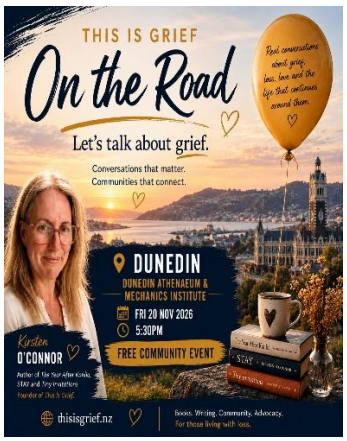
September 2026

Kia ora koutou,
I love walking to work at this time of year, when Dunedin wakes from its winter slumber and puts on an astonishing floral display. Spring is in the air at last.

This past month we have been hosts to the very successful National Poetry Day event, Asher Emmanuels thought provoking talk about his book *The Valley* and another of Eliana Gray's very popular writing workshops.

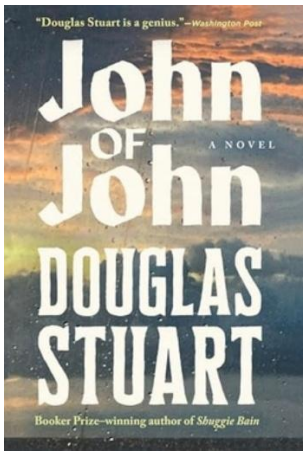
There hasn't been any new book buying While Holly has been on leave but we have had a couple of exciting new titles donated. We now have a copy of *The Valley* by Asher Emanuel and also Molly Crighton's new thriller, set in Dunedin, called *The Body and the Blood*. Holly will freshen up the new books shelves when she returns in early October.
Saskia

What's Happening



Later on in the year on November the 20th, Kirsten O'Connor founder of This is Greif and author of *The Year After Kahlia* and *Stay,* will be bringing **This Is Grief: On the Road** through New Zealand, including a stop at the Athenaeum Library. This involves a series of community conversations about grief, loss, love and the things we often struggle to find words for. This will be a free public event. You can register for this online. Find the link in our social media.

Book Review
Douglas Stewart
John of John



Douglas Stewart's 2026 novel *John of John* follows a young gay man Cal (John Callum) as he is called home from Glasgow to help with his ailing Grandmother. Home here means the isolated community of Falabay, on the isle of Harris, in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. After attending art school on the mainland Cal must readjust to the strictures of life back at the family croft where rigid expectations, driven by religion and tradition prevail.

Stuart sketches the remoteness large and manages to create an atmosphere both desolately empty and suffocatingly small. I could almost feel the weather battering me as I read.
The family are crofters and weavers, Harris, of course, being the isle of tweed. Fascinating descriptions of the weaving process, mirror not only the landscape but also its people. The tweed, with its subdued grassland browns and greens, interspersed with threads of intense bright colour, is woven with complexity. In the ultimate metaphor, John and John work the unforgiving loom, taking shifts to attempt to weave the cloth as though it's been made by a single person. The devout, presbyterian community lives tight, knowing both everything and nothing about each other. On the sabbath, chains are used to lock up the children's playground equipment, least happy squeals interrupt their pious contemplation. In Falabay, repression is a virtue; this detail allowing Stuart some dramatic plot twists.
Like the environment, the pace isn't fast but quiet and emotionally heavy. In a similar vein to his former booker prize winner *Shuggie Bain,* Stuart gives intelligence and depth to an ensemble of working-class characters. Harsh lives carry their own idiosyncratic beauty. If you enjoyed *Shuggie Bain* you'll enjoy this one too. Stuart has again been longlisted for the Booker Prize with *John of John*.
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