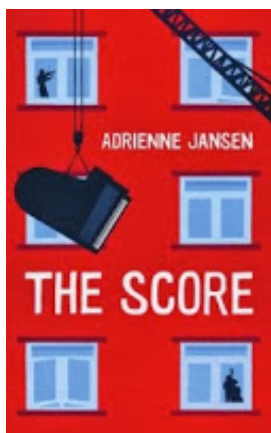


Old Lady Laughing

And Rachel McAlpine writing.

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Writers read: the plus and minus of writing in the present tense



The Score is a delightful novel about a smashed grand piano and its people.

As a reader I was happy to be whisked along by the story of Stefan the desperate piano restorer and his unlikely helpers. Attractions include a vivid bunch of characters in various predicaments; an interesting setting in the community housing in Newtown, Wellington, only a short bus ride from my place; and a friendly, confident style.

As a writer, I started pondering the problems of writing an entire novel in the present tense.

- You can only dive into the past by making a character speak or think about it. You can't take us there.
- The emphasis is likely be on constant activity. It's difficult to step back for a breather, to reflect on events.
- If you are telling events as they happen, it's hard to keep the timeline realistic.
- Your voice must be very engaging to maintain the reader's commitment. A "Hey, look at this!" tone can be tiring.

Adrienne Jansen handles the challenge expertly. The present tense suits the helter-skelter plot and conveys the minute-by-minute confusion of her characters' lives, which are certainly messy. Altogether this is a charming novel, warm and human.

Many a brilliant novel has been written in the present tense, but it's a heck of a lot harder than it looks. So before deciding to use the present tense in fiction, take a deep breath.

***The Score* is published by Escalator Press**

Posted by **Rachel McAlpine** at **12:18 PM**

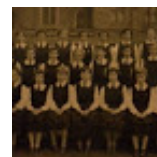
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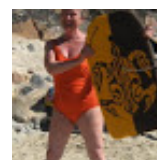
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