



17 Dec 2016

Weekend Herald, Auckland

Section: Times Out • Article type : News Item • Classification : Metro
Audience : 204,549 • Page: 14 • Printed Size: 426.00cm² • Market: NZ
Country: New Zealand • ASR: NZD 4,260 • Words: 524 • Item ID: 701707106
isentia.mediaportal

PMCA licensed copy. You may not further copy, reproduce, record, retransmit, sell, publish, distribute, share or store this information without the prior written consent of the Print Media Copyright Agency. Phone +64-4-4984487 or email info@pmca.co.nz for further information.



Page 1 of 2

Haunting and deeply evocative

Who are these “Kiwi book enthusiasts” who say they’re turned off by New Zealand fiction because they believe it to be dark, grim, depressing, gloomy, over-rated and boring?

I feel for them because if they go past Catherine Chidgey’s fourth and latest novel *The Wish Child*, they’ll miss something very special indeed. This is a meticulously crafted and superbly written novel but it demands careful and considered reading.

In 1939, two children watch as the adults around them become caught up by the (corrupt) mechanisms of power in Nazi Germany. Siegelinde lives in the “affluent ignorance” of middle-class Berlin; Erich is an only child growing up on a farm near Leipzig unaware of his origins.

The book spans World War II; the prose becoming more evocative as the situation becomes ever more desperate. As Hitler’s grand plans begin to collapse — along with the cities around them — the youngsters meet and while their time together is brief, they are forever altered by the time they spend together.

The Wish Child is dark and grim — the subject matter ensures that — but dark and grim can also be provocative, haunting, intelligent and lyrical. This is not fiction-lite for a quick read at the beach but on every page, there are examples of redolent prose.

Take this: “Ursula said to her sister, ‘Do you think it’s possible to fall in love with letters?’

and Emilie said certainly, because what else could she say now that all the men were letters, photographs, certificates; they were little notes cast from a moving train; they were telegrams.”

Indeed, the whole story is unique. How many New Zealand novels are set in World War II

Germany where the spotlight is on the (then) enemy, casting them in a sympathetic and entirely human way? How many more manage to reveal a new (loosely) based-on-fact story and tell it in such a beautiful yet terrifying way?

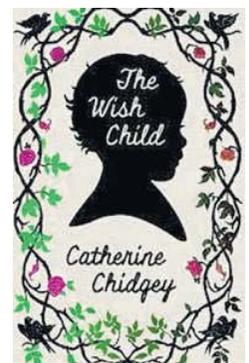
There are many breath-taking moments during the book, none more so than when the mysterious narrator is revealed and threads of the story are neatly — but not tritely or hurriedly — drawn together.

If there’s one criticism it’s that a particularly brutal scene toward the end of the story is

perhaps one horror too many. Promotional material states *The Wish Child* is “a rich meditation on the wreckage caused by corrupt ideology, on the resilience of the human spirit, and on crimes that cannot be undone.” It is, and it will stay with you long after you finish the final page.

Chidgey is one of our most decorated writers; her 1998 debut *In a Fishbone Church* won Best First Book at the New Zealand Book awards and the South-East Asian/South Pacific section of the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize and was longlisted for the Orange Prize. Two further books, *Golden Deeds* and *The Transformation*, saw the accolades and awards continue.

The Wish Child has been longlisted for the Ockham New Zealand 2017 Book Awards and deservedly so.



THE WISH CHILD
By Catherine Chidgey
(Victoria University Press, \$30)
Reviewed by
Dionne Christian



17 Dec 2016
Weekend Herald, Auckland

Section: Times Out • Article type : News Item • Classification : Metro
Audience : 204,549 • Page: 14 • Printed Size: 426.00cm² • Market: NZ
Country: New Zealand • ASR: NZD 4,260 • Words: 524 • Item ID: 701707106
isentia.mediaportal

PMCA licensed copy. You may not further copy, reproduce, record, retransmit, sell, publish, distribute, share or store this information without the prior written consent of the Print Media Copyright Agency. Phone +64-4-4984487 or email info@pmca.co.nz for further information.



Catherine Chidgey is one of our most decorated writers.

Picture / Fiona Pardington