

The Glassmaker by Tracy Chevalier

THIS is a time-travel historical novel with a difference. In an ambitious departure from her previous work, Tracy Chevalier outlines events from the fifteenth century to almost the present day yet her central characters, take Orsola Rosso, for example only ages from teens to her sixties throughout some six centuries.

Crafts and the creative arts are a familiar theme to the author (*A Single Thread*, *Girl with the Pearl Earring* and *Remarkable Creatures*) and this time we are based on the island of Murano in Venice's lagoon—traditionally a centre of the glassmaking industry.

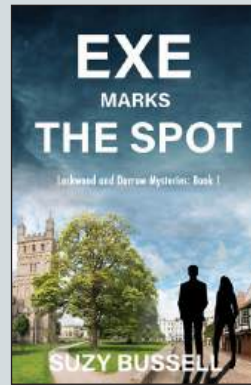
When Orsola's father dies in tragic circumstances, she is forced into helping to support the family business despite the fact that women are not considered suitable for glassmaking. Making glass beads does not require a large furnace however so this is her chosen option and as it transpires a niche market which flourishes and sustains her through the good times and bad.

The way in which the author dips into various periods of history, the Plague, the Age of Enlightenment, the First World War and the Covid pandemic, has been likened to the way in which a smooth pebble might touch the surface as it skims across the lagoon.

There are brief appearances from real life characters, Giacomo Casanova and Luisa Casati, for example, but the rest, (and the Rosso's are a large family) is Chevalier's own creation in what is an impeccably researched novel which unfolds at a pace that suits sunny days in Italy.

The author has admitted that it took a number of revisions and several re-drafts before she was satisfied but it has proved worth the effort, not only for the content of the narrative but also for the way it explores an exciting new way to present story-telling.

Published by Borough Press



Exe Marks The Spot by Suzy Bussell

I'VE made the point in previous reviews about the length of some murder/mystery stories currently on the market which often stretch to near five hundred pages.

So, I was glad to see the point made recently by the Chinese author, Xiaolu Guo who urged writers to, "Write less in order to write stronger."

Someone who has taken a leaf out of this book (no pun intended) is local novelist Suzy Bussell whose range of whodunnits about the Exeter region have all weighed in at about two hundred pages. All very suitable for quick bedtime reads, train or bus journeys and holiday spells on the lounge.

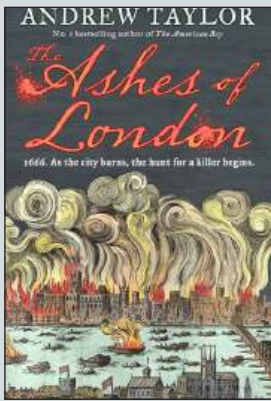
Straightlaced ex-police officer turned private investigator Angus Darrow has a two-edged dilemma—a murder and a disappearance. Being the technophobe that he is, Darrow enlists the help of Charlotte Lockwood, a talented though somewhat unpredictable cyber security expert, all very apposite as Bussell has a background in computing herself. They say that opposites attract and the working relationship between Darrow and Lockwood add credence to that

I particularly liked the way in which the pair not only solve problems but also stumble on clues in their pursuit of the truth and you'll find yourself trying to second guess what evidence is due to be uncovered next.

For local readers you've also got details of many locations in and around Exeter and if you know these places well it will certainly help the mind-pictures that reading a book creates.

For those who enjoy this highly readable mystery, there are others in the series to try like *Exe Ray Vision*, *Exe and the City* and *Trouble with the Exe*.

Published by Snowshoes



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The Ashes of London by Andrew Taylor

NO prizes for guessing in which historical period this narrative is based. As the story begins, we are in England's capital in 1666 and The Great Fire has taken hold of much of the central part of one of the world's largest cities.

As molten lead flows down the streets with St. Paul's Cathedral consumed by the conflagration, two characters make contact and it is this pair who are to touch base often unknowingly during the ensuing story.

One of the protagonists is James Marwood, a government investigator/agent, who is looking into the discovery of two murders with the same modus operandi. The other is Catherine (Cat) Lovett who, escaping from an arranged marriage, is having to work as a servant while she tries to locate her missing father. Adding to her problems is the fact that her father is a Regicide-one of Cromwell's cohorts who signed the death warrant of Charles 1.

Christopher Wren, tasked by the King to redesign and rebuild the parts of London destroyed, makes a cameo appearance and other characters I warmed to were no-nonsense Mistress Noxon, who shelters Cat in her home, and Master Hakesby, the old architect, who is rapidly losing his faculties but nurtures Cat as a willing apprentice.

This book is a slow burn and while the historical detail is fascinating there is a lack of pace to the narrative. Despite the title, the story is more about the aftermath of The Great Fire in London than the actual event itself.

There is evidence of a popular trend here too. Like so many television detective series these days, the actual solving of the crime and the pursuit of the perpetrator becomes almost a side issue as the myriads of personal issues besetting the main characters seems to become the dominant factor.

Published by HarperCollins

Book ahead

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Tickets from: www.bridport-arts.com.*



Steeleye Span, Hardy Theatre, Dorchester, May 17. Tickets from: www.dorchesterarts.org.uk.



*The Magic Numbers, Marine Theatre, Lyme Regis, June 7.
Tickets from: www.marinetheatre.com.*



Rob Beckett, The Lighthouse, Poole, June 20 & 21. Tickets from: www.lighthousepoole.co.uk.