



***Hilary and David* by Laura Solomon. Hong Kong: Proverse (2012). RRP: \$24. Pb, 184pp. ISBN: 9789881993298. Reviewed by Patricia Prime.**

Laura Solomon was Joint-Winner of the inaugural Proverse Prize with her novella, *Instant Messages*. In its turn,

Hilary and David won a Proverse Prize publication prize in 2010.

Hilary and David tells the story of how David, an elderly, lonely, struggling novelist strikes up a friendship with Hilary, a young, solo mother, via Facebook. The two share intimate details of their past and present lives and future dreams and find that they have much in common. One of Hilary's boys has Down's syndrome and the other suffers from ADHD (Attention Deficit Syndrome). David suffers from agoraphobia and is trying to complete a novel before the Christmas deadline. Hilary, while struggling to cope with her two young children is also hoping to complete a degree.

At the beginning of their friendship, Hilary writes to David about her depression and what she is doing to combat it:

The doctor has given me a script for Citalopram. I shan't be on it forever, just to tide me over what seems like a bit of a trough, a low ebb. Another day lying in bed with *Wolf Hall*. Really, she must be a genius to write so well. I suppose you are envious of writers like that, the ones who really make it big, though Hilary Mantel has had her own struggles.

Although the two live on opposite sides of the world (David in London and Hilary in New Zealand), they provide each other with the support and companionship which is lacking from their lives. Each of them shares the secrets of their pasts – David

has had a nervous breakdown and Hilary receives no support from the fathers of her two boys.

Through their series of messages, Hilary and David share their intimate thoughts and feelings with each other and David eventually flies out to New Zealand to spend a holiday with Hilary and her children. After his visit, David writes to show appreciation of his holiday:

Thanks so much for letting me stay – I had the time of my life. What a gorgeous little city you live in; it seems to me that Nelsonians enjoy a great lifestyle, all that fresh air and scenery, so unlike London where everybody is jammed on top of one another like sardines in a can.

Central to the themes of the book is the apparent search for love, a search often entangled with the pursuit of the perfect "other". It's a quest that is, throughout the book measured by loss. The seductive lures of romantic love for Hilary seem to lead only to pain and abandonment and an inability to make any sustained contact with a future partner. . If Solomon's story about Hilary is concerned with "love", it is a love that doesn't offer any version of the happy ending. The tension between a desire for love is a worthy and necessary goal for Hilary and she will eventually find it. David, on the other hand, has had manic depression and his doctor has advised him to cut down on the amount of work he does, but nevertheless he works at his collection of short stories and eventually sends them to Hilary for her to judge. Solomon's tale of love may not lead to happiness in the conventional sense, but it opens the possibility for a romantic resolution for one of the characters and the conclusion of his book and its publication for the other.

In all good fairytales, the resolution of the narrative of romance, the happy ending, is the closing of the book, the end of the story and the muting of voice. Hilary's last message reads in part:

I guess you've died on me, right. I can't think up any other reason you would suddenly go silent. I don't know what to say. You were such an excellent companion and now you've gone.