



The Luminaries

By Eleanor Catton

First published in 2013

Genre & subject

New Zealand fiction

Historical fiction

Synopsis

It is 1866, and Walter Moody has come to make his fortune upon the New Zealand goldfields. On the night of his arrival, he stumbles across a tense gathering of twelve local men, who have met in secret to discuss a series of unsolved crimes. A wealthy man has vanished, a whore has tried to end her life, and an enormous fortune has been discovered in the home of a luckless drunk. Moody is soon drawn into the mystery: a network of fates and fortunes that is as complex and exquisitely patterned as the night sky.

The Luminaries is an extraordinary piece of fiction, which more than fulfils the promise of *The Rehearsal*. Like that novel, it is full of narrative, linguistic and psychological pleasures, and has a fiendishly clever and original structuring device. Written in pitch-perfect historical register, richly evoking a mid-19th century world of shipping and banking and gold rush boom and bust, it is also a ghost story, and a gripping mystery.

Author biography

Eleanor Catton was born in 1985 in Canada and raised in Christchurch, New Zealand. She won the 2007 *Sunday Star-Times* short-story competition, the 2008 Glenn Schaeffer Fellowship to the Iowa Writers' Workshop, the 2008 Louis Johnson New Writers' Bursary and was named as one of Amazon's Rising Stars in 2009. Her debut novel, *The Rehearsal*, won the Betty Trask Prize, the Amazon.ca First Novel Award, the NZSA Hubert Church Best First Book Award for Fiction and was shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award, the Prix Femina literature award, the abroad category of the Prix Médicis, the University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize 2010 and Stonewall's Writer of the Year Award 2011, and longlisted for the Orange Prize 2010. In 2010 she was awarded the New Zealand Arts Foundation New Generation Award.

Discussion starters

- How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it - amused, sad, disturbed, confused, or bored?
- Describe the main characters; their personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.
- Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
- Is the plot engaging? Were you surprised by the plot's complications? Or did you find it predictable, even formulaic?
- Discuss the book's structure. Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did, and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?

- What main ideas and themes that the author explores?
- What passages strike you as insightful, even profound?
- Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
- If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask?
- Has this novel changed you in any way? Has it broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

The goldfinch by Donna Tart

The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri

A tale for the time being by Ruth. L. Ozeki



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