

Volunteer Book Review

By Mary Ferguson

Book Review: **The Pull of the Stars** by Emma Donoghue

About the book: The author is best known for her book **The Room**, which was the New York Times book of the year for 2010. The author has written 16 other novels. **The Pull of the Stars** was copyrighted in 2020, 295 pages. Oddly, the book was written before the Covid 19 pandemic.

Synopsis: The story is set in Dublin, Ireland, in 1918, and is a portrayal of a nurse, Julia Power, working in a quarantine ward during the Great Influenza Pandemic. It covers 3 days of her life as well as the lives of her patients and a young orphan woman who volunteers to assist her. Much of the book takes place in a very small general hospital room with 3 makeshift beds for pregnant women who are stricken with the flu and about to give birth.

What did you like about this book? I loved the writing style. The characters and events appear entirely plausible, gritty and real. The amount of suffering of the women, both patients and nurses, is incredible and their courage and ability to cope amazing. In a unique way, the writer allows the reader to follow the thought process of the nurse, Julia, in decision making, as she cares lovingly and expertly for her patients under horrendous circumstances. The reader becomes a voyeur in her world.

What did you learn from this book? I learned a lot about labor and delivery in Ireland in that era. For example, whiskey, chloroform and morphine were given liberally to the women for sedation and pain. According to the author, influenza greatly increased the risk of miscarriage or stillbirths. It also surprised me to learn that not all Irish citizens supported the new Republic of Ireland. I was introduced to the only historical heroine in the novel, Kathleen Lynn MD, who was also an army officer during the Irish rebellion. In the new Irish government, she is appointed Director of Public Health. When Julia remarks to Dr. Lynn that she does not support the republic and points to 500 lives being lost in the fighting, Dr. Lynn retorts that the Irish could either die from poverty or bullets.

Would you recommend this book? This book was a pleasure to read. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in women's history, The Great Influenza, Irish history or just wants to sit down and read a good book written in a unique style. The book gave me yet another perspective of the 1918 flu and sparked thoughtful comparisons with the present flu pandemic. I am very grateful that I am alive now in 2021 and not in 1918. I plan to learn more about Dr. Kathleen Lynn and the hospital for the poor that she founded in Dublin after the pandemic.

About the Reviewer

Mary Ferguson, RN, and museum volunteer, lives in Hollis, NH with her spouse, a cat and a dog. In addition to a nursing diploma, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of New Hampshire in 1990. Mary worked at Lowell General Hospital for 18 years as a nurse case manager, retiring in 2015. Some of her other passions are hiking, sewing face masks, reading and visiting with my grandchildren on Zoom. She also loves music and is studying the ukulele.

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