

Your communities

Newton book club plots a new course

By Denise Taylor
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Award-winning author Margot Livesey ("Homework," "Criminals") would like to talk with you about "Jane Eyre." She has a lot of questions about Charlotte Brontë's passion-filled coming-of-age classic. Meanwhile, author and Academy Award-nominated screenwriter Tom Perrotta ("Little Children," "Election") has Richard Price's gritty, slice-of-New-York-life novel "Lush Life" in his to-read pile. He figures if he makes plans to discuss it with you on Oct. 13, he'll get it read by then (and so will you).

Newtonville Books of Newton launches its Celebrity Bookclub at 7 p.m. Tuesday. Each session will be hosted by a local author and all readers are welcome. But don't expect the typical author event. Rather than a reading or Q&A about their work, the authors will dig into the meaning and the meat of a book of their choice in an equal discussion with participants. In a sense, the authors will serve as guest club members. The inspiration came from Livesey.

"I've been thinking about the idea for a few years because I visit a number of book clubs, with great pleasure, but always to talk about my own books, which is limiting in certain ways," said Livesey, a Cambridge resident whose most recent novel, "The House on Fortune Street," received this year's L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award.

"But often at the end of those book-club meetings, we'd end up talking about other books they'd read and whether I had suggestions for things they might read, and I was struck by how that was always a pleasant part of the discussion," continued Livesey. "So, I thought surely there must be other authors like me who would love to sit down with a group of interested people and talk about their favorite books rather than their own work."

A casual poll turned up a good deal of interest, she said, and Newtonville Books offered to host and organize a monthly series. Livesey will be the leading the first session on Tuesday, with her book choice, in a sense, decades in the making.

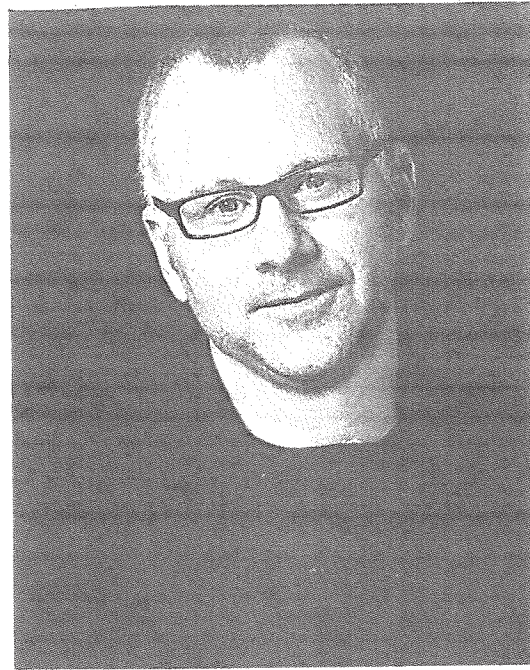
"I fell in love with 'Jane' when I was 10 years old and I've never reversed my position," she said. "I'm particularly eager to talk about it because there are a number of things about the book that are quite complicated and often get overlooked. I suppose because Charlotte Brontë is so in love with Rochester herself, there are all kinds of things she doesn't focus on."

Livesey is curious whether other readers find the nature of the attraction between Jane and Rochester "is more about passion than about sex." She's also looking for opinions on "how Jane Eyre, herself, comes to be this forthright and truthful person that she is."

But she is also hoping for the kind of surprise insights and questions that a good book club can provide.



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CELEBRITY BOOKCLUB

"Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë with Margot Livesey (left), 7 p.m. Tuesday, Newtonville Books, 296 Walnut St., Newtonville. Also: "Lush Life" by Richard Price with Tom Perrotta (right), 7 p.m. Oct. 13. Free. No RSVP needed. 617-244-6619, www.newtonvillebooks.com.

literary fiction was such that many people were reading the same books at the same time and were able to basically keep up with what was being published and have a kind of ongoing conversation. Everyone was reading, say, 'Lord of the Flies' or 'The Golden Notebook,'" said Livesey.

"But since that time," she said, "the number of books being published has grown enormously, and . . . we often find ourselves reading books in isolation."

"We absolutely love the book we're reading, but unlike a film, say, you don't have anyone to talk to about it. So one of the great values of book clubs is having that secondary pleasure of reading, which is talking to other interested readers about books you care about and have opinions about."

Perrotta pointed out yet another benefit: motivation.

"I'm a big fan of Richard Price's previous work. He writes big novels that are page turners, but they're also engaged in social reality," he said. "But really, there's a selfish reason in why I chose his book. I bought it a while ago and it's a big book and it's just been sitting on my table."

"When Newtonville Books asked what I'd like to do for the book club, I just kind of glanced at my table and said, 'I've gotta read "Lush Life."'"

"I think other readers will enjoy it, but it's also a good excuse for me to crack open a book that I've been meaning to read. And by the way, I was amused

to see that it's on President Obama's summer reading list."

Like Livesey, Perrotta is hoping for a true group discussion, not an author performance.

"I hope this will be a much more democratic experience," he said. "For me, the way I've always thought about book clubs is that they're a kind of continuing education. They're a way to recreate a friendly version of a good college class."

Both Perrotta and Livesey will be taking a break from writing to host their club sessions.

"There's a sort of rhythm to a writer's life where you're in the very private period where you're writing. Then, when you're in that publication and promotion mode, you're meeting a lot of people and doing a lot of events and traveling. And I've been in the quiet mode for the past year," said Perrotta. "So one of the reasons I was eager to do this is that I haven't been out much in a literary way. So it's a break from the solitude of writing."

The owners of Newtonville Books, Mary Cotton and Jaime Clarke, are busy lining up more authors for the monthly series. And Cotton has been preparing for the first event.

"I've been reading 'Jane Eyre' again just because I'm so excited to see how this club works," she said. "We're getting a lot of interest. People are really excited about it. It's just such a novelty to hear an author they've read discuss a book by another author."

BEST BETS

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EVENTS

Belmont: Frances Moore Lappé, author of the best-seller "Diet for a Small Planet," will explore the ways our food choices are a powerful tool for affecting our bodies, the earth, and the people who tend it Wednesday, 7 p.m., in Town Hall's auditorium, 455 Concord Ave. The free event will launch this year's One Book One Belmont program. 617-993-2600, www.belmont.lib.ma.us.

FILM

Natick: Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck star in "Roman Holiday," the 1953 scooter movie classic about a modern-day princess who rebels against her royal obligations, being shown Tuesday, 7 p.m., at Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central St. Free. 508-647-6520, www.morseinstitute.org.

POETRY

Newton: The opening event of this year's Newton Free Library poetry series will feature readings by Molly Lynn Watt, Elizabeth Quinlan and Edie Aronowitz Mueller, as well as an open microphone session as time allows, Tuesday, 7 p.m. at the library, 330 Homer St. Free. 617-796-1360, www.newtonfree-library.net.

THEATER

Wellesley: Wellesley Summer Theatre is presenting "The Guys." This play tells the story of Nick and Joan after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, two people who under normal circumstances never would have met and who jump the well-defined tracks of their own lives. In doing so, they learn about themselves and the healing power of human connection. Through Sept. 13 at Schneider Center Theatre, Wellesley College, 106 Central St. 781-283-2000, www.wellesleysummertheatre.com.

Event organizers: Submit items directly to www.boston.com/addevent.