



The Ladies of Missalonghi

Colleen McCullough

I had read several Colleen McCullough books but never *The Ladies of Missalonghi* until a reader (thanks Marg!) sent me a copy last year when, coincidentally, I was trying to highlight Australian women writers. This is a lovely book, light as a feather in both size and content, and thoroughly entertaining despite a fair bit of cliché and yes, a goodly dollop of sexism. However it's set in the early 1900s so the latter may have been difficult to avoid. Missy is the best type of heroine, who has much more going for her than she ever quite realises. Set in country Australia, *The Ladies of Missalonghi* is a book where the meek inherit the earth, and then reign in triumph.

Another reason I chose this book as a starter is that it's a terrific example of a light, fluffy read by an author capable of much weightier tomes. It reads as if McCullough is taking time out, relaxing, and as such she invites us to do exactly the same. It is also the type of book that I suspect V.S. Naipaul et al would dismiss as sentimental 'feminine tosh'. Yet the house of books is an ever-expanding mansion, and there is room for all. V.S. Naipaul and his ilk may commandeer the suite up towards the front and then restrict entry, but by doing so they limit themselves, and their view. Meanwhile I am flitting from room to room, upstairs, downstairs, depending on mood; from those with frilly, chintz curtains to those with secret stairwells to those that house books like *The Ladies of Missalonghi*, which are light and airy and simply good fun.

