

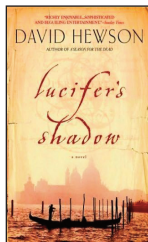
# books

## THE CEMETERY OF SECRETS

David Hewson

(Pan Macmillan, £6.99)

British crime writer Hewson exploits his love of Venice with this novel that seems to be written with a cinematographer's eye for rich detail. The story contains two parallel narratives, one contemporary



and one in 1733. Within this, Hewson sets his young, naive protagonist, Daniel Forster, in a glamorous modern world of intrigue and murder mystery.

As a young academic visiting the city to catalogue a private collector's library, Forster is soon drawn into the eccentric family's world and its many secrets. His experiences echo those of a printer's apprentice in 18th century Venice who was also drawn into a web of duplicity, jealousy and murder revolving around a brilliant orchestral

work created by an anonymous female composer. Hewson seems to enjoy exploring the heyday of Vivaldi much more than the modern twist and revels in the haughty tone and flowery language of the period. But such linguistic affectation and baroque descriptions only make the book seem rich in its own self-importance, leaving the plot to plod along with little spark.

LIANNE STEINBERG

## Author Q&A: Cynthia McLeod

### THE FREE NEGRESS ELIZABETH

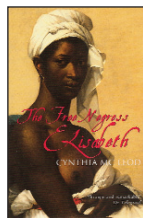
(Arcadia Books, £11.99)

Elisabeth Samson was an 18th century black Surinamese

woman worth millions of dollars – a puzzle to historians in itself. Then she sought the forbidden: to marry a white man. The daughter of the first president of Suriname after the Dutch left, McLeod has produced an intensively researched fictionalised account that attempts to answer why.

You write of Elisabeth Samson's "daring and courage, intelligence and culture" yet cannot "argue that she should be viewed as a role model for contemporary Surinamese women". Why?

I consider Elisabeth a role model for many young black females of today, because she demonstrated that if you want to achieve something, you can do it, if you take your life in your own hands. But for young, modern, black people who are used to thinking of blacks in the past as "victims", it's often difficult to understand that a black woman could have slaves, be rich and not use all her money to aid her people. That said, I do believe that she did what she could according to what was possible at the time: Elisabeth lived in 1750, the peak of slavery, and she gave poor, black people good food, clothes and housing. Freedom was out of the question, because if a slave was set free, he needed a guardian who could guarantee the freed person would never be poor and needy. Every poor



free black person became a slave again.

**Why were historians so reluctant to accept that Samson's immense wealth had not been inherited from a white man?**

I don't think that the historians were reluctant to accept that Elisabeth had made her money herself; it just didn't occur to them that a black woman could be rich by herself. In those days black people were traditionally slaves.

**How did Dutch colonialism differ from, say, British colonialism, in Samson's time and more recently?**

The Dutch had a worldwide reputation as the most terrible and cruel slaveholders. But that is of course a stereotype. The circumstances in the different colonies varied. In the British colonies the physical and the psychic distance between the white master and the servants was large. In Suriname there were far more white men than white women, and that's why white men often had children with black women. A "coloured" race grew quickly and if the white father had freed his children, those children had rights and could do a lot. But the Dutch had

so many rules to keep the slaves in their places, that it's no wonder that they got this reputation. Slaves could never become Christians. They were not allowed to learn Dutch, to wear shoes, European clothes or even have nice coffins.

**How did Suriname's independence influence your writing?**

For many, the independence of Suriname came right out of the blue. Of course independence is a beautiful thing but in Suriname's case there were many people – and I was one of them – who thought it should have been prepared longer in advance and more thoroughly. It was simply irresponsible to hasten it so much, and it was clear that Holland wanted to get rid of us. Fortunately, independence itself came without any violence, but in five years there was a putsch after which many people had to flee the country – including my father, and me. I have mixed feelings about the independence of Suriname.

**Why are you championing Dutch writers?**

The Go Dutch! project, of which I am a part, is a campaign started by the Dutch Foundation for Production and Translation of Literature based in Amsterdam and supported by Arts Council England. Its remit is to encourage more people around the world to engage with Dutch authors and their writing. They invited me to be one of the promoted authors, which I thought would be a fun experience. As part of the campaign I get to come to the UK and talk about my work.

KEVIN GOPAL



## Off the shelf

### MASTERING THE ART OF FRENCH COOKING

Julia Child, Louise Bertolle, Simone Beck

(Penguin, £12.99)

Over 1,000 recipes to be strictly followed, not lifestyles to be aspired to, are the stuff of this classic cookbook, first published in 1961. The three authors compiled the book while running a cookery school in Paris, and inspired the film *Julie and Julia*, in which Julie Powell tried to cook a recipe a day.

KEVIN GOPAL

### THE VOWS OF SILENCE

Susan Hill

(Vintage, £7.99)

This eerie, suspenseful crime novel is designed to be a page-turner. In the fictional town of Lafferton, there is a murderer on the loose and it is up to the chief detective to save the day. Fans of Dean Koontz will love this but the familiar plot and generic style will put other readers off.

### EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED: THE POWER OF MUSIC

Daniel Barenboim

(Phoenix, £8.99)

The musician turned peace activist provides us with an intriguing philosophical insight into his remarkable mind. Barenboim writes articulately of his belief in the interconnectivity of life and art as well as expressing his view that music has a role to play in achieving peace in the Middle East.

### WIVES V GIRLFRIENDS

Katie Agnew

(Orion, £6.99)

A must read for all aspiring WAGs, the novel follows the lives of four women, detailing their numerous relationship troubles on the path to everlasting happiness. From botox to pink weddings, nothing superficial is left uncovered.

MISCHA WILMERS