



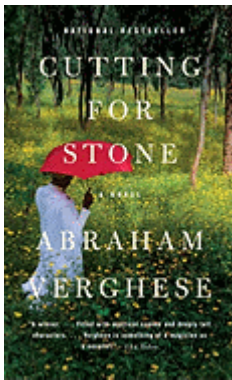
Boswell and Books

Thursday, December 31, 2009

Playing Catchup in Paperback on Abraham Verghese's *Cutting for Stone*

Last month I wrote about books that we had our eye on all year and sold quite well. I remember at one point we had stopped selling Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, and Jason put it on our short story table and it started to sell again.

I was inspired a bit by Lynn Neary's best books for book clubs piece on NPR. Today's post is a mea culpa, a book that I sort of dropped the ball on. It was Abraham Verghese's *Cutting for Stone*. It's not that we didn't do well with it. The book came out in February and we wound up selling 9 copies in hardcover--that's including the sales at the Downer Avenue Schwartz Bookshop.



We continued to sell it until July when we sold our last copy and let it go out of stock. Now generally this is something we have to do all the time. With new books coming in all the time, our restockers (generally, Jason, Amie, Conrad and myself) do not reorder some books in order to keep our inventory in line.

It doesn't matter who didn't reorder the book because I always could have ordered a copy in again. We let it go, and why not? I was a bit lukewarm on the book when it came out, and that was our only read.

There were some great reviews out there, but it's one of those things where you just don't know what the rest of the fall will look like when you're in the summer. (Note on the blog--I don't normally dish books in print as I'm not a reviewer, and I wasn't exactly complaining but sort of indicating why every book is not right for every customer, and in a sense, I'm a customer too. I thought the book had enough momentum not to need me, and there comes a point in most really long books where I get mad at the length. It happened in both *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* as well.)

The story that got my attention was that our friends at Bookstall in Winnetka sold over 500 copies. And I'm pretty sure that Sue at Lake Forest sold a ton as well--I saw it in her top ten of sales the week before Christmas. There's a lot of people who passionately love this book and I pride myself on knowing about these passions and matching them to our customers' tastes.

And it turns out that there weren't many old-fashioned epic novels that were worth handselling. The Verghese novel settled on me better, now that expectations were dampened. The Ethiopian setting was exotic and vividly drawn. It's a picture of the Indian diaspora. A big story, with a lot of emotion put into the effort. An intricate structure. The story was heroic and perfect for a doctor. I have lots of doctor customers--I'm three blocks from a hospital! "What was I doing," I thought about 3 days before Christmas? "This is a good book for a lot of people, and I wish I had some right now!" That's a quote from December 22nd, when it was too late to do anything.

That's the beauty of bookselling--most of the time we get a second chance, at least before publishing involves beaming hypertext into our brains. First hardcover, now paperback. And this time, I know who should read the book and I'm excited about selling it.

The paperback's on sale January 26th, but now's the time to add it to your book club reading list. Lynn Neary told you to.

Posted by Daniel Goldin at 8:18 AM