

## Granny's Good Reads with Sonia Lee – Gleebooks Gleaner – Vol 25 No 9 October 2018

Nowadays letters have largely been supplanted by emails and text messages, but folk of my vintage remember how the heart beat faster when a letter from the distant beloved landed in the letter box. Deborah Jordan has done readers a favour by publishing *Loving Words: Letters of Nettie and Vance Palmer, 1909-1914* in a beautifully produced volume from publishers Brandl and Schlesinger. If ever there was a marriage of true minds it was the one between this pair of colonial intellectuals. They met in 1909 when Nettie was finishing a classics degree at Melbourne University and the two corresponded for eighteen months, getting to know each other, their taste in books, their politics (distinctly left) and their general outlook on life. In the second half of 1909 Vance took a position as tutor at Abbieglassie, a property in south-western Queensland, where he gathered much of the material on station life and the treatment of aborigines which he later used in his novels. In March 1910 Nettie went, well-chaperoned, to London, where Vance joined her in August, which gave the couple time to get to know each other in person. While Vance worked hard to establish himself as an investigative journalist, Nettie studied for the International Diploma in Phonetics, so was often in Germany and France. Their letters are full of love and longing. "Every word you write is like a kiss", he tells her and she replies with exquisite little love poems. Until they married in May 1914 they were together for only a few months. Like Robert and Elizabeth Browning, they carried on most of their courtship by letter. Their letters, says Jordan, make up one of the most significant courtship correspondences that we have. She provides helpful footnotes, biographical details and linking passages and her foreword is enlightening. This is my favourite book of the year.