

What we've been reading



Nicola Bell

In the past six months I have dipped in and out of a few different book genres. Like most other Australians, I read (and loved) *The Rosie Result* by Graeme Simsion and *Nine Perfect Strangers* by Liane Moriarty. In the way of non-fiction, I enjoyed listening to the audiobook versions of *Boys Will Be Boys* by Clementine Ford and *Gut* by Giulia Enders. I did find I had to pause *Gut* whenever my car window was wound down (lest any passers-by be offended by the quite graphic descriptions of bodily functions). I also read a number of autobiographical books, including *How Not to Be a Boy* by Robert Webb, *The Land Before Avocado* by Richard Glover, *Peggy and Me* by Miranda Hart, and *My Squirrel Days* by Ellie Kemper. All were brilliant. The only book I've struggled to get through lately is the Man Booker Prize 2018 winner *Milkman*, by Anna Burns. It's been shelved for now, but I haven't lost hope; I might pick it up again when I'm in a more patient headspace.



Alison Madelaine

My professional reading included Greg Ashman's *The Truth About Teaching: An Evidence-Informed Guide for New Teachers*, but I won't say too much about that as there is a review in this issue of *Nomanis*! In my spare time, I mostly read fiction, but have read a few non-fiction titles recently: *Any Ordinary Day* by Leigh Sales, *The Land Before Avocado* by Richard Glover (the funniest book I've read in a very long time) and *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* by the late Michelle McNamara. Michelle McNamara was a true crime writer trying to solve the case of the Golden State Killer. Her book was released posthumously in February 2018 (two years after her death), and just two months later, police arrested a suspect. His trial is yet to take place. Although I did finish them, I was underwhelmed by *The Natural Way of Things* by Charlotte Wood, *The Party* by Elizabeth Day, and *Bridge of Clay* by Marcus Zusak (I loved *The Book Thief*, so I had expectations). One of my favourite books of this year has been *The Cellist of Sarajevo* by Christian Galloway, originally published in 2008. This is an account of the siege of Sarajevo of the 1990s, from the perspective of three different characters. My other favourite was *Boy Swallows Universe* by Trent Dalton and I can see why Dalton cleaned up at the recent Australian Book Industry Awards. Finally, I read two very different novels about child abduction cases: *The Nowhere Child* by Christian White and *The Ones You Trust* by Caroline Overington. Both were full of twists and were definitely page-turners, but don't read *The Ones You Trust* if you have any children currently attending daycare.



Meree Reynolds

Since the last issue of *Nomanis* I have read a few great books and have also spent many hours searching for and reading items related to family and local history. In the weeks leading up to Anzac Day I read war service records, books and newspaper articles about family members (three great-uncles) who served in World War I. This made Anzac Day more relevant for me and enabled me to share information with curious and enquiring relatives. Books that I thoroughly enjoyed were *The Girl on the Page* by John Purcell, *The Punishment She Deserves* by Elizabeth George and *We Were the Lucky Ones* by Georgia Hunter. Currently I am reading *The Rosie Result* by Graeme Simsion. I have read *The Rosie Project*, the first book in this series that deals with autism in a humorous, yet thought-provoking, way. Simsion's new book, the third in the series, continues with the focus on family and autism, highlighting issues related to diagnosis, labelling and the education of young people with autism. It seems odd, though, that I can't read too much of it at a time, perhaps as it evokes memories of issues that arose when I worked as a special educator in the past.



Kevin Wheldall

For a while, I stopped reading *Barkskins*, a novel by Annie Proulx, daunted by the 700-plus pages, but resumed it later; and I'm glad I did. It is a powerful historical reflection on the ecological destruction caused by indiscriminate logging in Canada in times past.

Gratitude by Oliver Sachs was published posthumously. This (very) short but beautifully produced little book comprises four essays written in the last months of his life. But one cannot escape the feeling that the publishers are cashing in on what is a very slight work.

I have begun to read (or re-read) Anthony Powell's much acclaimed *A Dance to the Music of Time* series of 12 novels. It covers the period from 1905 when the narrator Nicholas Jenkins was born, to the late sixties. I have read the first three volumes so far – *A Question of Upbringing*, *A Buyer's Market*, and *The Acceptance World*. In a similar but more contemporary vein, I have also enjoyed enormously the five Patrick Melrose novels by Edward St Aubin.



The latest instalment of Tudor history from C. J. Sansom, *Tombland*, was as brilliant as ever. His novels, in my view, are superior to Hilary Mantel's admittedly excellent books covering the same period, Man Booker notwithstanding. I was also greatly impressed by Sebastian Faulks' *Paris Echo*, set in Paris during World War II and dealing with the sensitive topic of collaboration, and Willian Boyd's *Love is Blind*; quite a strange, sad book.

I was determined to read Stephen Hawking's *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* which I was given for Christmas. I think I even understood parts of it, at least for a short while. But I discarded *God is Good for You* by Greg Sheridan after a few chapters finding it both lame and unconvincing. Argument by assertion is not to my taste.

Fans of *The Rosie Project* and its sequel *The Rosie Effect*, by Graeme Simsion, will be delighted by the publication of the third and, apparently, final instalment in the Rosie trilogy, *The Rosie Result*. Those late to the series are in for a treat, as our hero, Don Tillman, faces life 'on the spectrum'. But save yourself valuable hours of reading time by skipping Alexander McCall Smith's *The Department of Sensitive Crimes* and Marcus Zusak's *Bridge of Clay*, both of which I found unsatisfying, not to say tedious.



Robyn Wheldall

In the last few months I have enjoyed (and been informed by) *Sapiens ... A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari. I think this is one of those books that everyone should read. It telescopes us out from the preoccupations of the present day to see our place in the vast history of humankind. It's like a literary version of gazing into a clear night sky in the country. A fascinating read.

I have also enjoyed *Elizabeth Macarthur: A Life at the Edge of the World* by Michelle Scott Tucker that details the life of this impressive woman in the early years of the British colony in New South Wales. More typically described as being the wife of John Macarthur, who has been historically credited with the establishment of the wool industry in Australia, it is encouraging to see the incredible fortitude of this early colonial figure brought into the light; one of the untold stories of the women of early colonial Australia.

Speaking of fortitude, well known and highly acclaimed journalist Leigh Sales has chronicled the experiences and resilience of contemporary Australians in *Any Ordinary Day*. This was in response to her own series of traumas that occurred within a short period of time. Sales had had a life that had been pretty untouched by personal trauma until events turned otherwise for her in her mid-life. This generated a fear of what life can bring and set her on a course of exploring people's responses in the face of adversity. This book can be quite harrowing so the timing of reading this one might be something to consider.