

Some of our Book Reviews - June 2021

***Death Leaves the Station* - Alexander Thorpe**

A corpse vanishes from the bush near 'Halfwell Station' W.A. (1927).

The police are called in to investigate. A search ensues involving interesting characters.

This is a murder mystery that is an easy read, styled (a little tongue-in-cheek) similarly to Agatha Christie with well-drawn characters and a summation gathering.

- Idiosyncratic style of language
- Good characterization
- Interesting plot development

A good interesting debut novel.

Paints an early social history of W.A. too.

My favourite phrases:

- *Sickly simulacrum of sleep*
- *Flight from Cinderella Serfdom*

Pauline

***Our New Normal* - Colleen Faulkner**

Cover: Liv Ridgely prides herself on being the responsible wrangler of all things family: stay at home mum, caretaker of elderly parents, supporter of husband Oscar's career, saviour of her wayward sister. As the family fractures in every direction, past resentments and pain come tumbling out. After years of putting others first, Liv wonders if she can do what's best for her daughter, her parents, and her marriage - while still being true to herself.

Very moving. Had a few tears by the end.

Jill

***Skylarking* by Kate Mildenhall**

In the late 1800s, two girls grow up at a remote lighthouse in south-east Victoria. Their relationships, different natures, and aspirations form a story with tragic outcomes.

It is based on a true story of one of the lighthouses near Jervis Bay.

Beautifully written and descriptive.

The reader is transported to a world of isolation and of complex relationships. We become involved in the lives of the heroine and of her small community.

I really enjoyed this trip into the past and a different world - human nature never changes.

Pam

***The Scholar* by Dervla McTiernan**

The involved solving of two murders influenced by ego, power and money.

Excellent read. Interest is kept throughout the book – intrigue.

For those who like crime / investigative books, it is filled with human elements and relationships.

An easy read, with interesting Irish background.

Marianne

***The River* by Chris Hammer**

A non-fiction account (2009) of the state of the Murray-Darling River system. An exploration of its origins, history and current usage, told from first-hand exploration and observation, and interviews with many stake-holders.

Brilliantly researched and unbiased. Hammer gets down to the basics – the REAL condition of the Murray-Darling system and the reasons behind its current parlous state.

Anyone who cares about water in this country should read this book.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book – a lot I already knew or suspected, but much more to discover and think about.

Pam

***The Power of Suffering* by David Roland**

*The Power of Suffering* is psychologist David Roland's personal investigation into the nature of human suffering.

How can we grow from this? The lived experience of eleven incredible people. Anyone who has experienced tragedy or loss in some way would benefit from this book.

Easy read and inspirational in how these people have had a negative experience and turned it into a positive.

Cherry

***The Last Voyage of Mrs. Henry Parker* by Joanna Nell**

Mrs. Henry Parker has spent her life living on board cruise ships since her marriage to Dr. Henry Parker, a ship's doctor. She spends her last cruise looking for Henry.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and now want to read the author's first book, *The Single Ladies of Jacaranda Retirement Village*".

The story is funny, happy and sad. The author has a good insight into the effects of dementia, and also into the workings of a ship's doctor – as she was one.

Judy

***Duty Nobly Done* by Adam Holloway**

Eleven extended family members served in the AIF in the Great War. Brothers and cousins joined to serve country and contribute to the war effort. The author researches each man, his story, and the final outcome. The story is told chronologically.

An excellent read for those interested in Australia's involvement in the First World War. The book investigates what happened in daily life rather than the broader political and military machinations – the realities of daily life for an Australian soldier – and the book does not shy away from the grim.

Read it. Have some tissues handy. The book took six years to write!

Lisa

***All Our Shimmering Skies* by Trent Dalton**

Twelve-year-old gravedigger girl Molly Hook's family has been suffering under the curse of Longcoat Bob, turning their hearts to stone as punishment for her grandfather's greed. When Darwin is destroyed by Japanese bombers in the midst of the Second World War, she sets off on a journey into the Australian wilderness to find Longcoat Bob and convince him to lift the curse. With little more in her swag than a map-bearing foraging pan, and her trusty shovel Bert, Molly encounters heroes and monsters, beasts and beauties, and ultimately discovers that all that glimmers is not gold and that a heart of stone is more valuable than it seems.

An epic hero's journey, wrapped up in an Australian folk tale, on the backdrop of the ever-changing magical landscape of the Top End under an all-knowing sky, Trent Dalton's triumphant second novel is a wonder to behold. The unlikely ensemble of characters - a motherless gravedigger girl, an actress with her sights on Hollywood, and a Japanese fighter pilot- will at once steal and break your heart. Molly's story is about family - those you lose, those you choose, and those who are always in your heart.

Caitlin

***The Umbrian Supper Club* by Marlena de Blasi**

The author and four Italian women meet on Thursdays to cook supper. They each have a story to tell of their lives.

Beautiful book. The essence of Italy, her people and her cuisine (real cuisine, not restaurant fare).

If you love Italy, Italians, their ways and their food, you will love this book.

If you love writing which will touch the heart, you will love this book.

Marlena has written previously first-hand of her arrival (from the U.S.) and meeting the man she marries. I'm not sure if this book is fact or fiction.

Binnie

*Ed: This is a non-fiction account*

***The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse* by Charlie Mackesy**

Illustrations along the lines of Winnie the Pooh tell the story of a lonely boy, a mole that likes cake, a quiet fox in depression, and a strong but imperfect horse. The story explores their friendship, companionship, and views on life.

It's blissful and gives me a childlike joy I cannot describe. An absolutely amazing book! Makes you smile, laugh, ponder, with childlike wonder. Makes you want to dance. It's like a soothing balm to the soul and to the heart. Perfect antidote for grief.

It is the perfect easy read, somewhere between art, comic and self-help book. It makes the perfect gift, no matter the circumstances or age. I would love prints of these illustrations on my walls.

I would highly recommend reading this on a beach, with an ice-cream and some tissues. It allowed me to grieve in a way that was beautiful and joyful.

Sarah-Jane

***Lost Connections* by Johann Hari**

In a world that has seen an exponential increase in the diagnosis of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, author Johann Hari visits with a myriad of social scientists across the globe to delve into contributing factors. Rather than focussing purely on the biological, the chemical imbalance applicable (wholly or in part) to some depressive episodes, Hari investigates other lifestyle factors that impact on this area of mental health: lifestyle factors that have changed over decades and centuries, and not always in a way that has been positive for us as a race, or for our mental health.

*'But if we allow the biology to become the whole picture, what we're implicitly saying to people is "your pain doesn't mean anything: it's just a malfunction; just a glitch in a computer program; just a wiring problem in your head". But your depression is not a malfunction: it's a signal.'* – Johann Hari, "This could be why you're depressed or anxious", (TED talk.)

From connections with nature, community, a hopeful future, and purpose, Hari explores how these 'lost connections' can cause isolation, loneliness, and even depression; and helps us reflect on how we can focus on incorporating these basic connective building blocks into our busy, modern lives. A refreshing and interesting look at our mental health, how depressive episodes are an entirely normal human experience, and how we can build or re-build lost connections in our life to help stave off and bring us through those times of loneliness, anxiety, or depression.

Kristi

***The Silent Wife* by Karin Slaughter**

Familiar law and FBI characters chase an elusive serial killer and rapist over 10 years and several Georgia counties.

Gripping story-line, maybe spoiled by excessive description and exhaustive research – not a bad thing but slows the reader down; some unnecessary.

Heavy going at times with two alternating timelines and the background of key characters' relationships.

Pam