

Book Reviews - September 2021

***The Ruin* by Dervla McTiernan**

A family with old secrets, two deaths 20 years apart.

Set in Ireland, the story involves Detective Cormac Reilly and his investigations surrounding this family.

Novels that have a big focus on police, "the Garda", are probably not my thing but nonetheless the author kept me going back for more.

If you like mystery and detective work, then you should enjoy this book.

It won 2019 Ned Kelly Award for Best First Crime Fiction.

I loved the Irish accents on the audiobook! The written format had too many long paragraphs, so the audiobook was my preferred choice.

Debbie

***On Chapel Sands* by Laura Cumming**

(Non-Fiction 2020)

A daughter writes about her mother's kidnapping as a child.

It was a hard book to get into, but I was glad I persevered and finished it.

Parallels between artwork and human emotions are used though the book.

Anon

***Something In The Water* by Catherine Steadman**

A newly married couple discover a suspicious bag on their island honeymoon. This book explores how they deal with the windfall. Suspensions, tension and drama all follow.

Enjoyable novel set in the modern day. Not a classic but entertaining for most of the story. The main female character is somewhat insipid on occasions, but generally believable.

Well written and suspenseful. Study of relationships and how we, as ordinary people, may react in abnormal situations.

Will seek out other books by this author.

Terri-Ann

***The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides**

Alicia, a painter, after killing her husband, doesn't speak another word. She is "in care" at a mental health facility. A criminal psychologist tries to get her to talk.

It did keep my interest the whole way through. In fact, the whole book was a page-turner.

Although the outcome was a bit questionable given the build-up.

If you like a mystery / crime novel, you should like this book.

A pretty good effort for a debut novel.

Debbie

***Sacred Hearts* by Sarah Dunant**

Wealthy families usually send their second daughter to a convent. In this book, it is the first daughter, and she didn't want to be there, causing havoc.

I did enjoy the book, but in parts it gets bogged down. When you are about to give up, it gets interesting. This happens mainly in the first half.

Someone would enjoy this book if interested in ancient medicine, plants etc. Or if there was an interest in how life was run in the late 1500s in Italy.

Lesley

***Taking Tom Murray Home* by Tim Slee**

Dairy farmer Tom Murray burns his house down in protest to the bank foreclosing on his property – and he dies in the fire.

His wife and community takes his remains to Melbourne for burial in a long, slow journey to highlight what is happening to dairy farmers around the country.

I didn't think I would enjoy this book, but it captured my interest.

It is set in Australia, written by an Australian author, about an issue that is very much in the limelight. (No!! Not Covid.) You'll just have to read it and find out!!

It's funny, but real, in a way that shows what people power can achieve.

Loved the twist at the end. Totally unexpected.

Raelene

***Barrenjoey Road* by Neil Mercer & Ruby Jones**

This book details the disappearance of Trudie Adams (*in 1978 ed*), and the abductions of several girls on the Northern Beaches of Sydney N.S.W.

It outlines the corruption and mishandling of the police in N.S.W. at the time into the disappearance. Well researched by the authors.

It is a good insight into our past.

I only hope the lessons have been learnt, and that no family would have to go through what the Adams family did because of incompetent police.

Anon

***Honeybee* by Craig Silvey**

14 year old Sam Watson and Vic, a much older man, meet by chance when both are contemplating suicide. They change each other's lives for the better.

An extremely powerful and meaningful book.

The development of the story line is masterly and inspirational. At the core is Sam's finding out who he really is, and finding the support of good friends along the way.

An important book that deals with gender identity, family violence, intergenerational trauma, hope and love.

Ruth

### ***The Labyrinth* by Amanda Lohrey**

The narrator, Erica Marsden, is accepting of her unplanned and often traumatic life but haunted by the disappearance of her mother, Irene, when she was eleven and then later learning of her death.

She is also haunted by the imprisonment of her son, Daniel, and his inability to love her because of his fixation with his father, Gabriel Priest, who had decamped from their Redfern squat when their son was young. The traumatic fortnightly visits to see Daniel in prison affected her badly.

She and her younger brother, Axel, lived with their doctor father on-site at a mental institution where there had been a labyrinth. After a dream about building one, Erica, who was rudderless after her son's imprisonment, sold her city unit and bought an old neglected shack on the beach near a small village, Garra Narra.

This book, winner of the 2021 Miles Franklin award, is well written and reads easily. There are the undertones of the trauma and lack of motivation that Erica faced. She spent much of her time in the shack making or finding drawings of labyrinths but not getting the drive to build her own, although she had a suitable wide sandy space on her property.

Each labyrinth pattern is made up of two essential elements, the meander and the spiral, with the latter the primal image of creation.

The people living in the vicinity of the shack are well drawn, for example Linnie and Ray Gittus. Ray had been sitting on his verandah suffering from depression. But when the labyrinth started to be built, he came and helped and took on a new lease of life.

Erica was able to start building the labyrinth when she met Jurko, a damaged illegal refugee from the Balkans. He was a stone mason with very definite ideas and strong likes and dislikes. They were eventually able to come to an agreement about the pattern and the labyrinth was nearly finished when Jurko had to flee the police and leave.

The labyrinth was built for her mother, Irene, with the opening curves the nub of the cervix, the outer walls represented the lining of the womb and at the centre a fire pit.

Erica's father, Ken, had said that building something can cure many ills and this proved true. The novel ends on a hopeful note. Daniel has started drawing again and has been moved to the library run by a charismatic imprisoned doctor who was interested in the books he read. He had found his father figure. Erica contacted her brother, which she had previously refused to do, and she had found peace.

Diane

### ***Tuscan Rose* by Belinda Alexandra**

An epic story set in a broad event-filled time in history, yet about the heart and beauty of one individual person.

The author herself says it best at the end of this book:

*I hope that you will take away with you and share the core message of the novel - that peace on a world scale is determined by each of us creating peace in our own hearts and minds first, and doing our best to live in harmony with the people and other living creatures around us. When we can each do that, I believe together we will then become a force powerful enough to create positive change on a scale never before conceived.*

Camille

***Early Morning Riser* by Katherine Heiny**

This is the story of Jane & Duncan's relationship over the course of 17 years, and how their lives are permanently intertwined with others after a car accident.

I enjoyed this novel – the characters are interesting and different.

This is a witty and funny book, whilst also being tender and joyful. A simple delightful read.

Lois

***The Rose Daughter* by Maria Lewis**

A girl with special gifts is born in prison, escapes age 14, and spends the rest of her life making sure she will never have to return, until....

Enjoyable, readable, original. Interesting story. The characters came to life, were plausible and the story was meaningful.

An especially good book for young women or teenage girls; it tells of a young girl/woman overcoming adversity.

I hope there's a sequel.

Ruth

***Scrublands* by Chris Hammer**

Set in a small drought-stricken desolate town in Australia – a priest opens fire on his congregation. The book transports you out to the scrub where you can almost taste the dust and dirt. A town full of secrets.

A great debut novel by Chris Hammer. The main character, Martin, a journo, was quite the thinker. With so many twists and turns, he needed to be on his toes.

This is a great mystery novel. If you loved the settings in Jane Harper's books, I think you will like this one too.

Winner – UK Crime Writers' Association, Blood Dagger Award.

Can't wait to read Hammer's new novel coming September 2021 – 'Treasure and Dirt'.

*'Scrublands' came out in 2018 and was followed in a series by 'Silver' in 2019 and 'Trust' in 2020.*

*(Ed)*

Debbie

***Someone I Used to Know* by Paige Toon**

This is the story of Leah, George and Theo, three high school friends, and how their lives are entwined. The story unfolds as it is told alternately between 'then' and 'now'.

I enjoyed this novel – it was an easy, heart-warming book.

It's a quick, easy read, with a beautiful feel for love and family.

This novel centres on the themes of fostering and adoption.

Lois