

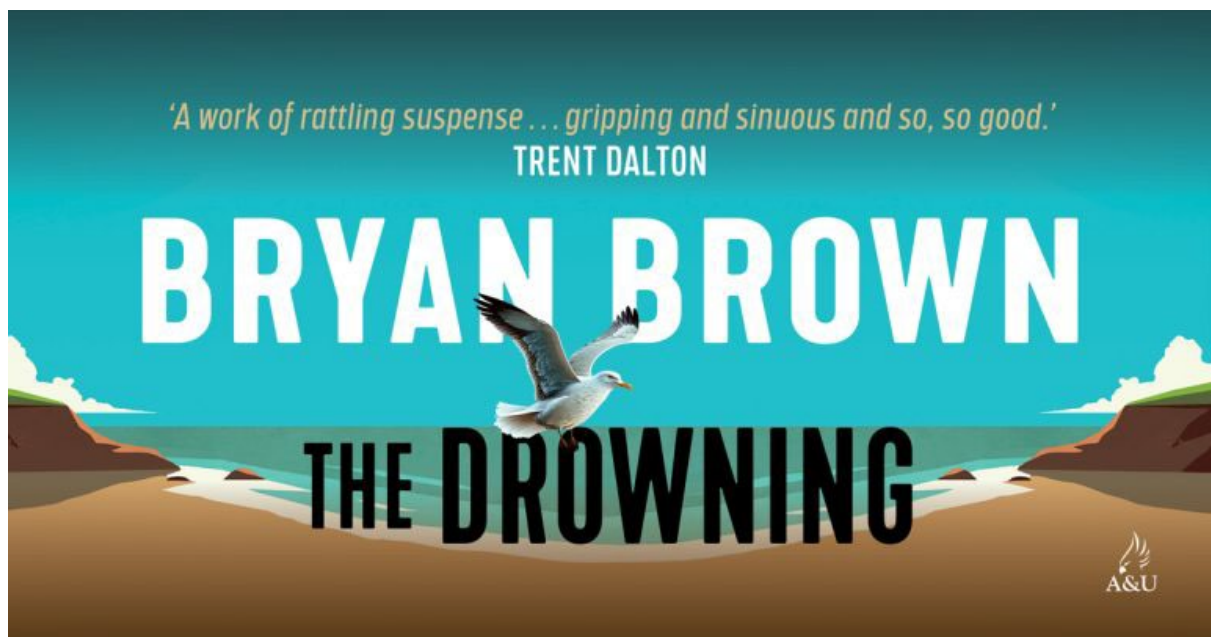
## Book Reviews

- *The Drowning* / Bryan Brown  
Fiction 2023
- *A Woman of Courage* / Tania Blanchard Fiction 2023

## Book Review

*The Drowning* / Bryan Brown

Fiction 2023



The body of a local teenage boy is found on the beach of a sleepy northern New South Wales town. David went for an evening swim and got into trouble... at least, that's what it looks like.

Three weeks before, Leila, a young backpacker, didn't turn up for her shift at the local cafe. Benny, the owner, isn't worried. It happens – backpackers are always on the move. There'll be another one.

One of the locals, Adrian, has been a help to Benny. He's found him a nice little sideline. Not exactly legal. Is that all Adrian is arranging on the coast? He once was a cop but has he gone bad?

And in the backblocks outside town, a bikie gang is gearing up for a large consignment from South America.

Murder, drugs, liaisons and lies are stirring up this small coastal town.

With Bryan Brown's characteristic laconic storytelling – humorous, tough and suspenseful – the secrets of this seemingly idyllic town slowly come to the surface.

One of Australia's most successful and recognisable actors, Brown has been a household name – and face – since the 70s. Given he's been pretty busy getting more than eighty films and TV shows under his belt, I guess we can forgive him for not turning to writing sooner! Brown's debut short story collection, *Sweet Jimmy*, was published in 2021 and sold over 16,000 copies. Now, his distinctive storytelling voice continues in this unflinching, gripping novel.

*The Drowning* opens from the perspective of David, the teenage boy who is murdered. Very soon we're seeing events from the killer's perspective. Then, local Wanda. And so on. The pace barrels forward, with no time for sentimentality. Brown's clipped, spare sentences land like unrelenting punches, or waves on the shore.

At first, *The Drowning* seems dead set on forging an arrow-straight line through the tragic, brutal crime at its centre. Soon, however, we begin to circle back through time, across Australia, and around the globe. With no central narrator, no 'hero' to grab onto, the book's dazzling array of perspectives cocoons the central crime in an ever-thickening web of complex backstories. Each imperfect character is just trying to get on with their own problems in the wake of a tragic event, until more than one of them develops 'a nag' that just won't let up... and so the mystery starts to unravel.

*The Drowning* has all the hallmarks of great Aussie crime writing. There's the sleepy coastal town, with its stunning natural facade harbouring more than its fair share of secrets. A cast of memorable and flawed characters – a diverse mix of locals and blow-ins – who all have a little too much to do with one another. A sexy undercurrent – mostly of the back-of-the-van-overlooking-the-beach variety. An unflinching take on tough themes, including family violence and Indigenous incarceration. And a race toward the finish line that has us flying through the pages to find out how such a tangled story could possibly be resolved.

Not a peep more from me – Brown's punchy prose makes this novel absolutely devourable, and all will be revealed in due time. *The Drowning* is highly recommended holiday reading.

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## Book Review

*A Woman of Courage* / Tania Blanchard    Fiction    2023



A gripping, moving story of love, tenacity and the right to be heard, by bestseller Tania Blanchard, inspired by a true story.

1890, Northern England.

Hannah Todd dreams of a future where women have the right to vote.

Fresh from her teaching studies in Durham, the university city, she joins her parents in a rural village, brimming with newly found passion and the groundswell towards women's suffrage unfolding in London.

Working tirelessly to help women and children in the county, Hannah is determined to make the fight for the vote her life's work, adding her voice to the rising chorus across the nation and hopes of a new world and a new way of thinking.

But soon she must fight a new, unexpected battle – that of the yearning of her own heart. Grappling with her conflicting feelings, Hannah discovers that when power is threatened, darkness, brutality, danger, and closely guarded secrets are never too far from the surface. How far can she go to fight for what's right?

From the exciting, progressive hive of London to the traditional villages of the rural north, *A Woman of Courage* rings with the strength and struggles of women at a time of momentous change... and the choices one woman must make to help forge a new future.

Tania Blanchard is the bestselling author of several historical fiction novels, inspired by her own family. In her latest novel, she takes inspiration from her husband's great, great Grandmother, Eleanor, for protagonist Hannah Todd. Blanchard's language is emotive and evocative and has a seemingly effortless ability to transport you to another place and time.

For history-lovers, Blanchard is renowned for her painstaking research, and this book provides remarkable insight into the social attitudes of the time, particularly around domestic abuse, education and birth control.

Blanchard's writing style is unpretentious and embracing. Her ability to relay detail in a way that's riveting is commendable. This is a novel that brings true and relatable life to the brave women who made their voices heard at a time when they had none.

*A Woman of Courage* highlights the hardships that seem almost incomprehensible to us now. At the heart of this novel sits a strong, intelligent heroine, a love story and a true tale of courage that's inspiring. It offers itself beautifully to a sequel.

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