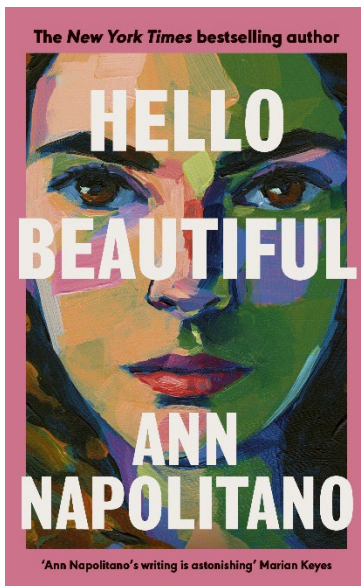


December 2023

Hello Beautiful
by Ann Napolitano



This book is beautiful in name and beautiful in nature.

Hello Beautiful by Ann Napolitano is a modern-day *Little Women* and the references to Louisa May Alcott's famous novel are ever present. In fact, *New York Times* described the book as "it's like *Little Women*—but with basketball".

In this novel there are also four sisters in a quirky energetic Italian family, the Padavanos—Julia single-minded, determined; Sylvie, a book worm dreamer practising kissing for when she finds her perfect match; and twins Cecilia and Emeline, a mural artist and a child care worker respectively.

William Waters is a wounded basketballer with little experience of parental love. His parents are aloof and disengaged from even the most significant events in their son's life—a stark contrast to the demonstrative Padavano

parents Rose and Charlie.

When William meets the Padavano sisters, the differences between their families and the way they express emotions is stark.

The story reveals the coming of age from childhood to womanhood of these four sisters, from 1960 to 2008 with a particular focus on Julia and Sylvie—the two older sisters.

Napolitano is an Italian American living in Brooklyn and writes with authenticity about Italian family life in this novel set in both New York and Chicago.

Chapters are headed William (first and last), Sylvie, Julia, and with a small number—late but powerfully—from a new character, Alice.

Rich, complex, compassionate, with equal measures of love and loss, this is a deeply felt family story.

Depression, separation, identity, secrets, and the risks and rewards of stepping out of one's comfort zone are all part of *Hello Beautiful's* rich tapestry.

If you're familiar with Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy from *Little Women*, you'll connect with Julia, Sylvie, Alice, and Emeline in a new era. But if you don't know the sisters Alcott created, no matter. These four sisters can stand alone and will capture your heart. William will make you sad.

I can imagine *Hello Beautiful* as a film that will attract a whole new audience who may then read *Little Women* too.

Loved, loved, loved it.

[Reserve it here!](#)

November 2023

Take My Hand
by Dolen Perkins-Valdez



Usually for me, a ‘can’t put it down’ book is a gripping edge-of-your-seat crime novel, but this one is something different.

Take My Hand really took my hands—and heart and mind—and gripped them from page one right to the end. It’s beautifully written, deeply reflective, and contains important lessons from the past and for the future.

This is Dolen Perkins-Valdez’s third novel after *Wrench: A Novel* (2010) and bestseller *Balm* (2015), both based on historic events involving issues of race in the USA. She’s also a university professor.

The opening chapter of *Take My Hand* is set in Memphis in 2016 where retired GP, 67 year old Civil Townsend’s adopted daughter Anne is home from college. Civil decides it’s time to tell Anne about the two sisters who influenced

Civil’s life and her choices in 1973 in Montgomery, Alabama.

Take My Hand is based on real events in a deeply racist society where there are state and federal sanctioned decisions about poor women, including about their reproductive health. Black women were particularly vulnerable.

Back in 1973, Civil was a young newly trained nurse at Montgomery Family Planning Clinic. She comes from a privileged and educated family with a GP father and an artist mother. Her father has gifted her a car, so she is given the task of visiting eleven and thirteen-year-old sisters in their cabin in the back blocks of a farming community.

India and Erica live in extreme poverty with their illiterate widowed father and grandmother. The one room cabin has a pit fire in the centre for cooking, a dirt floor, and gaps in the walls.

Being poor and Black are enough reasons for the state to assume the right to provide birth control.

It is Civil’s task to administer Depo-Provera, an injectable birth control medication every three months to these girls.

The girls become a personal mission for Civil who goes well outside her role to intervene in their lives. They become her family as she assumes responsibility for them and their father and grandmother. But Civil cannot protect the girls from the system and a horrifying intervention takes place that shakes Civil to the core.

In her attempts to seek justice, Civil also has to examine her own role in the health system and her need to be the girls’ saviour. She comes to reflect on ‘how a person could get so caught up in doing good that they forgot the people they served had lives of their own.’

That reflection opens to scrutiny in her relationship with her own mother and father and her decisions to forge her own path.

I do not want to disclose any of the details of the story and I encourage you to read it unencumbered by knowledge of the facts of the real-life case on which it's loosely based.

This is a novel that will shock you. It will warm your heart and break it too. It's a beautiful and moving story that encourages us all to stand up and speak out when we know something is wrong.

Reportedly Martin Luther King's last words were to request the playing of the hymn *Take My Hand, Precious Lord*. It is a fitting title for this book that honours all the Martin Luther Kings across the world who stand up for what's right.

Civil Townsend is one of them.

5/5

[Reserve it here!](#)

October 2023

All That's Left Unsaid

by Tracey Lien

all that's
left unsaid



tracey lien

Tracey Lien was born and raised in south-west Sydney but now calls New York home. She is a journalist with a Masters in Fine Arts.

All That's Left Unsaid is her debut novel, set and deeply rooted in her upbringing in 1990s Cabramatta.

The voice we hear throughout most of the novel is of Ky Tran, who is a cadet journalist in Melbourne. Ky has convinced her parents to allow her younger brother Denny to attend his HSC celebratory dinner at a local restaurant. Denny is the favoured son who carries the high expectations of his family. He is murdered at Lucky 8 that night.

Younger readers might not remember when Cabramatta was constantly in the news as the heroin capital of the nation and the centre of 5T, Vietnamese gang violence. This is the setting for this story.

“I know we can't go back ... but I wish we could” says Minnie, Ky's school friend. Regrets, guilt, shame, history, trauma, and loss are key elements of this heart-wrenching novel.

Ky and Denny's parents have fled war torn Vietnam for a better life, but the past remains with them and is ingrained in the shared inheritance of their children. Distrust of the police and fear of the gangs means that no one at the restaurant comes forward as a witness to the murder.

Ky returns from Melbourne, setting her task to interview those present at the restaurant. In those interviews, we hear the backstories and voices of many other characters—the teacher, the waiter, the wedding singer, the other diners.

This is more than a crime novel and much more than a mystery to be solved. It is a story of the complexity of families, parental expectations and beliefs, the clash of cultures, and the challenges for parents in holding on and letting go. From the children's viewpoints, it's about trying to fit in while experiencing racism at school, pressures to succeed, and the strictures of their family. The novel is also about Australia, its colonial history, its racism and who belongs and who doesn't. For all characters in this novel, most importantly, it is about forgiveness of self and others.

There is much humour in the book too, so please don't think this is a harrowing read. There is much to learn for an Anglo reader, but don't think this book is a lecture. *All That's Left Unsaid* is also a slice of social history, and while Cabramatta has changed, there are lessons to be learned in this book about the experience of new settlers who seek a new future in Australia for themselves and their children.

The final chapter is set 15 years after Denny's murder. It brought me to tears with its

beauty. The last paragraph is a wish for Parramatta.

'And then for my sister, for Cabramatta, for everyone who ever came or went or stayed—a wish for comfort. A wish for presence. A wish for power. A wish for dignity. A wish for all the strength in the world to endure, to survive, to finally, finally, finally conquer this place we call home'

Tracey Lien is a magnificent writer and I cannot wait to see what she produces next.

All That's Left Unsaid is one of my favourite books this year and I urge you to read it too.

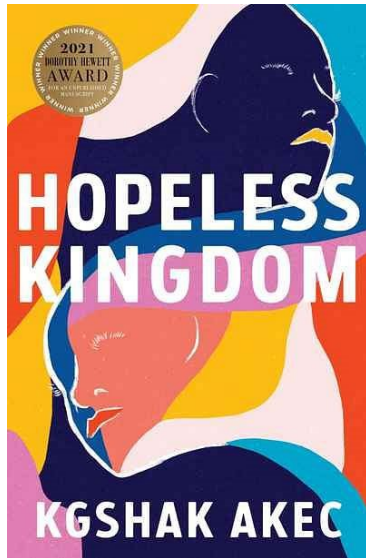
5/5

[Reserve it here!](#)

September 2023

Hopeless Kingdom

by Kgshak Akec



When the Long List for this year's Miles Franklin Literary Award was announced in May, I made it my goal to read all 11 titles. This book *Hopeless Kingdom* was the last one I borrowed from our library. By the time I read it, *Hopeless Kingdom* had been shortlisted (one of six) and although I was convinced it would be a worthy winner, another book, *Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens* by Shankari Chandran took out the award.

Author Kgshak Akec came to Australia from her birthplace Sudan via Cairo as a child and settled in Geelong with her parents and 8 siblings. Akec insists that the characters are not biographical and says the story sprang from her return from her first overseas trip (to New Zealand) in 2020.

"I understood, in every part of my being, that Australia is my home. It was the first time that I cognised it and felt it.....It was such a massive revelation for me."

The revelation led to thoughts of a short story that grew into this novel.

Akita, one of the two narrators in *Hopeless Kingdom* is an 8 year old girl who, like Akec, makes the journey to Cairo and then Australia with her family.

The other narrator in this novel is Akita's mother Taresai who hopes her daughter and her other children fulfil their dreams in Australia. Taresai is illiterate and does not speak English, relying on her eldest son Santo to interpret school interviews and make sense of this strange new world.

The family moves first to Sydney then to Geelong where other family members have settled. Akita's father Santino finds work at the local council helping other new settlers but struggles with homesickness. When the youngest child is a baby, Santino returns to Sudan and apart from twice weekly phone calls, has no contact with his family for ten years. In an effort to support her family Taresai takes on two jobs and Akita assumes the caregiving of the younger children and most household duties while she keeps up with her schoolwork. Meanwhile, Santo who is regularly in trouble, is expelled from several schools and engages in risky self-destructive behaviours.

Hopeless Kingdom is about intergenerational trauma, parental expectations of children, racism, the need to belong and the desire to find one's place of belonging.

My heart ached for Akita and Taresai. I was angry at Santino for abandoning his family and wanted to both shake and hug Santo whose acting out was a cry for help from his absent father.

Despite the sorrow, there is still optimism and hope in this wonderful book. The two women are very different, but they are both survivors. Their grandmothers, aunts and female cousins are also strong personalities in this novel. Like many women everywhere, they are exhausted as they hold their family together, protect them and juggle too many responsibilities.

The novel was the joint winner of the \$10,000 Dorothy Hewitt Award in 2020 for an unpublished manuscript. That award has led to this publication.

Having had regular contact with many of the new settlers from Africa who call Lismore home, I am very grateful that this book has been written. It has given me some insights into the challenges they might face.

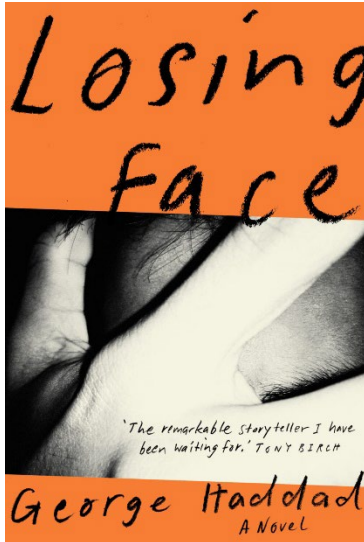
Hopeless Kingdom is a must read for everyone in modern day Australia. I encourage you to read it too.

[Reserve it here!](#)

August 2023

Losing Face

by George Haddad



This novel was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and was a worthy contender for Australia's preeminent literary prize. *Losing Face* did not progress to the shortlist, but other awards are sure to come its way.

I admit that part of the attraction of this novel is that it opens windows into an unknown world to many Australians. *Losing Face* is set firmly and squarely in the western suburbs of Sydney, among a predominantly Lebanese community. It opens with a traditional Middle Eastern fable about emasculated young men and the deals women make.

The two main characters in the novel are 19-year-old Joey and his grandmother Elaine. Joey lives with his mother Amal and his brother Alex. His father Simon, an Anglo Australian, has not been on the scene since Joey was a young child. His mother Amal is a hairdresser, saving money for a boob job and holding the family together with the help of her mother, Elaine, a proud Lebanese woman. Joey is easily influenced by his old school mates. He seems satisfied with a part-time job at a local supermarket, while his brother is studying at university. Alcohol, drugs, and hanging with his mates fill Joey's days. He drifts into situations that have the potential to land him in serious trouble. Mostly, he is lucky—until he isn't. Arrested and charged with a serious crime, his future looks bleak. His family, shamed, is 'losing face'. Joey doesn't tell his family about his drug use and his struggling relationships with girls—and boys.

His grandmother has a secret addiction too. But Joey and Elaine are not the only ones living with secrets. There is also a big secret about Simon, Joey's father, that emerges when Joey is faced with the consequences of the crime that could derail his life completely. Trauma, respect, consent and relationships, and those long-buried secrets are key themes for most of the characters.

This is a wonderful novel. It is gripping, edgy, and challenging. The writing carries the distinctive voices of its characters. It includes commonly used Lebanese vocabulary (that I looked up to confirm meaning—wejbet, habibi, mabrouk) and there are numerous references to Lebanese food.

When speaking to her other grandchildren, Elaine's English reads so authentically that I could hear her voice with its Lebanese accent. The star quality of this novel comes from the fact that it tells a story of an often-stereotyped minority in our largest city's west. I can't help but think that this novel will be met with great pride in Bankstown and its Lebanese community. I would think they will be pleased to read about their own lives in a realistic and complex way, rather than the black-and-white versions we often see on commercial TV news.

The best novels take us to new places or aid us to look at familiar ones in new ways. *Losing Face* does that. It's one of the best novels I've read in years.

Highly recommended

5/5

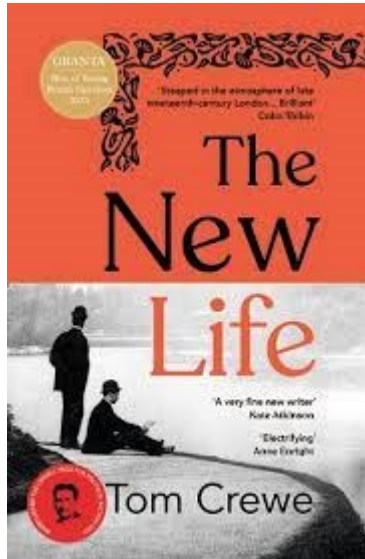
Reserve your copy of the book on the library catalogue now!

[Reserve it here!](#)

July 2023

The New Life

by Tom Crewe



'He must lie in order to live' says John Addington at a meeting of the Free Press Defence Committee in 1896 London.

The New Life is a debut novel steeped in historical references and loosely based on real characters, John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis.

As in real life, in this novel, the characters John Addington and Henry Ellis have combined to publish a book, *Sexual Inversion*, or as we would call it now, homosexuality. Their book as the actual book of the same name did, combines the history of homosexuality and literary references with interviews of gay men in London in 1895 including a case study of 'inverts' including Addington himself.

Addington is a married man who takes a lover Frank into his home as his 'secretary' while his wife Catherine turns a blind eye on the condition he does not bring disgrace on the family.

Ellis is married to Edith but lives separately with his own sexual peccadilloes. Edith has a female lover, Angelica.

In London contemporaneously, there was a movement, Fellowship of the New Life, exploring through public lectures, new ways of living and free thinking that later became The Fabian Society.

Just as in history, the publication of *Sexual Inversion* leads to the arrest of a bookseller, Higgs, shortly after the arrest, trial, and conviction of Oscar Wilde. The scandal brings unwanted attention on the authors and their families.

Tom Crewe who has a PhD in 19th Century British history says, 'This is the book I wanted to write long before I actually wrote it'.

While deeply embedded in historical fact, there are changes in chronology and narrative to enhance the story as is the author's prerogative. Many of the phrases in the letters between the characters are true to the real-life story. And what a riveting story it is!

There are explicit descriptions of sexual activity in the book that may discomfort some readers but I encourage you to explore this daring novel and reflect on how long it has taken the UK—and now Australia—to reach decriminalisation of homosexuality and to achieve marriage equality—yet how far we still have to go until there is no sexual vilification of our LGBTIQ+ community.

Highly recommended

5/5

Reserve your copy of the book on the library catalogue now!

[Reserve it here!](#)

June 2023

Bulldozed

by Niki Savva



This highly readable book, subtitled *Scott Morrison's fall and Anthony Albanese's rise*, will appeal to anyone with an interest in Australian politics over recent years. It's Savva's fourth and possibly her final book, published in 2022.

Through the words of the players closest to the action, the reader gains an insight into the motivations and styles of these two men.

In an earlier book, Savva called herself "a Leftie Conservative" and is generally regarded as a small 'l' liberal who wrote for many years for the conservative newspaper, *The Australian*. She also spent some years as Press Secretary for Peter Costello and was on John Howard's staff for three years. Nowadays, viewers can see her as a regular commentator on *Insiders* on ABC TV on Sunday mornings.

She's been scathing of Scott Morrison in her commentary but in *Bulldozed*, the former PM isn't pilloried by the author, but by the people around him—often those closest to him in his own party room.

I had another reason for reading this book. Niki and I were in the same year at Doveton High School in outer Eastern Melbourne. Kids of Greek Cypriots—like Niki—went to school with those of Dutch, English, Yugoslav, Latvian, and other European families and the country kids—such as I—in this melting pot of then modern Australia.

But enough of that.

On the cover, esteemed political commentator Laurie Oakes writes, "The gripping inside story of a fatally flawed leader who trashed his government, his party, and his legacy". It was Oakes who suggested the title for the book. Readers will remember the way Morrison 'bulldozed' a young soccer player, knocking him to the ground, but the title also refers to the method in which Morrison asserted his own agenda, often with little consultation with his colleagues. To find out on the closing days of his government that he'd also 'bulldozed' his way to take over a handful of other ministries only served to cement his reputation as a non-inclusive dominator.

I particularly enjoyed reading about the personalities of players, their friendships—often across the divide of party politics—and the loyalty of those closest to Morrison that was sorely tested, sometimes found to be misplaced, and sometimes retained despite the circumstances.

For me, the book ends with a feeling of hope. Time will tell if the positive experiences and impressions Savva provides of Anthony Albanese and his inner circle will last. The honeymoon period of the first year has now past and criticism has emerged in response to the May (2023) budget. So we watch this space for a continuation of Savva's—and

others'—commentary.

Savva's access to the key players is testament to her standing in journalistic circles. She's trusted and it shows. This is an engaging read that will appeal to those who love politics and to those who only see the bits that appear on the nightly TV news. *Bulldozed* is informative and entertaining. A rare combination in a book in this genre.

5/5

Reserve your copy of the book on the library catalogue now!

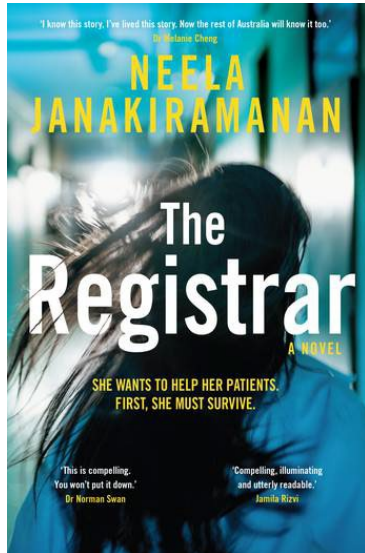
Disclosure: Jenny is a member of the ALP was the Labor Mayor of Lismore 2008-16.

[Reserve it here!](#)

May 2023

The Registrar

by Neela Janakiramanan



'This is compelling. You won't put it down. Shows how fiction can hold a mirror to reality—almost painfully real' says physician, commentator, and broadcaster Dr Norman Swan.

This is the first of three pages of praise by surgeons, health practitioners, authors, and others that appear at the beginning of this astounding novel.

Having read an article years ago by Lismore-raised Georgie Dent about the unreasonable pressures on her husband as a doctor in training, hearing many reports about the horrendous hours young trainees spend in our hospitals, and having a friend who was a senior nurse telling me about the hierarchical health system, I thought I had some idea of the workplace that is a busy teaching hospital.

Never could I have imagined how horrendous it really is!

This is a novel, but it's clearly steeped in reality. Neela Janakiramanan is a wrist and hand surgeon. She writes from experience. The voice we hear in this novel is first year registrar, Emma Swann. She is a trainee surgeon in a busy teaching hospital. She is also newly married to Shamsi. Emma's father is a retired and highly esteemed surgeon, and her brother is also a registrar, albeit a few years ahead of Emma.

This novel is gripping. It reads as an autobiography although it's not. It is full of detail about medical procedures but it's not difficult to read. It is primarily about people—the pressures put on them by others in more senior positions and by a ridiculous system that seems designed to break the spirit. The power imbalance and egos also abet bullying and sexual harassment. It is no wonder that burn out, illicit drug use, depression, relationship breakdown, and suicide are not uncommon among our young doctors.

'Physician heal thyself' comes to mind as a layperson reading this book. The system for training specialists and surgeons needs fixing and it needs the spotlight shone upon it that this novel provides.

This is no Grey's Anatomy TV drama. This is our Australian reality. *The Registrar* is well written, dramatic, riveting, fearless, and needs to be read—particularly by hospital administrators, politicians, and anyone with the power to change our medical system. We as patients, or potential patients, need to read it too—not just to better understand the system but to speak up about it. We all deserve better!

5/5

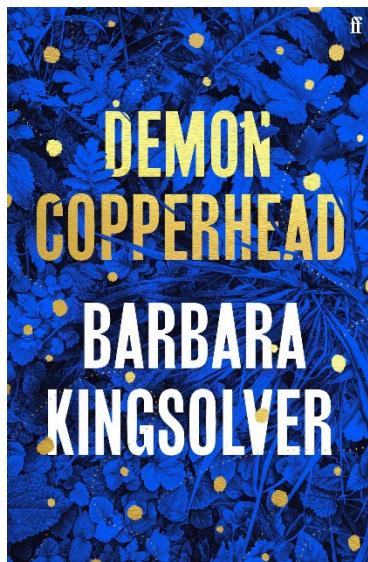
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[Reserve it here!](#)

April 2023

Demon Copperhead

by Barbara Kingsolver



Barbara Kingsolver is a successful author of many books, often with an environmental theme. Her latest novel, *Demon Copperhead*, is something different.

It's a modern American take on the Dickens classic *David Copperfield* and, like the original, this novel is a story of a young boy born into poverty and the often-dysfunctional adults around him. Combine that with addiction and crime and you have the contemporary reality of many poor children in supposedly the richest democratic country in the world.

The voice throughout the novel is that of the young Demon, and what an authentic voice it is! Kingsolver maintains his voice with consistency throughout and I am sure as a reader, you will hear his often-naive southern twang in

every line.

While a knowledge of the Dickens story adds depth to the reading of this book, it's not essential. So if you're not familiar with the classic *Copperfield* story, please don't let it lead to any hesitation in embracing this book.

For those familiar with the original, the names of characters are very similar to those of Dickens—Uriah Heep is U-Haul Pyles, the Micawbers become the McCobbs, the Peggarty family are the Peggots, Agnes Wickfield is Agnes/Angus, and James Steerforth is Sterling Ford or Fast Forward. Renamed and redefined Doris and Emmys are there too, along with McCreakle and Tommy Waddles. It's a pick-the-character for those familiar with the original.

Dickensian London is contemporary hillbilly Appalachia in Virginia, southern USA. Demon is the son of an addicted single mother who lives in a trailer. He's subject to abuse, a corrupted childcare system, and institutionalised poverty; but like David Copperfield, he had abilities and a drive that allow him to survive and indeed thrive, finding meaning and a purpose in his life despite his harrowing experiences.

Do yourself a favour and read this novel. While it's not totally new, it's a gritty retelling that places a familiar story of tenacity in a raw modern-day setting. Very satisfying.

5/5

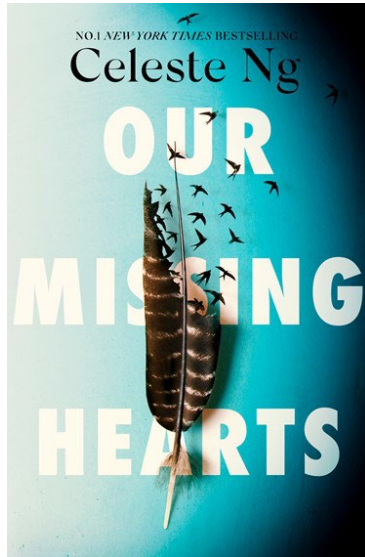
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[Reserve it here!](#)

March 2023

Our Missing Hearts

by Celeste Ng



The first thing to note about this book is its beautifully designed cover. The Abacus Books edition I read has a feather morphing into a flock of swallows flying up into the sky.

Inside the cover are two quotes; one from poet, Anna Akhmatova, and the other from the imagined Guide for Young Patriots that describes PACT as ‘a promise that for people who weaken our country with un-American ideas, there will be consequences.’ PACT—we come to discover in the novel—is the Preserving American Cultures and Traditions Act.

Twelve-year-old Bird (Noah) is the son of Chinese American poet, Margaret, and white American linguist, Ethan.

Our Missing Hearts is a deeply affecting novel about forced child removal under the PACT. POA, Persons of Asian Origin such as Margaret are seen as a threat to America and unfit to be parents. Their work life is restricted, writings are banned, and their books are destroyed.

This is speculative fiction at its best, combining the reality of present-day events with the possibility of a future that is just a few steps into the world of imagination. It is easy to envisage an authoritative government restricting freedom of expression and enforcing a patriotic conformity all in the name of national security and public safety. As we saw in the violence and vilification aimed at Australians of Chinese descent post Covid, it's also easy to create scapegoats for human misery and to divide communities into ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Margaret Mui leaves her husband Ethan and son Noah (Bird) before her son is removed under a concerted government sanctioned child removal system. While this book is about American xenophobia, Australian readers can reflect on our own past practices of the removal of Aboriginal children in the Stolen Generations.

Readers need not think this book is a moralistic tirade against injustice, it's much more than that. This is a cautionary tale with love and hope at its core. At its simplest, it's a story of a broken father and a son trying to make sense of his mother's abandonment and choices. Bird's search leads him to his mother and the underground movement of librarians who assist in telling the stories of the stolen children and the parents who suffer as a result. The ending is both poetic and tragic.

Ng is a beautiful writer. The language of the narration, Margaret's poetry, Ethan's fascination with the origin of words, the importance of books and libraries, and the

stories of loss all combine to make this a book to savour. The power of words and stories also remind us of the importance of words and stories in resisting injustice and providing hope for change. It also reinforces Margaret Mead's words about never doubting that one person can make a difference.

Celeste Ng wrote *Little Fires Everywhere*, a bestselling novel. She went on to produce a television adaptation of the novel, along with Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington—who both also starred.

Our Missing Hearts is a worthy third novel.

5/5

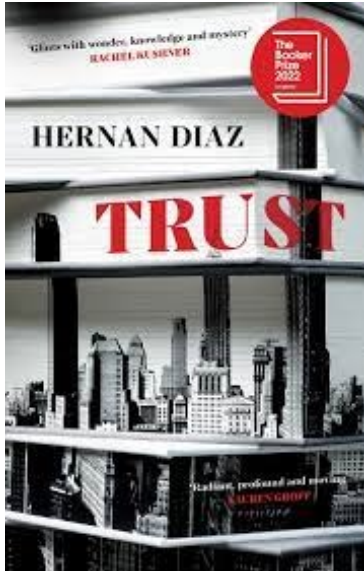
Reserve your copy of the book on the library catalogue now!

[Reserve it here!](#)

February 2023

Trust

by Hernan Diaz



Even the blurb for this book doesn't really prepare the reader for what's ahead.

This is a huge, ambitious, and different read that I suggest you approach with an open mind.

The book is divided into four parts that could each quite easily stand alone with varying degrees of completeness, but together they weave a complex story of truth, lies, perception, and history.

The first part, *Bonds*, is the cornerstone of the book and is presented as a complete popular published novel by its author, Harold Vanner. Its subject is Benjamin Rask, a wealthy New York businessman with a prodigious ability to play the stockmarket in the years leading up to the Great Depression. The title clearly references that stock market, but also the bonds of his family life with his enigmatic wife, Helen. It reads as it's intended—as a biography, not only charting the course of the Rasks' life, but the decline of Helen's health and subsequent death.

The second section, *My Life*, is written in the first person by Andrew Bevel, the subject of the previous novel—albeit with a different name—as he attempts to defend his reputation and right the record of the novel. It is often incomplete, with parts merely outlines of intended paragraphs or chapters. Unfortunately it is written with little self-reflection, considerable self-justification, and a 'greed is good' attitude.

The third section, *A Memoir, Remembered*, is written by Ida Partenza, the young woman hired by Andrew Bevel to ghost-write his story making it accessible to the average reader, and in which he's at pains to convey a particular image of his dead wife. Ida is a detective as she attempts to sift fact from fiction and find the voice of her subject. As she meets with Bevel, explores his previous home, and discovers Mildred's words, Ida also establishes her own credentials as a writer with an independent voice. Parts of this chapter are written many decades later when Ida is an established author but is still plagued by her own role in helping to perpetuate the myth of Mildred.

Finally, the fourth section, *Futures*, is written by the mystery woman at the centre of the novel—Mildred Bevel. It's a chapter of increasingly sparse diary entries that help solve the mystery and bring this extraordinary book to an end.

This novel, while it seems complex at first glance, is not. I encourage readers to suspend expectations and go with the flow. And the flow is good! There is beauty in the writing, a story worth telling and characters that will fascinate. Don't rush this book. Savour it and you will be rewarded.

Diaz was shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize for his first novel, *In the Distance*. I haven't read it, but I'm not surprised that *Trust* was long listed for the 2022 Booker Prize.

PS I hope I haven't spoiled this read for you by including so much information, but as a reader, I would have liked some hand holding with this one—so I hope you do to. If you prefer not, set this aside and just enjoy *Trust*.

5/5

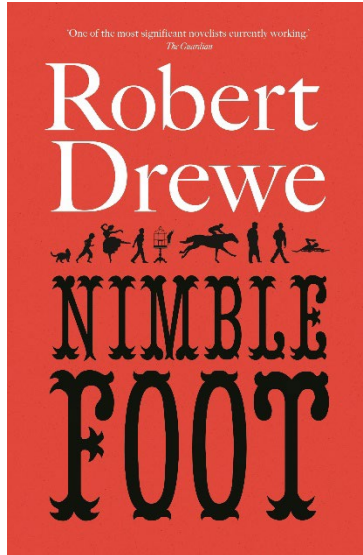
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Reserve it here!

December 2022

Nimblefoot

by Robert Drewe



For the second month I'm reviewing a book with a horse theme, and again, one based on historical events and people embellished by the imagination and writing of another wonderful Australian author.

Nimblefoot was the horse that won the Melbourne Cup in 1870 but in this book, the title applies to its jockey, Johnny Day. Four years before Day won the famous horse race, he was the 1866 world champion in pedestrianism as it was known, or race walking. Pedestrianism swept the globe and was not solely based on speed, but endurance and strength. As a ten-year-old, Day beat much older men who walked with such encumbrances as a goat around their shoulders to demonstrate their strength and to attract wagers. Just like the Melbourne Cup, crowds of onlookers and gambling accompanied the sport.

Johnny Day's father was his son's promoter who took him to England for the world championships—retaining the winnings.

The novel is clearly based on many well researched facts, but Drewe invents a story of what became of Day after his famous racing win. *Wikipedia* has Day racing until 1877, when he had a bad fall at Yarrowonga—dying in Inglewood in 1885, aged 29. Drewe told an audience at the Byron Writers Festival in August this year, that his own research into what became of Day proved fruitless and so he invented this story.

Historical figures who frequented Melbourne in the era appear in the book with convincing detail, such as imagined letters and newspaper reports. Prince Alfred who attended horseracing events and was reported to frequent various notorious hotels, brothels, and gaming rooms in Melbourne, is a key figure in an incident that Drewe invents to set Day on the run to a new life in Western Australia. Other well-known figures in the book include poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, actress and dancer Lola Montez, and writer Anthony Trollope.

The chapters are generally written in the third person, but several about Johnny Day are in his own voice. I was particularly attracted to the chapters in which he interacts with Clara, a young teacher. Without all the clumsy awkwardness of *The Sentimental Bloke*, there was a shyness in those chapters that was captured beautifully by Drewe.

Nimblefoot is a ripping yarn of adventure, escape, violence, romance, intrigue, corruption, and luck. It's a great book and would make a terrific Christmas gift for any reader.

5/5

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