

December 2021

## 14 Suggestions for Holiday Reading from Jenny Dowell



Jenny's been busy (...er than usual!) in the lead up to the festive season, and has compiled a MASSIVE list of 14 books to read over the holiday period!

We don't know how she finds the time, but we're so very glad she does! Thanks Jenny!

*Still Life* by Sarah Winman is a big, generous, uplifting novel spanning pre WW2 to the late 1970s. A young English soldier meets an older art historian in Tuscany in 1944. Unknowingly their lives become entwined despite them not being aware of each other's locations in the decades that follow. This is a beautiful book in the traditions of the best sagas setting the wonderfully drawn characters and the minutiae of their daily lives within the context of world events. One to savour. *Still Life* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*We Were Not Men* by Campbell Mattinson is a poignant, heart wrenching story of twin brothers whose parents are killed in an horrific car accident and whose bodies and minds need healing. Jon, the narrator, and Ethan become the responsibility of their grandmother Bobbie who struggles with maternal instincts, alcohol and cynicism. This is a beautiful, sad and uplifting book that took 30 years to write. It was worth the wait. *We Were Not Men* is available now on the library [HERE](#).

*The Night She Disappeared* by Lisa Jewell is a thriller that will keep you turning pages. In 2017, teenage parents Tallulah and Zach disappear leaving their baby son at home with Tallulah's mother Kim. When crime novelist Sophie comes to live in the village a year later, fiction and fact come together in attempts to solve the mystery. This novel explores the power of the 'in group' among teenagers and the use of social media. A satisfying crime novel from a prolific writer. *The Night She Disappeared* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*People Like Them* by Samira Sedira is a short but powerful novel about class, power, money and murder. The narrator is Anna, partner of Constant who lives in a small French alpine village. She tells the story of the arrival of the Langlois family and the relationships that develop with villagers. This story is based on a 2003 French crime and is enriched by the personal experiences of its Algerian born author. *People Like Them* is

available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*Locust Summer* by David Allan-Petale is set in 1986 in the Western Australian wheatbelt. Rowan reluctantly returns to the family farm to help with the final harvest before the farm is sold. He is now a city slicker and finds it hard to fit in to what was once familiar. This is a story of family relationships, making peace with the past and connection to place. *Locust Summer* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*Beat Your Breasts* by Sue Edmonds is a self published memoir by this well-known Nimbin resident. From her childhood in her Communist family in Melbourne to her adventures travelling the globe, feminist activism, a myriad of jobs, music and much more, Sue, now in her late 70s, writes with an engaging, conversational style as she shares her fascinating life. *Beat Your Breasts* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*The Turnout* by Megan Abbot is a dark, disturbing novel of a family's strange relationships set amid the seemingly beautiful world of their small ballet school. Teachers and students are preparing for the school's annual performance of *The Nutcracker* when the first of several accidents happen. A stranger enters to repair the damage, but does he?

*The Long Call* and *The Heron's Cry* by Anne Cleaves are the first two books in her latest series featuring Detective Matthew Venn. Cleaves is the author of the Vera Stanhope and Jimmy Perez books and is guaranteed to bring you a good crime read. Her police procedurals are detailed, character driven and firmly set in place. Matthew Venn has an interesting personal story and will prove to be a popular new protagonist- as will Detective Jen Rafferty. The Two Rivers series set in North Devon is set to be a four part television drama.

*New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson is a big (600+ pages) utopian novel set in an era of global warming and sea level rise. The lives of the eight narrators intertwine along with historical references on how life in New York has evolved with parts of the city that never sleeps now in the intertidal zone. For those who like speculative fiction, this is a stimulating read. *New York 2140* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*Phosphorescence* by Julia Baird is a beautiful nonfiction reflection on life, friendship, family and purpose. Taking inspiration from the phosphorescence of the sea and her daily ocean swims, Baird explores the glow of positive people who live a life of awe and hope. An uplifting book especially apt in challenging times. *Phosphorescence* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*The Dressmakers of Yarrandarrah Prison* by Meredith Jaffe is a feel good story of Derek and his prison mates as they embark on a new sewing project- to sew a wedding dress for Derek's estranged daughter Debbie. This is a poignant story of redemption and hope that looks made for the screen. A lovely read. *The Dressmakers of Yarrandarrah Prison* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

*For Your Own Good* by Samantha Downing is a riveting crime novel full of twists secrets, jealousy and revenge. Teddy Crutcher is an English teacher in an elite private prep school. He knows what's best for his students and will stop at nothing including murder, to ensure they get what they deserve while he basks in his award as the best teacher in the school. *For Your Own Good* is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

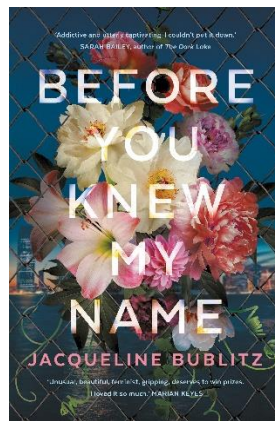
1979 by Val McDermid introduces the reader to new character, journalist Allie Burns. 1979, set in the winter of that year in Glasgow is littered with linguistic and cultural references of the time and place that enrich the writing while the narrative will enthral fans of McDermid old and new. 1979 is available now on the library catalogue [HERE](#).

Thanks again, Jenny, for all your beautifully written and insightful reviews. We look forward to more in the new year!

---

**October 2021**

## ***Before You Knew My Name*** **by Jacqueline Bublitz**



'Love crime novels? Looking for something new? *Then Before You Knew My Name* is one to note.

Jacqueline Bublitz is a Melbourne writer who spent some time in New York where this, her first novel, is set.

Alice has been killed. It's her voice we hear narrating her story both in life and in death. She was an 18 year old with a difficult upbringing who fled an unhealthy relationship in Wisconsin with \$600 and a stolen camera. A month later, she's dead.

Thirty-six-year-old Ruby arrives in New York from Melbourne on a 'gap year' also having run away from a difficult relationship.

Both women are looking for a new future. Their paths cross when Ruby, out running by the Hudson River discovers Alice's body.

After her murder, Alice is an observer of Ruby's movements, interspersing her narration with her (Alice's) opinions. When Ruby expresses a view about America's history as shiny on the outside, Alice's commentary includes 'I think she's right about that part'.

This novel approaches the 'body discovered by a jogger' in a way that is fresh and fascinating. It explores both women's lives pre-murder by focusing on Ruby's search for

the woman behind the 'Jane Doe' tag. Much more than the usual 'whodunnit?', it is 'who was she?'

The two women form a post murder bond that enhances both of their stories and lives. As Ruby grieves for this young woman whom she did not know, and seeks counselling, Alice is beside her.

Bublitz approaches this novel from a very different perspective from any crime novel I have read. Her feminist viewpoint enriches her characters and the narrative technique is enthralling. It is certainly not a bleak novel either, there is humour aplenty, albeit dark. The self help PTSD group is likened to 'a Jenga tower of misery'. When Ruby finds the Death Club, she makes her first New York friends and is able to talk freely about her experience.

You can gather that this novel is more than a simple crime novel. It asks lots of questions too, such as, do some lives matter more than others, whose 'dead girl' story is worthy of being told, and why is the focus often on the (usually) male perpetrator rather than the female victim?

This book firmly focuses our gaze on Alice and her accidental advocate Ruby. *Before You Knew My Name* is the standout book for me this month and I hope you find it so too.

Jacqueline Bublitz is a name to watch. Her second novel is eagerly awaited.

Highly recommended

5/5



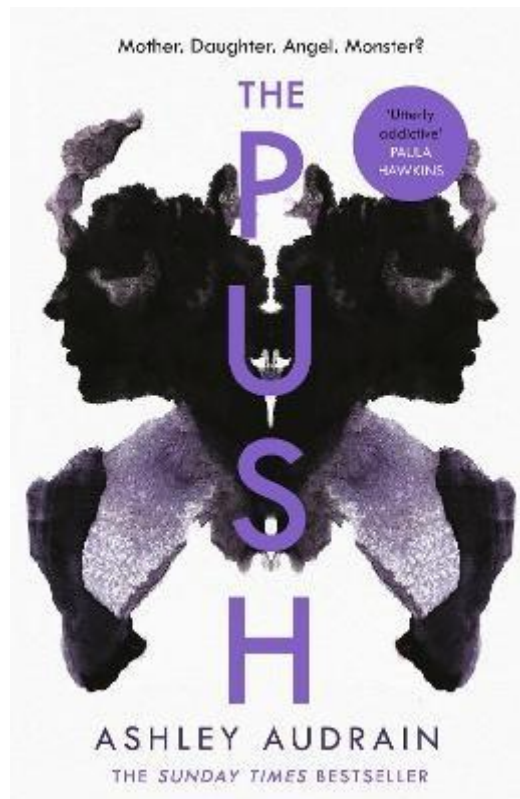
Cheers  
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

---

September 2021

***The Push***  
**by Ashley Audrain**



*'I think she pushed him'*

This riveting read opens with Blythe sitting in her car outside the home of her ex-husband Fox, their young daughter Violet, his new wife and son. Blythe is watching the family. Her gaze meets the eyes of her daughter.

Blythe is a writer and this is her narrative written to her husband Fox ('you') about the events that led to this scene. But is Blythe a reliable narrator or is she seeing these experiences through the filter of her own childhood and that of her mother and grandmother?

This is a book about mother-daughter relationships through three generations.

Interspersed through the numbered short chapters of the main narrative are dated chapters of the stories of Blythe's grandmother Etta and mother Cecilia (1938-1975) written in the third person and in italics. All three women experience trauma, neglect, abandonment and their effects.

Blythe and baby Violet fail to bond. Blythe doubts her own ability as a mother until new baby Sam arrives. Sam is an easy baby but tension with Violet grows.

Blythe is reluctant to take the medications prescribed for her in the fear of becoming like her frequently absent and emotionally distant mother Cecilia.

This book reminded me of *We Need To Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver. Both novels are about a young child's behaviour and the challenges for a mother who raises her concerns about that behaviour but who is not believed. Mothers reading this book will relate to the labels of being 'over anxious' or 'imagining it'. In reading this book, we are also observers and potentially judges of both child and mother.

Is a young child capable of premeditated cruelty? Does a baby carry the generic predisposition to be unfeeling? How does a mother's childhood trauma affect her relationship with her baby? Is inter-generational trauma a factor in a mother and baby's ability to form a bond?

Motherhood is complex and this novel reflects that complexity with great skill. It's a riveting, page-turning read that will engage your thoughts long after you finish the last page.

It's one of the most engaging reads I've had this year and I expect you'll feel the same.



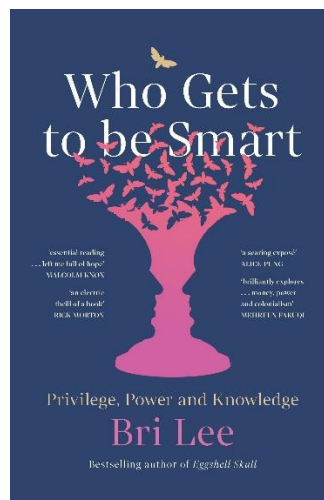
Cheers  
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

---

August 2021

## *Who Gets to be Smart* by Bri Lee



I awaited Bri Lee's new book with great anticipation. *Eggshell Skull*, her first book, was a deeply personal account of her years as a judge's associate in the Queensland court system and her case against the perpetrator of her own sexual abuse.

Lee writes with a clarity of style and purpose that makes even the most challenging of subject matters, interesting and readable.

*Who Gets to be Smart* is not a question. It is a statement and the book sets out evidence to show that access to education is determined not by brains but by gatekeepers who include and exclude according to pre-determined yet unspoken rules.

The book opens with Bri Lee visiting an Australian friend at Oxford and feeling that she

does not belong in this hallowed place of learning. In examining the history of Cecil John Rhodes whose name is paired with the most prestigious scholarship in the world, Bri Lee exposes an uncomfortable truth. Rhodes' wealth was built on slavery, theft, misogyny and racism. Rhodes' aim was to build 'a secret society of superior men who would work to advance the interests of his great Anglo-Saxon Empire'.

Bri Lee develops the idea that education is built on kyriarchy, the accumulation and exercise of power based on an exclusivity that further entrenches social control, domination, submission, profit and exploitation. The concept of kyriarchy, first introduced by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, a radical feminist theologian in 2001, is illustrated by a pyramidal system where those at the bottom of the pyramid are locked out of wealth and opportunity, therefore proving their inferiority and reinforcing the right of the elite to be at the peak and in control.

Virginia Woolf wrote of the 'stream of gold and silver' that flows through elite institutions dictates decisions about who deserves to be educated there. Bri Lee takes these writings further by examining Australia's education system, its funding and the private schools and universities that reinforce these ways of thinking that in turn strengthen their hold on power and view of history. Organisations such as the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation and its defendants such as Tony Abbott have a view that western culture is superior and under attack. So, we see the denouncing of writers such as Bruce Pascoe who in describing Aboriginal use of farming and construction, brings into question preconceived ideas of a less advanced people.

The influence (and money) of the Ramsay Centre evidenced in recent years with the lucrative offer to set up a school for western civilisation in some of our universities. Sadly, financial constraints in our tertiary institutions led Wollongong University to accept Ramsay money and with it, input into board and academic decisions. The University of Queensland also accepted Ramsay money despite staff and student opposition and has been open to other conservative forces influencing its decisions.

There is a rawness about Bri Lee's writing about her own secondary education and not feeling good enough. She exposed some of those feelings of inadequacy in *Eggshell Skull* and despite her obvious intelligence and achievement, her self-doubts are still there. That exposure of her vulnerabilities adds to the depth of the writing in this book too.

There is so much thought-provoking material in this book. If you value education that is secular, open to all regardless of wealth, privilege, colour, ethnicity, gender or beliefs, *Who Gets to be Smart* will be a wakeup call.

It will confront you with the thinking that drives our national policies on off shore detention, our anxiety about refugees and more.

In Bri Lee's words "Our most moneyed and powerful educational institutions ...can only maintain their power by practising exclusion and discrimination".

I urge you to read this book.

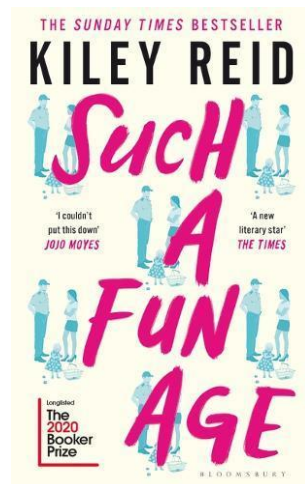


Cheers  
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

July 2021

## *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid



Often when I finally collect a book I've reserved from our library, I've forgotten why I reserved it. Sometimes a friend has recommended it, sometimes I've read a review or seen the book shortlisted for a prize.

I cannot recall where I came to hear about *Such a Fun Age* but I started reading it with little expectation, especially as it came with a sticker saying it was a Reece Witherspoon Book Club Pick. I admit, guiltily, that the sticker and the pink cover detail flagged it as 'Chick Lit' and did not inspire me to think it was going to be something special.

How wrong I was.

Set in contemporary Philadelphia, the two main characters are Emira, a young Black woman with seemingly little career ambition who babysits for Alix, a privileged white feminist blogger, wife and mother of two. Both women have a strong circle of female friends keen to offer advice.

In the opening pages Emira is accused by security guards of kidnapping Briar, one of Alix and Peter's children, late at night in a supermarket. Emira is more than just a babysitter to Briar and is heavily depended upon by Alix. The relationship between the two women takes a serious turn when Emira arrives at Alix' house for Thanksgiving with her date, Kelley, a white man who met Emira at the supermarket incident. Kelley and the then 'Alex' had a school-age relationship 16 years prior that ended dramatically. Some of the potential explosive twists in the novel such as this one at Thanksgiving, are flagged to the reader early in the novel but others are totally unexpected.

This is a clever novel about race relations, privilege, ambition, jealousy, social media—and trust and consent. It is a novel of our time combining wit, humour and a subtly caustic style that searingly delineates the different lives of these two women. Kiley Reid, who has a background in teaching creative writing—with a focus on race and class—is a new talent worth watching.

I found it riveting and hope you do too.



Highly recommended.



Cheers

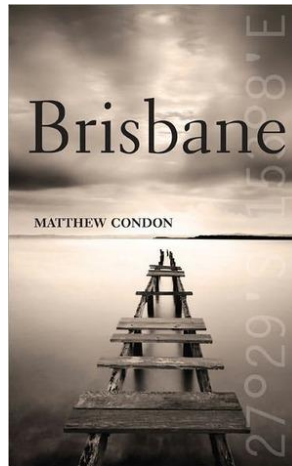
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

---

June 2021

## *Brisbane* by Matthew Condon



*Brisbane* is a book of great beauty.

Firstly there is a sensuality to just holding this small book. I read it in hardback—it's the size of a traditional Penguin paperback. Its paper—from sustainable sources—is creamy coloured and the edges are not guillotined or sharply uniform. The print is old-style and there are maps on the endpapers. Most tactile of all, is the feel of the book in hand. This is a beautifully designed book to hold and savour, even before you start to read it.

Then to the content. One of a series where authors write about their hometowns, *Brisbane* is classified by the publisher NewSouth Books as Travel/Memoir, but it's more than that. This is a personalised history of our capital city to the north and combines well-researched historical facts and primary sources with a family story of five generations.

Matthew Condon is best known as a journalist and writer of fiction. To those who have attended Byron Bay Writers Festival, he's also known as a regular panelist, interviewee, and interviewer. He proudly calls Brisbane home, as his place of birth, and where he has returned to raise his own family. The love he has for Brisbane is obvious on every page but that doesn't mean that he sees its history through rose-tinted glasses. In these pages are the stories of the First Nations People, the Joh Bjelke-Peterson years, the Fitzgerald enquiry, the great floods, the Springbok tour, and through to the various Lord Mayors and Premiers who put their stamp on this city.

The constant thread that runs throughout the book is the mystery of where Oxley landed on the river and why the obelisk that bears his name is situated where it is. Woven around this mystery are the characters of the past and memories of Condon's childhood as he describes in the third person, 'the boy's' experiences.

If you know Brisbane even a little and especially if you have connections there, you will find this book fascinating. Even if you don't, I encourage you to read it and enjoy the sometimes-melancholic poetic quality of the writing on these pages. Like me, you may find yourself rereading some paragraphs for the sheer beauty of them.

On the back of the book, there is a paragraph about Brisbane light and how stepping back into it and recognising it, means you are home. Brilliant—the light and the words.

Highly recommended.



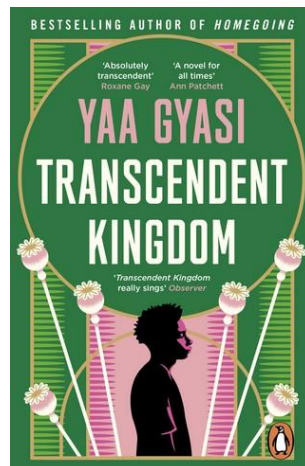
Cheers  
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

---

May 2021

## *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi



2020 was the year of African novels, with the emergence of several new female voices. They are fresh and worth exploring.

Also published in 2020, *Transcendent Kingdom* is not the first publication by Ghanaian born Yaa Gyasi who now lives in Huntsville Alabama, but it is the first I've read.

In the opening of the book, Gyasi writes 'Homo sapiens is the only animal who believes he had transcended his Kingdom' and in a nutshell, this novel is about the nebulous complexity of being human.

Although not autobiographical, the novel is also set in Huntsville and tells the story of Gifty, her brother Nana and her parents who migrated to the USA in search of a better life before Gifty was born.

Religion plays a huge part in her mother's, and then Gifty's lives—especially as they first lose their husband/father when he doesn't return from a visit back to Ghana. Then again, when teenager Nana dies from a drug overdose, having become addicted to OxyContin after a basketball injury.

The reality of life in America for a poor migrant family, including the endless racist abuse she suffers from the elderly man for whom she provides personal care, wears down Gifty's mother. Her depression, evident when Gifty was 11, worsens through the decades until she becomes bedridden.

Through all this Gifty is driven in everything she does with a hunger for meaning in the events that surround her. She compartmentalises her life in an attempt to control those parts of it that are controllable. Her research in neuroscience is part of that search for control. She is at Stanford University studying addiction and depression in mice, seeking scientific answers to human suffering.

Her scientific method brings success but in her less-easy-to-control personal life, she keeps friends at arm's length and doesn't share her story or inner turmoils with those who are closest to her. 'I'm horrible at relationships', she says.

Han, the lab mate whom she is dating says 'You hide behind your work, you don't let people in.' He hasn't met her family and her family don't know of his existence.

Gifty also struggles with the dichotomy of her scientific view of the world and the evangelical faith that is so embedded in her upbringing. Each comes to the fore at various times as she searches for answers to the trauma that runs deep in her family.

This is a beautifully written, poignant first-person narrative that is dense in its emotions and humanity. It also has a great deal to say about current day America and its challenges for a migrant family, including the deep racism that has floated more obviously to the surface in recent times.

I have since read Gyasi's book, *Homegoing*, a best-seller and award-winner that is equally compelling. As a young writer, Yaa Gyasi is worth watching—her future works will be eagerly awaited.

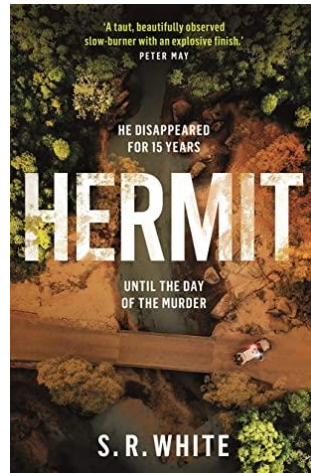
Highly recommended.



Cheers  
Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)

## *Hermit* by S.R. White



Looking for a Murder mystery with a difference? Then *Hermit* is one to note.

The action in the book takes place in about 18 hours but it's a culmination of decades in the lives of the main characters.

The novel opens with the near suicide of Detective Dana Russo on the anniversary of an horrific day in her past that is unspecified. Her planned suicide does not eventuate as she is called to investigate a murder in a local store.

The hermit, Nathan Whittler, has been missing for 15 years. He is apprehended at the scene of the murder of a supermarket owner. He has blood on his hands. It looks like a clear-cut case. The aim is to gain a confession. Most of the novel is Detective Russo's challenge to develop a rapport with this reclusive and reticent man as she interviews him to gain that confession while slowly and carefully uncovering his life story. In the background, the dark shadow of Dana's past trauma hovers albeit very vaguely. These two flawed characters seated across an interview table, are in the most intense of situations.

The novel is set in rural Australia, yet it is not distinctly an Australian novel. This makes sense when, after finishing the book, I discovered that S.R. White was a UK police officer for 12 years, did a Masters in Creative Writing in Nottingham Trent University and now lives in Queensland. Unlike many current-day Australian novels, the geographic setting is largely not important.

The crime in the novel is the event that holds the story together and on a simple level, this is a police procedural but it's the revelation of character and motives that are truly riveting. The behind the scenes planning for the interviews and the detailed description of those interviews are simply brilliant. The psychology of the relationship between Dana and Nathan, as they come to call each other, is intense and enthralling.

Dana Russo is a strongly drawn character and I hope we see more of her in further SR White books.

I found this book totally captivating and I'm sure you will too.



Cheers  
Jenny

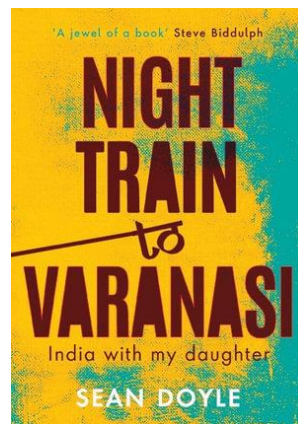
[Reserve it here!](#)

---

March 2021

## *Night Train to Varanasi: India with my Daughter*

by Sean Doyle



I really enjoy reading a book with local connections and this one, *Night Train to Varanasi—India with my Daughter*, by Sean Doyle is especially interesting. Sean and his family live locally, Anna went to Trinity College here in Lismore and I know his wife Micky. Sean is an experienced travel writer and editor and a committed and self-confessed Indiaphile.

*Night Train to Varanasi—India with my Daughter* is categorised in the Memoir/Travel/Parenting genres and that triple listing is important to note. Like India itself, it's hard to pigeonhole this book in a single genre. As a memoir, it's a detailed segment of Sean's life and while there are glimpses into his past, it's not a whole-of-life story. Similarly as a travelogue, while chapters bear an Indian city or town name, do not expect it to tell the planning traveller details of how to get there, what to see or where to stay. The book delves deep into the diversity of culture, history and religions of India and its influence on the West but not simply that. Much of this Varanasi pilgrimage experience is illuminated through the conversations Sean, an experienced traveller to India, has with his daughter Anna on her first journey to this unique place as part of her post HSC celebration. It is this father-daughter shared experience that is the heart of the book. The enthusiasm and passionate idealism of youth meets the memory filled, experienced pragmatism and parental responsibility of a parent facing his own ageing. All the while Anna and Sean realise that this holiday is likely to be their last together knowing that Anna will soon spread her wings to her independent life. It was fitting that renowned parenting writer Steve Biddulph introduced Sean at the book's launch at Lismore library on 26 February. In that introduction Steve likened this book to the 1970's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* that will be familiar to many older readers.

I also heard Sean speak on ABC North Coast radio on 19 February about India, his 'existential home' having visited there first as a 22-year-old, and regularly since. Anna also spoke in that interview about her experience as 'an assault on the senses'. Anna is vegan and passionate about animal rights and social justice. Her willingness to have deeply personal aspects of her life shared in her father's book is truly astounding and admirable. This is almost as much her story as Sean's and as Steve Biddulph says, it's a textbook on how to talk to teenagers.

In the interview and in the book, Sean quotes author Ruth Praver Jhabvala 'India always finds your weak point and presses on it'. Through this book, Sean and Anna experience several weak points and India does indeed press upon them bringing out a vulnerability in father and daughter that is raw and real.

'Like introducing loved ones', Sean describes his hope that Anna and India get along, to share his deep love of India and the meaning of life. Their conversations are deeply personal. Anna's willingness to share her words in those conversations, her experiences and depth of feelings on the page are astoundingly generous. Sean is experiencing India in a new way too, changing the way he travels to make adjustments from being a solo traveller to being with his daughter, protecting her and seeing the country through her eyes too.

While I find some of Sean's views on 1980s feminism and the world of adolescents 'world pain' a little simplistic, they are minor and personal quibbles with a book that is as expansive as India itself.

This book is a different type of read for me but I'm pleased I read it and I know that many of those who will read this review will enjoy reading *Night Train to Varanasi—India with my Daughter* too. Whether you are familiar with India or not, I'm sure you'll enjoy Sean's excellent writing and along the way, you'll learn about this amazing country, reflect on father-daughter relationships and appreciate the complexity of life itself.

Read, enjoy and reflect.

PS you'll note I use the author's first name in this review. I felt that the personal tone of the book compelled me to use 'Sean' rather than 'Doyle' in this review.



Cheers  
Jenny

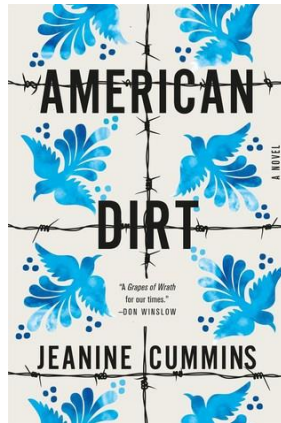
[Reserve it here!](#)

---

February 2021

*American Dirt*

by Jeanine Cummins



I am in two minds about reviewing this book. It is not without controversy but all those I know who've read it agree that it's a riveting and important read that will stay with the reader long after the final page is turned.

We in Australia cannot imagine the risks that Mexicans and others from South American countries will take to get into the United States and a better life. The dangers of riding on the roof of freight trains, trekking at night through mountains and deserts and relying on mercenaries to aid in those escapes are unimaginable to most of us.

Book shop owner Lydia and her eight-year-old son Luca have hidden as a powerful crime gang has murdered their journalist husband/father and 15 other family members at their home in Acapulco as they celebrate a birthday. The two are at risk of the same fate so they run hundreds of dangerous kilometres to the USA as 'undocumented migrants' hiding from authorities, the gang and vigilantes.

Along the way, they meet others who may be spies for those trying to find them. There are also many others who, like them are escaping for a better life. We meet teenage sisters Rebeca and Soledad and many others young and old with their own harrowing stories. But who do they trust?

*American Dirt* is a story of the love between a mother and son. It is also a story of the risks desperate people take and the prices they are willing to pay—and of those who make money from that desperation.

The novel sprang to prominence having been chosen for the Oprah Winfrey Book Club but controversy soon emerged because the author is a white woman. Many Mexican-American writers question Jeanine Cummins right to write this story and criticise what they see as stereotyping of Mexicans. A book tour scheduled in January last year was curtailed for fear of violence. The #OurVoices call has been as strong as we see here in Australia when white authors write a story about Aboriginal people or, for example, when a cisgender author writes about the trans experience. The question 'Who has the right to tell this story?' is a topic for discussion at many recent writers' events and festivals but voice appropriation is nothing new.

I encourage you to read it and make up your own mind about this book. Reflect on the fact that authors have been writing from perspectives other than their own since stories began. In a more recent edition, Jeanine Cummins discloses her family's links to South America in an attempt to justify her credentials to write this book. Some will continue to object to this book, but I am grateful that it has been written—and read—and talked about.

Highly recommended



Cheers

Jenny

[Reserve it here!](#)