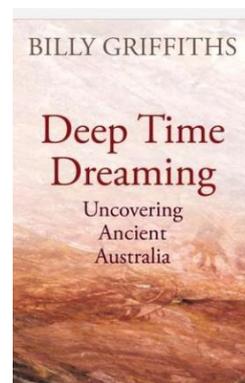


July 2020 SAMU3A Book Reviews

***Deep Time Dreaming* by Billy Griffiths**

Reviewed by Pauline Williams

I have moved away from crime fiction and jumped into this wonderful exploration of Australia's ancient past. '***Deep Time Dreaming***' looks at the role archaeological narrative is playing in connecting everyday Australians to the deep and culturally rich Aboriginal fabric that binds our vast continent together. Colonial history only takes us back a handful of hundreds of years or so, and ignores what the early explorers and white settlers found and observed in all corners of this great country. Griffiths notes that early attempts at uncovering our ancient past were primarily in the hands of treasure hunters and 'amateur' historians who collected stone artifacts from the local landscape and then sold these on to museums.



From these stone collections it was deemed that the Australian Aboriginal people had a primitive lifestyle and therefore considered relatively recent arrivals. It was only when in the late 1950s and early 1960s that a small group of Cambridge University trained archaeologists started to look at our past with a different historical perspective. They pioneered a technique called 'stratigraphic' excavation where pits were dug into the surface of the landscape and each layer analysed and documented. This saw significant sites explored along the Murray River, North Western coast of Tasmania, South Western Queensland and in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Some of the most culturally exciting and significant finds from these sites were 'grinding' and 'pounding' stones. Evidence of domestic grain growing and nearby charcoal deposits showed bread making was most likely a by-product of this technological change.

Those who watched the recent screening of '***Mystery Road***' on the ABC would recall the excitement when the visiting Swedish archaeologist found a grinding stone during her excavations and how important that was in the chronology of human evolution. This book demonstrates that Australian Aborigines have the oldest uninterrupted living culture anywhere on our planet. What's more, as Griffiths goes on to reveal in this book, recent archaeological evidence is continually pushing back the time sequence for Australia's ancient past and this is a remarkable story of transformation and resilience.

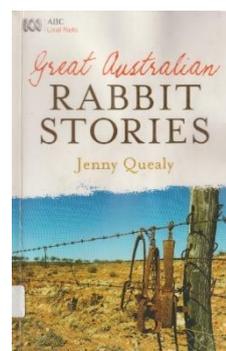
Please note, after I purchased this book Richard Fidler interviewed Billy Griffiths on '***Conversations***' and I am happy to include this in my Podcast sessions once U3A is back up and running as per normal.

***Great Australian Rabbit Stories* by Jenny Quealy**

Reviewed by Glenda Murray

"Great Australian Rabbit Stories" is a marvellous collection of true-life tales that give a remarkable insight into life on the land as seen through the eyes of those who have been at the frontline of Australia's relentless battle with the rabbit. These stories perfectly capture the Aussie spirit and ingenuity." *ABC Books 2010*

When Jenny Quealy, from a local Jerrys Plains family, worked for ABC Rural radio, they ran a story telling competition to collect rabbit stories from across the nation. She took these stories to ABC Books who published this book as part of the Great Australia Stories series.

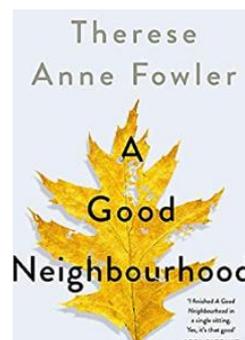


These stories are an invaluable record of Australian social history.

***A Good Neighbourhood* by Therese Anne Fowler**

Reviewed by Eryl Carter

Therese Anne Fowler must have tuned into the zeitgeist to publish this novel just before the murder of George Floyd and the international eruption of Black Lives Matter. It's mostly narrated in somewhat folksy style by the "We" of the neighbourhood in North Carolina and right from the start we know that something bad is going to happen. Xavier is 18, the son of a black ecology academic mother and a dead white father. He's a promising classical guitarist who's just won a scholarship to a prestigious music college. Growing up, his mother warns him to be careful around police because of his skin colour.



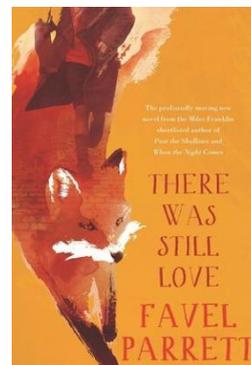
Over their back fence a new McMansion is built. Mother Valerie worries about the effect all that concrete will have on her beloved venerable oak. The family of local (white) successful businessman Brad moves in. He's the stepfather of 17 yo Juniper who's mocked by some school girls for taking a Christian vow to stay pure till marriage. The inevitable happens: the two youngsters fall in love. If you're thinking it doesn't end well, you're completely right, but no spoilers.

Despite the fact that we can clearly see Fowler setting up her ducks in a row the unnecessary tragedy that unfolds with the inevitability of a horrendous train wreck is still deeply affecting. Affairs are complicated by the fact that Brad convinces himself that not only does Juniper return his romantic interest (she doesn't), it would be only right and natural for him to be her first. Mercifully this doesn't happen but this delusion doesn't help. All in all, it's a heck of a good look at entrenched, systemic racism. By the way: isn't it interesting that no Americans ask young Christian boys to take a vow of purity?

***There Was Still Love* by Favel Parrett**

Reviewed by Eryl Carter

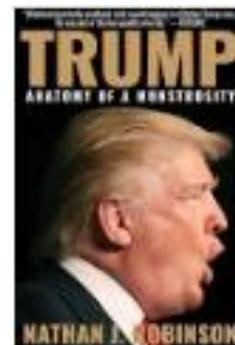
This charming little book is mostly told from the point of view of two children: a girl growing up in Melbourne and a boy in Prague circa 1980. Their grandmothers - who are doing the child-raising - are twin sisters. Through simply told vignettes that skip around in time we get a feel for Czechoslovakian life under communist rule and the trials of immigrant life in Australia plus the vivacity, creativity and stoicism of Czech culture. It is, in fact, the story of Favel and her Czech cousin. Gradually, we discover the wartime separation of the twins who both love and resent each other for very good reasons. Forgiveness and understanding win out. Parrett has gained an excellent reputation in Australia's literary world. This book is written with deceptively simple economy yet manages to be very vivid.



***Trump: Anatomy of a Monstrosity* by Nathan J Robinson**

Reviewed by Eryl Carter

In the first part of this book Robinson goes through Trump's faults. He is a serial sexual predator by his own admission. He regularly underpaid for goods and services contracted, causing businesses to go bust and deserves to be in prison for this alone. He exaggerates wildly (eg: about how wealthy he is). He hasn't read a book since grade school. He has poor understanding of world trade (advisers use flash cards with no more than two points per card). His



knowledge of the world is limited (he didn't know that India and China share a border). He doesn't laugh. He has no moral code to speak of. Yet despite this, says Robinson, Trump cannot be dismissed as a buffoon. No one gets to be in the public eye for decades without being very shrewd. He is very good at grasping people's weak points and engaging in bullying negotiations. His often-outrageous statements succeed in getting exactly what he wants: **attention**. Robinson thinks the media are wrong to pay attention to everything Trump says. They should reserve their criticism for matters of substance.

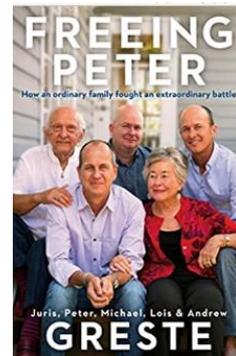
In the second part of the book Robinson examines why the Democrats failed in 2016. He finds fault with Hillary Clinton's candidacy for many reasons. She was under investigation by the FBI. She didn't have strong policy positions, often issuing wishy washy bet-each-way statements. She preferred to hob nob with the rich and famous rather than engage with grassroots supporters. She famously referred to poor people as "deplorables". She relied on fancy algorithms to tell her where to campaign, which were faulty and she was largely missing in action during the campaign. She relied on a feeling that it was her time; that she deserved the presidency. Democratic policy was long-winded and difficult to understand. Trump by contrast issued pithy statements that told people what they wanted to hear. Robinson's analysis of the increasing poverty and despair in the Rust Belt states is sad to read. These are the people Democrats should be engaging and Robinson sets out a plan for how they could do it.

This book is easy to read and not that long if you ignore the appendix, however it could be shorter still as Robinson does repeat himself unnecessarily. He certainly knows his stuff, being a columnist, a teacher and the force behind *Current Affairs* magazine, which he started in 2016.

***Freeing Peter* by Juris, Peter, Michael, Lois & Andrew GRESTE**

Reviewed by Pauline Williams

I chose to review this book because of what is happening in our world as we navigate through COVID-19. The role of free press has always been an integral part of democratic nations and now more than ever we need to be able to discern 'real' from 'fake' news. The role of the journalist is imperative to record and report what is happening out there as we are bombarded daily by sometimes conflicting events. The world moves at a fast pace and we need a clear and reasoned voice to keep us informed. We don't need our journalists attacked and silenced!



In December of 2013 Peter Greste an Australian journalist working overseas for Al Jazeera English and went to Cairo, Egypt to cover for a friend over the Christmas break. Things in Egypt had been simmering along since the civil unrests in Syria and Tunisia. Peter was arrested and put into solitary confinement, then charged with threatening national security. No evidence was ever produced, but after a sham trial he was given a seven-year sentence.

In this book we hear the harrowing journey Peter Greste endured while his family pulled together back in Australia, galvanised rather than paralysed by the crisis. This is a powerful insight into the power of love, fortitude and resilience. Each family member provides intimate details of how they pulled together, endured emotional visits to the Cairo prison, the strain of decision-making and dealing with the paucity of information. The strength provided by the family and later the

international media campaign gave Peter Greste the mental capacity to endure the 400 days spent in prison and his battle to be set free. Well worth the read!

Good Quotes

Have you ever laughed out loud or been particularly struck by something you've read? In this new section are quotes from books. Feel free to submit your own.

He lets the owner go and turns to a young guy sitting on a stool. "I'm going to pat you down, m'ijo."

"I'm not your son."

"You don't know that," Wilmer says. "I get around. Hands on the bar."

Crime 101: There's a word for a man who believes in coincidence: the defendant.

Bobbi is a West Texas liberal, which don't make her a unicorn but something much rarer. Compared to a West Texas liberal, Cal thinks, unicorns are a dime a dozen.

the best part of ourselves is trapped inside the worst part of ourselves and just can't manage to get out.

From "Broken" by Don Winslow

Six excellent novellas by the Emperor of crime fiction.

She knew all the fashion designers by their first names and went to the memorial services for their boyfriends.

Like communism in Eastern Europe, her marriage was suddenly crumbling so fast that she couldn't keep up with it.

On George the dog:

Most of the time he was as lazy as Buffy – even lazier, if that was possible – and needed to be dragged along on his walks, sometimes in a sitting position.

His marriage was like a cot-death. Barely begun, it had turned over on its face and stopped breathing. Nobody noticed, least of all his wife.

From "The Ex-Wives" by Deborah Moggach (author of the book and screenplay of Best Marigold Hotel)

Story of an ageing hypochondriac Shakespearean actor called Buffy and a young woman who comes to London and takes a bizarre interest in his ex-wives and mistresses. A bit slow but has some great lines.

Thanks to the reviewers for our July SAMU3A online book club. Please feel free to write a review of your own reading loves (or hates) for the August edition of SAMU3A Book Reviews. Email to erylacarter@gmail.com. **Please don't feel that only serious books are welcome. Especially during COVID times there's nothing wrong with a bit of light-hearted escapism! Also, don't feel that you need to provide a picture of the cover. I'll get that.**

Cheers, Eryl.

Happy reading!