

## June 2020 SAMU3A Book Reviews

### ***Terra Nullius* by Clare Colman**

Reviewed by Carolyn Carter

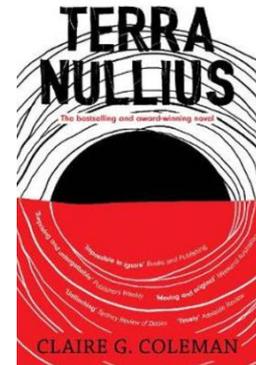
This novel is set in outback Australia when it opens and appears to remain in that setting for most of the book. It is Australia post the invasion and we are told the story from the point of view of the invaded. There are about three main stories or subplots that develop this theme throughout the novel.

In particular, one of the stolen generation who has escaped a mission being run by the Sisters is attempting to get back to his place of birth and be with his people. A posse is set up made up of a violent leading trooper and a handful of young local male settlers keen to round up the escapee. Their chase of the escapee forms an ongoing sub plot of the novel.

Switch to another of the main characters, and we share his experience as another contingent of troopers massacre a group of indigenous people. He is truly horrified by the experience and deserts the troopers only to end up almost dying of thirst, only to be saved by two indigenous men. This trooper joins his two saviours who have formed a 'marauding' group with three others, and their exploits form another sub plot of the novel.

Another subplot is about a remote community hiding in the desert from the invaders to escape being forced into a reserve or mission.

It is a couple of months since I read this novel so I can't remember all of the details such as names and places. There is a great dramatic twist in the book about a third of the way into it which I was not expecting. This novel had an enormous impact on me as I felt that the writer was very successful in making the reader feel what it is like to be on the receiving end of an invasion and the powerlessness of the conquered.

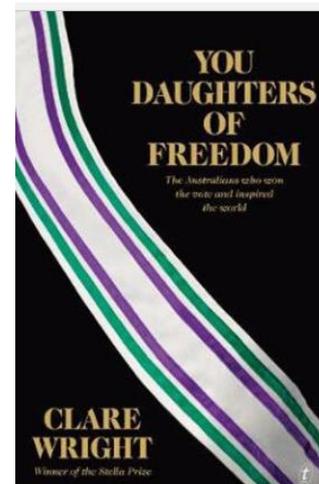


### ***You Daughters of Freedom* by Clare Wright**

Reviewed by Carolyn Carter

This is a non-fiction history book about some of the early leading feminists and suffragettes of Australia. I had never heard of some of them, and was only vaguely aware of the others. Apart from providing some detailed information about how they worked to achieve the vote for women in the various states of Australia as well as the vote in federal elections, it also provides some insight into Australia's beginnings from the first Federal Parliament to the outbreak of World War I.

One of these insights was how Australia was renowned by the rest of the world for its political and social innovations, e.g., USA (whose President Teddy Roosevelt greatly admired us) and the UK. This was because of such things as votes for women, the right for women to stand for election to parliament, the Harvester Judgement ('fair and reasonable wage'), and the first Labor led government (led by Chris Watson in 1904) – we are now led to believe that Gallipoli was the making of Australia!



Another insight is do with whether Australia is racist. This issue seems to crop up from time to time (especially now during the COVID19 pandemic) and there are always people insisting that we are not racist – against this the fact that one of the first acts passed by Federal Parliament was the ‘Immigration Restriction Act 1901’ which formed the basis of the White Australia Policy. Although the act was repealed and replaced in 1958 by the Immigration Act, it’s still haunts our national psyche.

Most of the book focuses on what several of the Australian suffragettes did in the UK to help women there get the vote, and the important part they played in that movement. These ladies were a feisty lot to say the least. Also, sadly for the women of the UK, their male MPs had a greater sense of male entitlement than most of their Australian counterparts and some UK women only got the vote after World War I. Clare Wright has a good story telling style, and although she uses the usual academic protocols of writing based on evidence this does not affect the flow of the text.

### ***Husband Replacement Therapy* by Kathy Lette**

Review by Eryl Carter (when too many Carters are never enough)

This is the latest from Australian funny woman Kathy Lette (of *Puberty Blues* fame). It begins with a drunk Ruby Ryan at her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party telling everyone - including her sexting, cheating husband - exactly what she thinks of them. She finishes by announcing she has pancreatic cancer and will die soon. Great set-up, right?

She convinces her warring older sisters Emerald and Amber to go on a last cruise with her in hopes they’ll kiss and make up. It turns out to be a cougar cruise. There’s something important she doesn’t tell them though.

We expect a madcap romp with plenty of good jokes. This Lette delivers, so I kept asking myself “Why am I so lukewarm about this?” After thinking about it a lot, it came down to this: the psychology of the characters is unconvincing. For example, the mother of the 3 daughters is painted particularly black. She is pious, hypocritical and horrendously nasty. She plays her daughters off against each other, and they – somewhat unconvincingly - don’t realise this. Also: Ruby knows she should ‘fess up about some major news but doesn’t seem to realise the all the psychological and ethical implications of not doing so. Well okay – the narrating character can be a bit blind but I don’t think the author realises either. She needs this as a plot device to introduce complications of the “true love never did run smooth” variety.

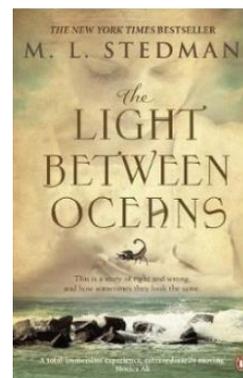
I score this 3 out of 5. It has a happy ending of course. And warning: there’s some hearty sex so if you’re averse to this give it a miss.



### ***The Light Between Oceans* by M.L.Stedman**

Reviewed by Cheryl Gardiner

After fighting in the war for four years, on returning to Australia Tom takes a job as lighthouse keeper on Janus Island. A ship with fresh supplies comes once each season and leave is only granted once a year. Tom marries Isabel and they begin to build a life together. Tragically they lose three babies and Isabel is devastated at the prospect of never having the family she longs for. One day Tom sees a boat floating near the island and Tom and Isabel's lives change forever.



This is a beautiful book exploring the idea that one person's happiness can cause great sadness to another. Also, the consequences of one deception can be long lasting and unpredictable.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This book has been made into a film.

### ***Catch a Falling Star* by Katie M Little**

Reviewed by Anne Mason

This book is about growing up as Jeannie Little's daughter. Many of us remember Jeannie Little as the zany woman on the Mike Walsh midday show, who made outfits out of almost anything. This book gives us an insight as to what it is like to be the daughter of a celebrity. Many of the reminiscences are similar to what every child experiences - arguments with parents, first kisses and teenage

parties that got a little out of control. But most of us have not been backstage, or mixed with famous names in our childhood. Gary McDonald's penchant for sarongs and not bothering with Russell Crowe's autograph as he wasn't yet famous are just 2 examples.



There is not a happy ending (spoiler alert) as Jeannie Little contracted Alzheimer's in later life. As with many families her spouse refused to acknowledge this for some time. This book will be available at next year's book fair at the Uniting church.

### ***The Amazing Mrs Livesey* by Freda Marnie Nicholls**

Reviewed by Anne Mason

This book is about a woman who had over forty aliases, eight official marriages, five divorces and four children. She was born in Manchester, England in 1897 and first came to Australia in 1919. She managed to avoid incarceration for most of the time. I was amazed at the woman's audacity. She must have had the gift of the gab and an engaging personality as later in life she was overweight and not overly attractive.



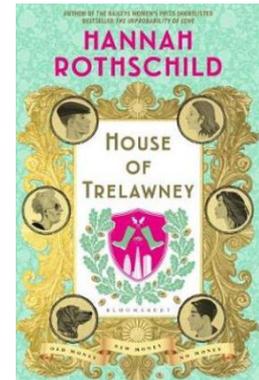
How she evaded the law catching up with her is hard to comprehend in this age when we have access to so much information from all over the world at our fingertips. It gets bogged down in legal matters at the end, but nevertheless, an interesting read about a little-known character from our past.

This book will also be available at next year's book sale. (ED: Which says it all.)

## **House of Trelawney by Hannah Rothschild**

Reviewed by Eryl Carter

Unlike the Kathy Lette book I can highly recommend this. It's the story of impoverished aristocrats in Cornwall. It's often very funny – Rothschild writes with an insouciant, light-hearted tone – but never at the expense of seriousness when called for. These totally believable characters are holding some painful secrets. They follow the usual story arc: once innocence has gone they struggle along with life's ups and downs, eventually arriving at a wiser, stronger, more contented place.



One of the characters picks the GFC. Unfortunately, she's less good at trading her way out of it. The portrait of Princess Margaret is priceless. Poor Jane, married to Kitto the heir, (who's useless at banking and manages to lose yet more money) is an absolute dogsbody to ageing in-laws and the decaying family pile they can't afford to fix. She's a lousy cook, her children are rude to her and she's not her husband's first choice of spouse. Out of the blue an old friend who's dying in India asks that they look after her 18yo daughter. What could possibly go wrong?

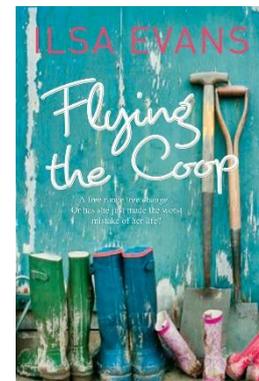
Rothschild is one of *THE* Rothschilds and has had a pretty impressive career herself so she's presumably well-placed to write about such things. I enjoyed her first novel, *The Improbability of Love* too. This one is definitely a thumbs up.



## **CHICKENS RULE**

Reviewed by Pauline Clark

In *Flying the Coop* Chris Beggs and her husband had the dream of one day owning an idyllic farm with a few chooks and cattle. So, when Chris, now divorced and 15 years later, goes ahead with the plan those close to her are a little surprised. Instead of the picturesque farmhouse with a few wandering chickens Chris buys a free-range chook farm with thousands of inhabitants and an opinionated llama. Planned and unplanned chaos ensues and recognisable family life goes on.



*Flying the Coop*, is just one of fourteen good reads by Australian author Ilsa Evans. I haven't read all of them but the 10 I have were well written and highly entertaining. Ilsa Evans is the type of author who, once you find one of her books, you pretty quickly buy others to read – the magic of ebooks for me. If you are a murder mystery lover then her *Nell Forrest* series is a must. If *Flying the Coop* doesn't sound like your cup of tea then try another Ilsa Evans book – you won't regret it.

Thanks to all reviewers for our second SAMU3A online book club. Researchers find that people who read are more empathic, as well as more knowledgeable. Please feel free to write a review of your own reading loves (or hates) for the July edition of SAMU3A Book

Reviews. Email to [erylacarter@gmail.com](mailto:erylacarter@gmail.com).

*Happy reading!*