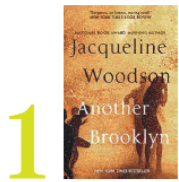


5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES



1

Fiction
ANOTHER BROOKLYN
Jacqueline Woodson
Oneworld \$18.99

Woodson is a writer of young adult and children's books but this is a very grown-up story about being black and underprivileged in Brooklyn. Her heroine, August, is motherless — somehow she and her brother managed to be halfway-whole, she says — and finds family among friends who are full of life and hope, dancing and music, before the eating disorders, religious fervour, drugs, sexual assaults and deeper grief for a mother who heard voices in her head.

Locked arm in arm with Sylvia, Gigi and Angela, she, like them, thought the future was hers. August runs into Sylvia years later on a train; it's awkward and they're no longer in touch.

But it triggers poetic reflections on a time of joyful empowerment that shows how beauty can still be found where the eye sees none.

PENELOPE DEBELLE ★★★



2

Memoir
ONLY
Caroline Baum
Allen & Unwin \$32.99

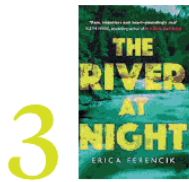
Only is an homage by journalist and broadcaster Caroline Baum to the extraordinary lives of her parents. Growing up in 1960s London, Baum enjoyed a life characterised by material privilege and emotional deprivation. Her European parents, both damaged by the horrors of World War II, were distant and demanding.

Absorbing many of their worst traits, she became an "ungrateful, obnoxious snob". By her teenage years, Baum was "a geyser of contempt and hatred".

Only later did she learn to negotiate those difficult family relationships and temper her bitterness and frustration.

She reveals more about her parents than about herself in a vivid, but not flattering, family portrait written with honesty and grace.

DIANA CARROLL ★★★★★
Caroline Baum will be a guest at Adelaide Writers' Week March 4-9.



3

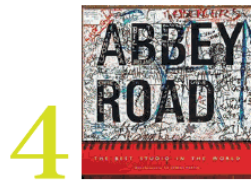
Thriller
THE RIVER AT NIGHT
Erica Ferencik
Bloomsbury \$24.99

Four friends put aside a week each year to holiday together; chugging cocktails on beaches while battling disintegrating marriages, stalled careers and sickness. This year exercise junkie Pia persuades them to go to backwoods Maine instead for a white-water rafting trip. The narrator, magazine artist Win, is doubtful, suffering an existential crisis as 40 approaches, she "doesn't speak nature". But pushy Pia wants adventure — and adventure is what she gets.

A freak accident leaves them stranded, their relationships fracturing as they fight for survival and, in Win's case, the seductive lure of death as well.

This is screenwriter and essayist Ferencik's debut novel. Wonderfully adept at passages of descriptive prose that bring a unique environment vividly to life, she also handles the adrenaline-charged action scenes with ease.

SHELLEY ORCHARD ★★★



4

Music
ABBEY ROAD
Alastair Lawrence
Bloomsbury \$39.99

Some might expect this "photographic celebration" of London's Abbey Road studios to be all about The Beatles. But this magnificently researched book (now in paperback) throws open the doors to a surprisingly large and diverse array of bands, solo stars, comedians and composers who have worked there in the 85-year history of the world's first purpose-built recording studio.

In 1931, Elgar conducted the London Symphony Orchestra in Abbey Road's opening ceremony. Churchill recorded his inspiring wartime speeches there, while Glen Miller recorded his last session at the studios before his plane disappeared over the Channel.

The Beatles' penchant for recording experimentation in the 1960s was further expanded by seminal acts such as Pink Floyd, which embraced Abbey Road's multi-track technology.

NICK HOPTON ★★★



5

Picturebook
MOPOKE
Philip Bunting
Omnibus Books, \$24.99

The shy mopoke just wants a little peace and quiet, but he is about to find out you can't always get what you want. In this gloriously quirky picturebook debut, a stylised round-eyed mopoke sits on a minimalist gum tree branch against a midnight black background and tries to sleep through all the pokes the bush (and the inventive Bunting) can inflict on him.

Bunting marries something of the illustrative style of John Klassen with the prose of *Where is the Green Sheep?* as his spare text introduces an imaginative variety of "pokes", from a yo-yo playing yo-poke to a moustachioed mo'poke and a combination slowpoke. At the exact halfway point there is a hilariously pofaced interloper. Brilliantly produced — check out the mopoke-feathered endpapers — this is a book to relish, share and treasure.

KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★★★

Search for solace in the Red Centre

REVIEWED BY MARGOT LLOYD

It is a habit of Australian writers, I think, to spend a lot of time trying to describe landscape. Our films, too, often feature endless panning shots with little in the way of plot. It's possible for a story set in a beautiful location to still be gripping, of course, but sometimes plot takes a backseat. Sometimes it's not there at all.

Lia Hills is well known for her debut novel, *The Beginner's Guide to Living*, a young adult book that focuses on a young man's grief after his mother's death. In *The Crying Place*, she comes back to the idea of grief, this time focusing on the ties of friendship and place between two men.

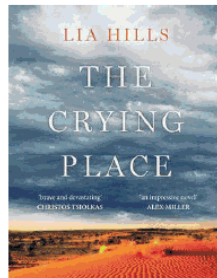
Saul is in his mid-30s, trying to force himself to settle down in Sydney after a youth spent wandering the world. Most of these adventures took place with Jed, his best friend since childhood. When Saul finds out that Jed has killed himself, his reaction is immediate and unthinking: he packs his car and starts driving. First he goes to Melbourne, to the boarding house where Jed occasionally lived, then to Adelaide, and finally north, in search of the woman loved by Jed, who's living in a desert community southwest of Alice Springs. Saul doesn't have a plan, but he's searching for answers.

Hills's prose is spare, unembellished and

perfect for describing the silence and hidden depths of the desert. There is a running comparison between the Sahara, site of young Saul and Jed's adventures, and the Centre, all the more alien for being closer to home. For all its beauty, the desert is home to ugly behaviour, like that of the sexist fly-in workers at the Coober Pedy pub, or the casual racism of the people Saul encounters as he works his way north. But Hills lets the landscape breathe, giving us glimpses of the transcendent experience of walking through the salt crust to find water in Lake Eyre, of the miracle of a waterhole in the middle of the desert.

Still, there's something clichéd about Saul's flight and search for redemption in the Red Centre, especially as he tries to take part in Aboriginal rituals in order to cleanse his grief. Hills consulted local communities extensively for *The Crying Place*, and her articulation of racism in the area is nuanced, including Saul's realisation of his own racist assumptions. But his attempts to insert himself into this other culture to cure his grief feels trite.

As Saul travels he meets a cast of characters, including Ziggy, a German woman who has overstayed her visa and found her own connection to the land. She offers Saul the possibility of some kind of



Fiction
THE CRYING PLACE
Lia Hills, Allen & Unwin \$29.99

future, beyond his grief. There are also moments of depth in Alec, the slow and quiet gardener in Alice Springs, and Thaddeus, the old man trying to make his peace with the past.

Still, many of the characters feel underdeveloped, a feeling not helped by dialogue that is either stilted or dull. As Saul



Lia Hills... lets the landscape breathe

travels, he reads another story of a man's journey to the centre, Patrick White's *Voss*, in which the strong-willed Laura and Voss forge a connection that ties them across great distances. Saul and Jed feel ephemeral and incomplete.

For the sake of Hills's descriptive abilities alone, I wanted *The Crying Place* to be a success, but instead it feels like a half-done book. The landscape is there — bold, beautiful, relentless — but Saul's journey and final redemption feel flimsy, like an excuse to put all that desert to paper.