

5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES



1

Memoir
AUTUMN
Karl Ove Knausgaard
Harvill Secker \$35
Knausgaard's *My Struggle* series was a literary sensation. In six "autobiographical novels", the serious, but seriously talented, Norwegian laid his life bare, writing unflinchingly about life, death, sex and his father's slow slide into chronic alcoholism. It was a tough read.

Autumn, on the other hand, is anything but. The first in an "autobiographical quartet", it's a series of vignettes, including three letters to his unborn daughter, in which he ponders everything from porpoises to piss, beekeeping to buttons, fingers to flies.

Some are serious, some are lighthearted and some are - believe it or not - bordering on funny.

He seems to be in a good place, and some of the best passages are saved for descriptions of family life around his home in rural Sweden.

NATHAN DAVIES ★★★★★

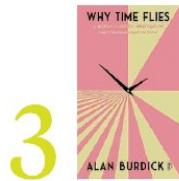


2

Fiction
THE GIRL WHO TAKES AN EYE FOR AN EYE
David Lagercrantz
MacLehose Press \$32.99
Lisbeth Salander, the girl with the dragon tattoo, is back and still hellbent on tracking down and punishing those who made her childhood - and that of other vulnerable people - a misery.

In this fifth Millennium book, Swedish journalist Lagercrantz again proves himself up to the job of continuing the late Stieg Larsson's series. His political tone and narrative style is almost indistinguishable from Larsson's, and he provides an authentic voice for the other main character, investigative reporter Mikael Blomkvist. Computer hacker Salander begins this tale in prison where she quickly hospitalises her resident queen bee, uncovers a brutal murder plot hatched by the brothers of a defenceless Muslim prisoner, and learns of a government experiment that involves separated twins.

PATRICK MCDONALD ★★★★★



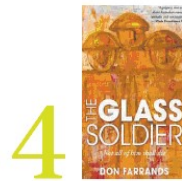
3

Science
WHY TIME FLIES
Alan Burdick
Text \$32.99
It seems pointless ambitious to write a short book about the concept of time. Where (when) would you start? *Why Time Flies* gets around this by looking not at time itself, but at the way we see it. Alan Burdick is more interested in the psychology, rather than the physics, of time.

The first half of the book concerns the way we measure time, from atomic clocks through to our own biological rhythms. Then, he deals with the way we experience time, our idea of "now", and the way time seems to speed up and slow down.

Research in this area is messy and inconclusive. Burdick has been thorough in his attempt to turn it into something understandable. It's a good read if you want to think, hard, about the way time passes and how you mark it.

ELLEN PHIDDIAN ★★★★★



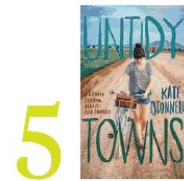
4

Biography
THE GLASS SOLDIER
Don Farrands
Big Sky Publishing \$34.99
Nelson Harold Ferguson enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in July 1915. He was a young art teacher from Ballarat who joined up to be part of "the adventure of war".

Serving as a stretcher-bearer on the frontlines in Europe, his adventure rapidly became a nightmare. He returned home in January 1919 suffering debilitating injuries and facing an uncertain future. Later in life, Ferguson founded a stained glass business in Melbourne, earning himself the sobriquet "the glass soldier".

This book is by Ferguson's grandson and draws extensively from his wartime diaries and letters. It's a story of determination, faith, and love, and a reflection on the tragic human cost of war. Royalties from sales of the book are being donated to The Fred Hollows Foundation.

DIANA CARROLL ★★★★★



5

Teenage Fiction
UNTIDY TOWNS
Kate O'Donnell
UQP \$19.95
O'Donnell's debut novel follows 17-year-old scholarship-girl Adelaide as she walks out of her prestigious boarding school and heads home to the sleepy country town she was once glad to leave. She finishes Year 12 online in a desultory fashion and works at the dusty local historical society while she reacquaints herself with old school friends and country town ways.

Desperate for adventure and a passport to the world, she nevertheless takes a long time to understand her own responsibilities in making her dreams a reality, but meantime she meets Jarrod who is reticent about his dreams but makes an excellent role model in the reality stakes. As well as an embedded wealth of literary allusions from childhood to the classics, O'Donnell includes lists of her favourite books and the books she wants to read next.

KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★★★

At home everywhere – and nowhere

WORDS LAURA KROETSCH

In her Miles Franklin winning novel *Questions of Travel* Michelle de Kretser told the story of two travellers, her an expat, him a refugee, and it is through their displacement that we see both Europe and Australia.

The Life to Come continues a similar line of enquiry. If in the earlier novel the question was how did we get here, this new novel wonders what's next, what could be different?

And while it shares the fierce intelligence of its predecessor, it is in a way a gentler book, but no less satisfying or sophisticated.

The setting shifts from Sydney to London and Paris, and the story moves in a circular way, told in sections by a series of characters whose lives have in some way touched upon Pippa's, a naive and ambitious Anglo-Australian writer who travels first to Sydney and then to Paris.

There are two writers in the book, and through them de Kretser has great fun with her tribe.

In Paris, Pippa encounters the aged and elegant Celeste, a French-born Algerian turned Australian woman working in near poverty as a translator, deeply and unhappily in love with a married woman.

In Sydney, Pippa's life brushes up against

a series of recent immigrants. The first is Ash, a Sri Lankan man born in London and educated in the US, who uses the story of his childhood as a way to rather callously endear himself to women.

Another is Cristabel, a woman who has come to Australia to live with a childhood friend from Ceylon, known affectionately as Bunty. Together they share a house, a debt and a mysterious friendship. Pippa lives next door.

The most powerful of her immigrant encounters is with Eva, the matriarch of her husband's family, a woman embracing her position as a moneyed Australian with the freedom to help those less fortunate.

She is a wonderful tyrant and a clever poke at the Left.

Each of these characters, and others within the novel, harbour a familial link to civil unrest, war or revolution. Through these encounters de Kretser is able to explore both the politics of displacement and the terrible loneliness of love and loss.

Her great gift is her ability to write novels where the past hovers over her characters as they struggle to create new lives.

What is often astounding is her ability to write about flawed characters in a way that is never cynical or sentimental. It is instead a great story.

The book begins with a quote from Beckett's *Endgame* and near the end an



Fiction
THE LIFE TO COME
Michelle de Kretser
Allen & Unwin \$32.99

elderly and alone Celeste asks "Do you entertain illusions?" In this, de Kretser reminds us that life is absurd, and hopeless and sad, and her novel aches with loneliness. It knows that foolishness is too often yoked to power and that we all have a little racist living in the reptilian part of our brains.



A gentler book ... de Kretser. Picture: Renee Nowytagher

And yet, her novel is hopeful, and full of light, illuminated on nearly every page, almost always by natural light that sustains both us, her readers, and them, her characters.

No matter how or where they travel, they always have just enough good sense to look up and out into the world.