

5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES



1
Fiction
GRACE
Paul Lynch
OneWorld \$24.99
The subject is harrowing: a young girl in 19th century Ireland, Grace, is cast out by her desperate mother who cuts the child's hair and dresses her like a boy.
Winter is coming and no one knows but the Great Famine has begun.
Her younger brother, Colly, leaves with her and they have each other but then Colly slips into the river, leaving nothing but a mud scar.
He stays in her head though, a companion even after death.
How Grace survives is a vast sweep of a story and years later she knows the Famine has past only when a horse is left to die alone, not surrounded by the starving who wait for it to fall.
Mostly though it's Lynch's poetic, effortless, inventive way with language that makes this such a majestic book.
PENELOPE DEBELLE ★★★★★



2
Biography
MEMOIRS
Mike Willesee
Macmillan Australia \$44.99
Mike Willesee once hosted *This is Your Life*. It was, he writes, a sham and he hated it. Now he's written his own memoirs and, reliable or not, they make a cracking tale of good fortune, ambition, risk-taking, self-belief, and driving curiosity.
He opens with the cancer diagnosis that gave him a year to live - but by the end, he's still here. Maybe that's the luck that saw him survive other near-death experiences: his birth, the Vietnam War and a plane crash.
Bold business deals, a beauty queen bride, beatings by the Catholic Brothers, a VFL career, all flesh him out, but journalism dominates.
Whether interviewing Adelaide boy Quentin Kenihan, his search for God, alcoholism, name-dropping or failed marriages, his is a tale, and life, that rarely flags.
ROY ECCLESTON ★★★★★



3
Crime
SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE AUSTRALIAN CASEBOOK
Edited by Christopher Sequeira
Echo \$34.99
It's little known that the incomparable detective Sherlock Holmes spent 1890 not at 221B Baker St but in Australia. Here, as attested by the faithful Watson, he solved many a puzzle.
This handsomely bound book, complemented with pen and ink illustrations, details these adventures in the great southern land, including encounters with bearded bushrangers.
The collection has been cleverly compiled to include all the capital cities, from the murder at Mrs Macquarie's Chair to Perth, ducking in also to Ballarat and Bunbury, to mention but two. There's a tricky case in Adelaide with a cheeky mention of *The Advertiser* and several featuring the "alien bush", particularly a poetic piece from Will Schaefer. Other contributors include Phryne Fisher author Kerry Greenwood.
SHELLEY ORCHARD ★★★★★



4
Nonfiction
AUSTRALIAN GYPSIES: THEIR SECRET HISTORY
Mandy Sayer
New South \$34.99
"Gypsy life" conjures up images of perennial travellers, colourful caravans and fortune tellers. That's true in part: the Romany have historically been nomads, particularly through Europe. But they have also been persecuted and harassed, mistrusted and evicted.
Sayer was initially fascinated by the musical traditions of Gypsies, and managed to befriend a number of Gypsy families in Australia.
Notoriously private and self-reliant, the Gypsies may not appreciate Sayer's careful detailing of their history, customs and language. But she offers a sympathetic account of their past and likely future, pressured as their children are by the demands of 21st century life.
I was curious to find two of my forebears' surnames in the list of Gypsy families in Australia. You might be, too.
ROBYN DOUGLASS ★★★★★



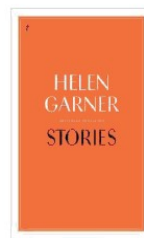
5
Teen Fiction
TAKE THREE GIRLS
Cath Crowley, Simone Howell and Fiona Wood
Pan \$18.99
Three of Australia's best YA authors have teamed up in this rewarding and entertaining novel exploring female friendship and the scourge of cyber-bullying.
St Hilda's school responds to a spate of online bullying targeting their students by setting up a term-long Wellness Program for Year 10 tackling issues such as identity, self-image and making good choices.
The program's exercises bring together three girls who would not normally be friends: brainy musician Kate, a boarder, patrician Ady with a family in quiet crisis and disaffected swimming star Clem.
The characters are thoroughly engaging, their interaction convincing and they grow most satisfyingly in their relationships as the book progresses.
KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★★★

Garner's birthday gift to her readers

WORDS KATHARINE ENGLAND

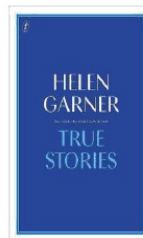
Published in honour of Helen Garner's 75th birthday towards the end of 2017 these handsome hardbacks bring together all the author's published short pieces. *Stories* reproduces the fictional contents of *My Hard Heart* (1998) minus the novellas *Honour* and *Other People's Children*; *True Stories* brings together the non-fiction contents of the original 1996 *True Stories* with *The Feel of Steel* (2001) and 2016's *Everywhere I Look*, prefaced with a new, 2017 reflection on the case of Akon Guode, who, in an eerie echo of the Farquharson tragedy that consumed Garner in *This House of Grief*, drove her careful of children into a Victorian lake.
The new, compendious *True Stories* is a fine, clean 636 pages, each piece usefully dated with its year of publication, the odd typo corrected although some puzzles remain, but its heft is such that it is more comfortable to read the work in its original, more manageable formats.
For the thing about Garner's short non-fiction is that it is eminently re-readable: it is rewarding to dip into for a dose of clarity, a remembered reassurance, a useful object lesson in constructive ways of thinking, or to reignite a sense of admiration for a particular craft, for work conscientiously,

imaginatively, almost sacramentally undertaken. The two standouts, for me, are still *At the Morgue* and *Death* from Garner's first collection with their intense yet tender observation, their uplifting sense of practical, respectful care for the left-over body and the writer's unexpected conviction that the death of the body cannot be the full-stop end of all that a person has been.
To these have now been added the hilarious *The Insults of Age*, which robustly interrogates the invisibility and infantilisation of, particularly, women past retirement age, and recounts some energetic and effective ripostes, and Garner's painful but insightful experience of her mother's Alzheimer's. I had forgotten, too, the wonderful description of the down-to-earth, sex-education lessons that saw Garner sacked from teaching in 1972: off-the-cuff lessons inspired by the lewd defacements of school history texts and her determination to respond honestly to the burning questions of her class of Fitzroy 13-year-olds.
Not all is uplift. Garner is writing here through the painful ends of three marriages and the deaths of her parents. She speaks here and in interviews of her shame over what she sees as a dereliction in care for her mother and more than once quotes Elizabeth Jolley on the way in which the parent's strong love for a child does not seem



Fiction
STORIES
Helen Garner
Text \$29.99

able to be replicated by the child's love for the parent.
There seems less difference than one might expect between the true stories and the fictional ones: many of the latter are written in the first person and the main character of one of the best is a Little Helen, but the fiction, too, is full of the intense observational and psychological detail that illuminates the "true" stories and generally



Non-fiction
TRUE STORIES
Helen Garner
Text \$39.99

makes Garner's work so intimately relatable. As I leaf through the volumes, having just re-read both of them, I am still brought up short by another revelatory insight of the everyday, the latest one of my favourites from *Postcards From Swiflers*: "Now that I have spent money here, now that I have rubbish to dispose of, I am no longer a stranger." I could go on and on, but I am out of words. Many happy returns Helen Garner!