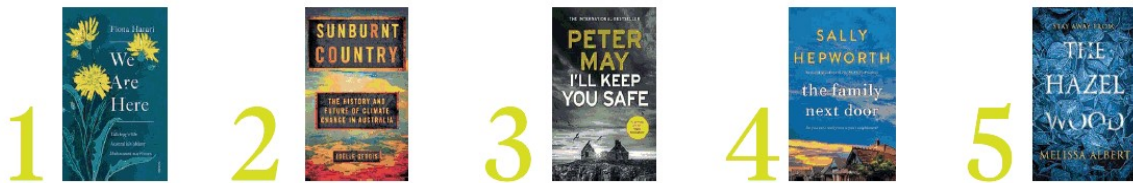


5 BOOKS IN 5 MINUTES



History

WE ARE HERE
Fiona Harari
Scribe, \$29.99

Harari has collected the stories of 18 Holocaust survivors who made a new life in Australia after World War II. Each mini-memoir is prefaced with a sensitive introduction by Harari and then the story is told in their own voice.

All now elderly, the youngest being 92, they have long lives to recount. And these are lives full of surprises – happy, stable lives with suburban homes, children and grandchildren. Creating a strong family takes on a new importance when you've lost everyone, and everything. For some, the hate and anguish of the war is always present, overwhelming their quiet moments and haunting their sleep. But most have learned to live with their past.

Mala Sonnabend, now almost 100, speaks for many of her compatriots in the book when she says, "I consider myself lucky, absolutely."

DIANA CARROLL ★★★★★

Nonfiction

SUNBURNT COUNTRY
Joelle Gergis
Melbourne University Press \$34.99

A decade ago, Joelle Gergis gathered historians and scientists for an ambitious project – to document, as far as possible, the climate of southeastern Australia. From First Fleet diaries to indigenous records, tree rings and ice cores, the team left no stone unturned.

It begins with a familiar theme: droughts and flooding rains, as Europeans describe their shock at the continent's unforgiving nature.

Gergis explains how the Earth shapes Australia's climate, and compares the patterns of the past with records gathered by the Bureau of Meteorology since Federation. Record after record is smashed as global warming takes effect – but we knew that. In Adelaide, the number of heatwave days is double what it was in 1950.

It's not depressing, just an impressive marshalling of the facts.

ROBYN DOUGLASS ★★★★★

Crime

I'LL KEEP YOU SAFE
Peter May
Riverrun \$32.99

At the heart of this story is a murder mystery but it's really a love song to the hardy folk of the inhospitable Scottish Hebrides.

May has featured the Isle of Lewis in his writings before but never so lyrically. He paints the landscape with the skill of one of the fabrics featured in the tale, weaving together the heathery colours and tinting them with the silver of the sea.

Tweed designers Neave and Rory (Anglicised from the Gaelic Macfarlane) are in Paris when a bomb explodes as Rory sets off to visit a client.

The police rule out a terror attack and draw up a list of suspects, among them Neave.

As the close-knit island prepares for a traditional burial, Neave dissects their lives in search of answers. Only the destination is disappointing.

SHELLEY ORCHARD ★★★★★

Fiction

THE FAMILY NEXT DOOR
Sally Hepworth
Macmillan \$29.99

A nice little pod of happy housewives has moved in to Pleasant Court: nice houses, nice husbands, nice neighbours, and nice children. Then the childless woman moves in. What is she doing there?

Isabelle is not a catalyst for all the issues which beset the Melbourne friends. They each have shadows somewhere in their lives.

Just as they establish Neighbourhood Watch, their worlds swing into disarray. Sally Hepworth paints a droll portrait of idealised suburbia. One sees shades of *Desperate Housewives*. She tells the women's stories in synchronous chapters with cliffhanger endings, which makes for easy page-turner reading.

All but one, they're tales of classic domestic phenomena with which most readers will identify. The exception, however, brings the book nicely to its surprising finale.

SAMELA HARRIS ★★★

YA Fantasy

THE HAZEL WOOD
Melissa Albert
Penguin \$17.99

Sometimes fairytales don't end with a "happily ever after". And the troubles facing Alice Crewe (or Prosperpine, or ...) don't seem destined for a cheery conclusion. She and her mother Ella, the daughter of strange, departed author Anthea Prosperpine, have spent years on the move, seeking to outrun the inexplicable bad luck that stalks them.

When Ella is abducted, Alice gives chase all the way to Anthea's mysterious property, the Hazel Wood. Awaiting her is a weird, dangerous world that hides the shocking truth of her existence.

The concept behind this macabre tale is brilliant but Albert has opted for a "slow burn", building the creep factor, and the early going may be too slow for some. That said, the later action is well worth the effort.

SCOTT MOORE ★★★

Winton at his best in searing new novel

WORDS KATHARINE ENGLAND

A week ago Tim Winton was announced as the nonfiction winner in the 2018 Adelaide Festival Literary Awards and immediately donated his \$15,000 prize money to the campaign to save the Ningaloo Reef, once again, from the depredations of the fossil fuel industry. It seems slightly ironic that the novel published this week charms with its intense evocation of one of the most landlocked stretches of WA: across the wheat belt into a desert-fringe area of abandoned gold mines, feral goats and vast salt lakes.

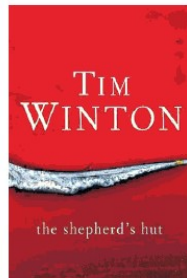
Here Winton sets one of his most moving and memorable explorations of father/son relationships in the interaction between a teenage Jaxie Clackton and an elderly, exiled Irish priest. Jaxie is the offspring of a brutal, drunken, country-town butcher who cheats his customers, bashes his wife and is perpetually violent towards the son who acts as his apprentice. Jaxie calls him Captain Wankbag and, once his mother has escaped by dying of cancer, decides he has the choice of killing the man or outlasting him. He hasn't "the nerve to blow him away", but the outlasting does indeed occur in an unexpected and potentially incriminating

fashion. Jaxie goes bush in a panic, ill-equipped and on foot, but clear about where he is headed: north to collect his true love, the one person he trusts to understand him.

By the time he comes across the shepherd's hut and old Fintan MacGillis is attempting to charm him with *The Wild Colonial Boy*, Jaxie is armed with a rifle and a butterknife but all out of water and desperate with thirst.

He hides a full night in the bush waiting to raid the old man's tank, mistrustful as any animal of the man's invitations to a civilised meeting over a proffered plate of food. Fintan is hoping for a messenger; Jaxie is impatient to be on his way, but the two settle tentatively together, exploring one another's character and beliefs until the habitual nervy carelessness of one and the age and sacrificial courage of the other deliver them to a climax as tragic as it is random and unexpected.

Much of the considerable attraction of the novel lies in the utterly consistent voices of the two characters, in Fintan's Irish-accented formality and Jaxie's often foul-mouthed creativity as the two worry out their attitudes to the universe and in particular to God: "That's f--ked up," says Jaxie; "Disconcerting, yes" translates Fintan. The relatively unlettered Jaxie's metaphors are delightful: a moon "round and toasted like a Jatz cracker"; birds "going on like shopping ladies"; the pair "strangling the water out of innocent



Fiction
THE SHEPHERD'S HUT
Tim Winton
Hamish Hamilton \$39.99

laundry" while emus look on; or being so tired "the swag felt like a sponge that soaked me up. I went to sleep like someone disappearing from the earth, like rain sopped into dust."

At the heart of the book's concern is the nature of God and Fintan's dynamic determination that God is not what or who you believe in but what you do: "when you do



Winton ... deeply memorable. Picture: Denise Winton

right, Jaxie, when you make good – well, then you are an instrument of God. Then you are joined to the divine, to the life force, to life itself." Jaxie replies in his own idiom: "That's all jumblyf--k to me, I said, as decent as I could ..." but nevertheless recognises some quality of godlike attention in the old man: "It's a dangerous feeling getting noticed ... getting seen deep and proper, it's shit hot but terrible, too."

In a lifetime of fine literary achievements *The Shepherd's Hut* is likely to be recognised as one of Winton's deepest and most memorable.