

## Reading during the Covid Pandemic – Choir Members' Experiences

During the first phase of the Covid 19 pandemic reading was one of the things recommended to keep us sane during lock-down. In one Friday Bulletin, Naomi asked Choir members to send her details of what they had been reading. Not so much book reviews, but a comment on where the situation had led our reading.

Here are the responses so far. If you are searching for a something to read yourself, the recommended books are highlighted in **bold type**.

### Naomi:

I read a book recommended to me by Carolyn Everett. **Inheritance** by Dani Shapiro. It is a true story of a woman whose life changed after an innocent DNA test revealed that the man she thought was her father, is not. It raises interesting social and moral questions about identity and connections.

### Lynnette Clark:

I have done quite a bit of reading in isolation and most recently enjoyed **The Memory Keeper's Daughter** by Kim Edwards. A sad story but I like his writing style and will search out further titles once libraries are reopened. I am now reading Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House*, a very different read.

### Marj Binns:

The most relevant book is Geraldine Brookes **The Year of Wonders**. Not a new publication but a novel based on the plague in a real live village of Eyam in England. A good read and frighteningly relevant.

### Sue Justice:

The only book I have read, for sheer escapism, is **Five French Hens**. It is far from intellectual, doesn't require much thought at all and is a bit of fun (only!). It's about five seventy year-olds who meet at Aquarobics going off to Paris for a hen party. One of them, Jen, had met a man, they got on well, she accepted his proposal and this trip is the lead up to .... well, wait and see! ☐

### Kerry Foster:

**The Penelopiad** by Margaret Atwood. Forget The Iliad! What was Penelope doing while her husband Odysseus was gallivanting around the Aegean for 20 years? At home keeping the "joint running", dealing with unscrupulous suitors etc. The story is told in the first person from Penelope's point of view, but from the Underworld, which enables a lot of cross referencing into historical events and contemporary

cultural behaviour. It is biting satirical; but also hilarious. An added attraction - it is quite short!

**Dark Emu** by Bruce Pascoe. I have yet to finish this. But I feel really "ripped off" that so much of Australian (or should I say Gondwanaland?) history, has been and continues to be omitted from our formal education. Solid evidence for aspects of civilization prior to European settlement is presented (eg systems of food production, land management, irrigation etc). So much early documentation has been suppressed. We know so much about the beginnings of Western Civilisation, so little about that in our own continent! So much to learn!

**Home Fire** and **Burnt Shadows** by Kamila Shamsie. Wonderfully complicated stories that have depth and narrative expertise. Google the titles for more info !

**The Kites** by Romain Gary. Recommended by Naomi. Brilliantly engaging story about characters during the German occupation of France. Lyrical and wise.

**Judith Dallas:**

**The Dark Emu** by Bruce Pascoe. An amazing revelation of the life and culture of our indigenous people pre colonial settlement.

**A Gentleman in Moscow** by Amor Towles. Story of a Russian aristocrat sentenced to house arrest in Moscow's Metropol Hotel. Wonderful example of coping when your world suddenly shrinks.

**Christine Norris:**

I read all the time and I reread old favourites (this week a 1942 ghost story called **The Uninvited**). My daughter and I are also reading a crime novel by the Australian writer Garry Disher: **Under the Cold Bright Lights**. I am enjoying it more than *Bitter Wash Road and Peace* - although I loved their settings in my home state of SA - as it has moments of wit. I have Adam Kay's second NHS memoir *Twas the Nightshift Before Christmas* ready to go. I read **This is Going to Hurt** earlier this year. Compassionate, hair raising and hilarious. Passed it on to my brother in law and one of my sisters and they loved it too.

**Patricia Hayes:**

When COVID started, I was just finishing **Boy Swallows Universe**. Takes a bit to get into but well worth the read. Based on fact and set in Brisbane. Then I embarked on the first of the last three of the *Seven Sisters Books*. All 700 pages long, I thought they would take me through to the end of the virus, but not sure about that now! I would have called them holiday reading but now the COVID read!!

**Gill Gray:**

**Where the Shawdad sings** is great. Also, I've been rereading old favourites by R F Delderfield and Rosamund Pilcher ( getting my English hits when I can).

**Rosemarie Lloyd:**

A book I can recommend is

**The Heart's Invisible Furies by John Boyne – sin and torment in Catholic Ireland.** Here is a review <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/18/the-hearts-invisible-furies-by-john-boyne-review-sin-and-torment-in-catholic-ireland>

Good Reads says this about the book and I fully agree: “*The Heart's Invisible Furies* is a novel to make you laugh and cry while reminding us all of the redemptive power of the human spirit.”

**Jan Grant:**

I have just finished reading **Bruny** by Heather Rose; very thought provoking.

**Heather King:**

I have been re-reading Dickens' books: **Great Expectations, A tale of Two Cities, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield** and enjoying the funny characters in these books.

**Marienne Short:**

Living at ARV Warriewood, I have raided our small library and discovered that our residents seem to like a varied selection of books but many to do with World War II. I've read about Australian nurses, **Solomon's Song** by Bryce Courtney, which although is fiction does give an amazing account of the battlefield on Gallipoli beach - very harrowing at times. I am currently reading **One Crowded Hour** by Tim Bowden, which is a biography of the life of combat cameraman Neil Davis (1934-1985), mostly about the Vietnam war and very descriptive of the part played (or not played) by the much celebrated American troops in contrast to the South Vietnamese, who it seems won many more battles than we have been led to believe.

**John Kibby:**

So, I'm well into reading **Milkman** by Anna Burns. The end may be optimistic but so far it reflects a young woman's experience in the oppressive environment of Northern Ireland during the troubles. She is under more threat from community expectations than the warring sides. The fictional work won't lighten the mood for choristers, and it's heavy going. Enjoyable to me, but hardly a general recommendation.

**Joan Sample:**

I have just read **The Mirror and the Light** by Hillary Mantell, the third in a trilogy of historical novels, set in the time of Henry VIII. The central character is Thomas Cromwell, Chief Minister and Powerbroker to Henry, who sadly eventually loses his head ( didn't they all?). When I say read, I have to admit to listening to it as an audiobook, rather indulgent you might well think, but with a good narrator, the various characters seem to "come to life."

**John Moore:**

Books, aren't they wonderful things when one has time on their hands? I'm currently reading a book recommended by The Guardian online. It's called **Saving Capitalism For the Many Not the Few** by American author Robert B. Reich. It has proved a very interesting read so far. It includes a poignant quote from John Taylor, author of *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States 1814*: "There are two modes of invading private property; the first, by which the poor plunder the rich... sudden and violent; the second, by which the rich plunder the poor, slow and legal." I bought it online through Booktopia and I'm awaiting another book by the same author called *The Common Good*.

**Gina Cottee:**

Since childhood rocks have fascinated me and since then, in pride of place I have a flat golden chalky rock, collected from a South Coast beach showing carved ripples of receding waves.

Overseas travel has heightened this interest. Beautiful smooth rounded streaky rocks of the Greek Islands. North Oman's mountains of layered solid rock. In Egypt from the Saqqara Plateau pale yellow stratified rocks that shed a fine powder at the touch.

So with time to read unread books I delved into **The Earth - an intimate history** by Richard Fortey, an English geologist.

He focuses on geological sites, which would help piece together an understanding of the whole picture of the geological processes that result from plate tectonics, the foundation of modern earth science. This he combines with the history of scientific theories and discoveries.

As well, ancient mountains and continents are revealed by the rocks themselves. All highlighted by a succinct chart of the major Time Divisions.

He concludes with an overview of today's continents.

This is not a dry book as it is interspersed with poetry and culture.

I found I needed my two big volumes of the Oxford Dictionary to look up geological terms as well as his extraordinary vocabulary.

In all a fantastic adventure.

### **Richard Griffiths**

**Burial Rites** by Hannah Kent. It is the story behind the last female execution in Iceland, set in the 1830s. You can feel the ever-present cold and rain in the prose, not just of the environment but of the story. It is a slow burn, in that narrative and dialogue covering just a short time gradually reveal a complex and harrowing back story of several years. The tempo of the book is constant, encouraging the reader to move on from chapter to chapter, wondering what will be revealed next. At the end there is a feeling that the full story has been told, and that, despite the verdict and punishment, the culprit's actions are vindicated.

**Bridge of Clay** by Marcus Zusak. This book would have been discarded in normal times. The opening chapters are scenes from a highly dysfunctional family – a horrible environment and a set of loathsome characters. I asked myself why I was reading such dreadful material, and got very close to moving on to the next book. However, something held me, and I determined that I would read to page 100 (of 580). At that point, if things had not improved, I would then put the book away. It was a close run thing. On page 98 there is the hint of some humanity in two of the main characters. I persisted and was rewarded with a remarkable tale, again revealing a harrowing back story, but in this case also moving to a satisfactory conclusion with animosities resolved to create a truly functional family.

**The Elegance of the Hedgehog** by Muriel Barbery is a lovely tale of the concierge in a block of Parisian apartments who unexpectedly finds love – and her real self – in late middle age. The book is so well written – and translated – that from about half way through I found myself savouring it as I might a delicious meal, the sort where you enjoy the taste of one mouthful for as long as possible before taking another. So I would read just one chapter at a time and then put the book down to share and reflect on the heroine's triumphs and trials before picking it up later to read the next chapter. An intriguing and very satisfying read.