



Book Club Book of the Month: September 2019

***Refuge*, Richard Rossiter (UWA Publishing)**

Summary

Refuge is a meditation on place and belonging which intertwines the stories of a tenderly portrayed and compelling cast of characters. Each in their bush shacks, Greta and Tinny share a hillside on Western Australia's southwest coast. German-born Greta is haunted by a history of tragic relationships. Tinny has lived in relative isolation in the bush for most of his life, but his body is beginning to fail him. His sons Skel and Rock face the uncertainties of leaving childhood behind and a mother, Prue, who having confronted her past, wants her boys back in her life. The chronology ebbs and flows, and many lives are dipped into. The actions of the sorry and desperate Clive impel the plot. Clive, whose loved ones were killed in a car crash, needs revenge on someone and Greta, misguidedly, is his target.

About the author

Richard Rossiter lives in Perth and occasionally in a bush dwelling in the southwest of the Western Australia - where *Refuge* is broadly located. He is a writer, editor, mentor and occasional judge of writing competitions, including the T.A.G. Hungerford Award and the WA Premier's Book Award. He has been the fiction editor for *Indigo* and *Westerly* and has supervised numerous postgraduate creative writing students. He is an editorial board member of Margaret River Press and an Honorary Associate Professor at Edith Cowan University. He enjoys catching herring.

Questions for discussion

1. The novel explores in depth the concept of belonging. What forms can belonging take? What does it mean to belong?
2. Refuge has several threads of low-key suspense, such as Clive's obsession with Greta, the secrets of Prue's childhood, and events surrounding Marvin. What other questions or dilemmas keep readers engaged?
3. What is at stake in the reignition of Skel and Rock's relationship with their mother?
4. Are Tinny, Skel and Greta refugees from the world or simply living in isolation? What distinguishes living in isolation from taking refuge?
5. Clive is driven by religious fervour. Can religion and/or spirituality be a form of refuge?
6. The novel has a complex structure. There are several characters, by and large written as discrete segments, whose stories return them to the past. What are the pros and cons of this approach for the reader? How otherwise might the author have structured the many narrative threads?
7. Refuge has a strong sense of place, the author drawing heavily on nature for plot (especially fire) and setting (ocean, bush, sky). How might the story unfold differently if set in an urban environment?
8. Greta's colleague, an Indigenous elder, says 'You know, we're refugees in our own country. Where's our asylum?' (p. 264). To what is she referring? To what extent do you agree or disagree with her?
9. The book's Acknowledgements confirm that the story, at least loosely, is set in the Cowaramup Bay region of Western Australia. What are the advantages and disadvantages of locating a story in a place familiar to many? Would an imagined town name, such as Tim Winton's 'White Point' for Lancelin, be safer for either author or reader?
10. A skeleton motif runs throughout the novel e.g. in Tinny's shack, Skel's name, Prue's childhood trauma. Are these elements connected? What are their significance?

If you liked this book, you may also like...

The Art of Persuasion, by Susan Midalia, Fremantle Press

The Shepherd's Hut, by Tim Winton, Penguin Books

The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea, by Randolph Stow, Penguin Books

The Break, by Deb Fitzpatrick, Fremantle Press

Other works by the author: *Arrhythmia: Stories of Desire* and *Thicker Than Water*, UWA Publishing