



## Book Club Book of the Month March 2020

### *Fauna*, Donna Mazza (Allen & Unwin)

#### Summary

A young family in an eerily familiar future-Perth comes to terms with the latest addition to their family, a baby girl named Asta. While Asta is the child of Stacey and Isak, she is also the bearer of 'other' and possibly 'edited' genes. Asta provokes in her mother a fierce desire to protect her from the world's prying eyes, and in her father an imperative to stay as far away as he can from anyone who knows him. This is the story of how a family deals with parenting outside perceived 'normal' guidelines, what they do to survive, and how they try to protect their own. Written in meditative, poetic prose, the novel evokes a world that is strange while seeming familiar, choices we understand even as we resist them, and how the ideals of love and motherhood don't always connect with ethical boundaries.

#### About the Author

Donna Mazza is a senior lecturer in arts and co-ordinator of the South West arts program for the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University. Her first novel, *The Albanian* (Fremantle Press, 2007), was awarded the TAG Hungerford Award and her short stories, reviews and poetry have recently been published with *Westerly*, *Southerly* and Margaret River Press. Her short story 'The Exhibit' was awarded the Patricia Hackett Prize (2015) by *Westerly* and she was the 2018 Mick Dark Flagship Fellow for Environmental Writing at Varuna Writers Centre in New South Wales. She is an active community member in regional visual art and writing, as judge, author and presenter. She supervises research students in creative writing and literary theory and several of her students have published novels from their doctoral theses.

## Questions for discussion

- 1) Author Sofie Laguna says “the most frightening thing about *Fauna* is that it convinces”. Do you agree with this statement and what are your reasons?
- 2) How are the relationships between Stacey, her husband, and her two older children, different from her relationship with Asta?
- 3) What is Stacey’s mental health status at the time of Asta’s birth and why do you think she has such a longing for another child?
- 4) The scenes describing Asta’s actual birth are harrowing, detailing more than the natural rigours of childbirth. Stacey watches her husband’s reaction to the birth – ‘what horror he is witnessing’ and the way he ‘jerks out of the way’. How does this scene prepare us for what Asta will become?
- 5) What picture in your mind do you have of the way Asta looks? How does the author convince us of her strange appearance?
- 6) What is the message, if any, about the relationship between science and the environment, between nature and nurture and the notion that ‘just because we can, doesn’t mean we should’?
- 7) What are the strongest characters and relationships in this novel and how does the writer convince us of their strength? For example, Stacey and Asta, Isak and his mother.
- 8) What do the children, Emmy and Jake, witness? How are these two children affected by their new sister and what do they do to include/exclude her?
- 9) How has your understanding of motherhood been shaped by what you’ve read in this novel? Is Stacey obsessed or is she just being a mother?
- 10) ‘How far would you go to save your daughter?’ is the question posed on the front cover of this novel. Do you think Stacey goes far enough, and why or why not?

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*The Sinkings*, Amanda Curtin, UWA Publishing

*The Children’s House*, Alice Nelson, Penguin

*Wildlight*, Robyn Mundy, Picador

*Past the Shallows*, Favel Parrett, Hachette