

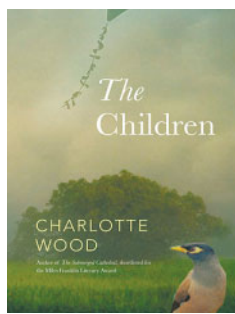
Fragile ties that bind

by Katharine England

A BOY fishing with his new Christmas rod catches a tiny whiting, but as he reels it in a seagull swoops the fish high up into the air. For a few long seconds, the boy and his father hold astonishment in their hands - a bird flying in the air on the end of a fishing line. This marvellous image is at the heart of Charlotte Wood's new novel, which, like *The Submerged Cathedral*, perceptively and poignantly probes the complicated love that binds families.

The fishing line snaps and the bird flies off, but such severance and emancipation are much more difficult for the adult children of Margaret and Geoffrey Connolly, still holding the end of the emotional fishing line - the string of the kite in the country town where their children grew up.

When Geoffrey suffers a disastrous fall, the children are reeled in to his bedside - Mandy the difficult, distant eldest, a foreign correspondent steeped in the carnage of Bosnia and Baghdad; her husband, Chris, who seems almost to have taken her place in the family, responding warmly, gratefully to the love Mandy finds so hard to accept; easygoing Cathy

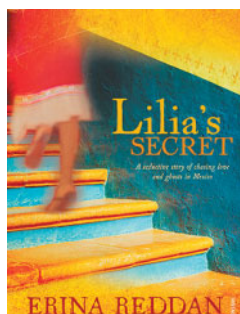


The Children
Charlotte Wood
Allen & Unwin; \$29.95

who readily keeps in touch, and absent Stephen who took himself deliberately beyond family reach when still a boy.

There is also the slightly damaged and simple Tony, a wardsman at the hospital where their father lies, who shares a tiny, vital piece of the past with Mandy and who is capable of holding up a mirror to the parts of themselves the children cannot see.

The book focuses particularly on Mandy, gently exploring the small and large experiences that have made her what she is. A bright, perfectionist first child, scornful of those who didn't measure up and never able to let go of truth in favour of kindness or harmony, she has been further polarised and carapaced by her chosen profession with its endless exposure to horrors that her comfortable compatriots can switch off.



Lilia's Secret
Erina Reddan
Vintage; \$32.95

Mandy comes to see herself and Tony as the ruined: "stained with decay, from too much misery too closely watched". The climax which involves them both is unexpected and shocking, but in some senses peripheral: One rereads the novel not for its shock value but for its nuances, its deep questions and its lovely supple prose. For this is a vibrant, intelligent, utterly compelling work, achingly real and seductively woven with a restrained consonance of connected images that build through the novel to a final symbolic release.

Mandy's conclusion - that, "when there is nothing to be done, all we can do is pay attention, keep watch" - is a function of love, but also seems to me to sum up one of the roles of the novel, any novel: to pay attention - to the small things, the "ordinary

decencies" as well as the large - to record, to witness, to ensure that nothing is lost.

Lilia's Secret is similarly concerned with family and the influence of trauma on a person's character and relationships, and comes to a similar conclusion about the importance of paying attention. In an odd little echo of Wood's book, Erina Reddan has been a foreign correspondent but has taken the history of her Mexican husband's family as the basis for her first novel, rather than any first hand experience of global suffering.

An emotionally scarred Australian fleeing her Mexican husband's desire to start a family and a Boston millionaire suffering post-retirement depression both have reasons for trying to find out the truth about Lilia De Las Flores. Lilia was reputed to have been both a drug-running, brothel-owning revolutionary who murdered her five husbands and a healer and midwife after whom most of the village children have been named in gratitude.

After a confused and confusing beginning, the book settles into an amiable, atmospheric mystery with intriguing magical overtones.

The telling tends to the long-winded and the expression to clichés, but there are also appealing flashes of real insight and originality.

10 Best read National top sellers

1	Guinness World Records 2008 Guinness World	\$47.50
2	Just Shocking! Andy Griffiths, Pan	\$14.95
3	Double Cross James Patterson, Headline	\$32.95
4	Those Faraday Girls Monica McInerney, Viking	\$32.95
5	Bones to Ashes Kathy Reichs, William Heinemann	\$32.95
6	Exit Music Ian Rankin, Orion	\$32.95
7	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows J.K. Rowling, Bloomsbury	\$49.95
8	A Thousand Splendid Suns Khaled Hosseini, Bloomsbury	\$32.95
9	Making Money Terry Pratchett, Doubleday	\$49.95
10	Not in the Flesh Ruth Rendell, Hutchinson	\$32.95

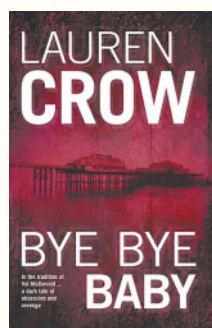
Data supplied by Nielsen Book Scan's book sales monitoring system from 1000 retailers nationwide.

10 South Australia

1	Roo: The Mark Ricciuto Story Mark Ricciuto, MacMillan Australia	\$35
2	4 Ingredients Kim McCosker & Rachael Bermingham, 4 Ingredients	\$17.95
3	Just Shocking Andy Griffiths, Pan	\$14.95
4	Those Faraday Girls Monica McInerney, Viking	\$32.95
5	Not in the Flesh Ruth Rendell, Hutchinson	\$32.95
6	Snakehead Anthony Horowitz, Walker Books	\$16.95
7	Double Cross James Patterson, Headline Fiction	\$32.95
8	Exit Music Ian Rankin, Orion	\$32.95
9	Bones to Ashes Kathy Reichs, William Heinemann	\$32.95
10	Clean Cut Lynda La Plante, Simon & Schuster	\$29.95

Based on Dymocks SA sales

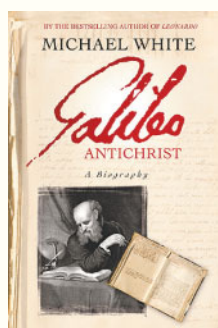
This week's selections



Bye Bye Baby
Crime
Lauren Crow, HarperCollins
\$32.95

Lauren Crow is a new South Australian crime writer but, as Fiona McIntosh, she is a best-selling fantasy author. Having established her reputation as a good storyteller, she endorses it with this large and lively whodunit. The plot twists and turns. The serial killer, prone to peculiar mutilations and a signature of blue clown paint, is revealed. Yet still the surprises come. It is an ambitious narrative, vividly set in Crow's English birthplace, and promises to be the first in a series about posterboy policeman DCI Jack Hawskworth, of New Scotland Yard. Crow does not hesitate in throwing in the love interest and a fair gamut of romantic emotions as parallel to the sturm und drang of the chase and the cold psychopathology of the killer. It's a quick read, mainly because one does not put it down for long.

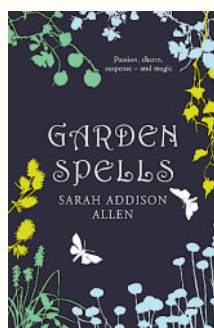
Samela Harris



Galileo: Antichrist
Biography
Michael White, Weidenfeld and Nicolson \$49.95

Michael White does an excellent job of putting Galileo's work and controversies into the context of religious politics in 16th and 17th century Italy. It's a tale of intolerance, superstition and hypocrisy. Galileo was among the first to propound a model of inquiry based on observation, experimentation and mathematical testing: the scientific method. Flying in the face of both the Church and the old Aristotelian model of the world, his work and his ideas were seen as blatant challenges to the established order. White traces the decades-long struggle between Galileo and the Catholic Church and points to interesting recent discoveries suggesting that Galileo's trial was a sham designed to divert attention from deeper threats the Church saw in his writings. The book reminds us that the forces that opposed him are still active.

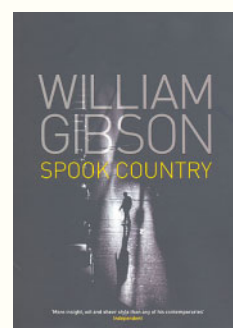
Rick Sullivan



Garden Spells
Fiction
Sarah Addison Allen, Hodder & Stoughton \$32.95

Welcome to the charmingly fey North Carolina town of Bascom, where families have long been defined by their characteristics: Hopkins men always marry older women; Clark women are always good in bed; and Waverleys are strange - in the most benign of magical ways. Abandoned in childhood, the Waverley sisters took very different paths. Sydney tried to escape her heritage while Claire stayed home in splendid isolation, trusting no one and making no friends except the plants in her garden; flowers she uses in a catering business built on the properties of each particular bloom. Now Sydney has returned with her own daughter, fleeing an abusive relationship, and forcing a new dynamic. Claire finally blossoms in the love of the man next door, ably assisted by a weirdly wonderful apple tree. Ideal light reading.

Shelley Orchard



Spook Country
Thriller
William Gibson, Viking \$32.95

Science-fiction master Gibson remains firmly in the present with a riveting thriller which takes a sardonic swipe at modern values. Former cult rock star Hollis Henry, now a freelance journalist, is commissioned to write for a magazine which may or may not exist. Tito is a member of a mysterious family well versed in spycraft - protocol. He is being shadowed by Brown, who may or may not work for the Government, and who has kidnapped Milgrim, a drug addict, to help crack codes used by the family. Everyone is chasing a mysterious shipping container. In his precise and crackly style, Gibson moves the action to Vancouver, Canada, where the utter meaninglessness of the elaborate chase is exposed. The brilliance of the book is that you can stop and think about metaphors or, like Milgrim, just observe, note and move on.

Ian Orchard



The Worry Tree
Junior Novel
Marianne Musgrove, Random House \$14.95

This first novel by a new Adelaide author is a delight. Fresh, funny and gently wise, it is full of memorable characters: engaging worrywart Juliet with the weight of the world on her shoulders, enthusiastic father, social worker mother ("let's all name our feelings"), evil little sister Oaf and a grandmother trying to deal with a role-transition from head of a university chemistry department to frail old target of occupational therapists. When Juliet uncovers the Worry Tree on her bedroom wall and is able symbolically to relinquish some of her burdens to its friendly painted animals, she starts to learn that the happiness of the family is not her entire responsibility and that there are ways to unite the two best friends who are fighting over her allegiance. Many children share Juliet's anxieties and may be reassured by her experiences.

Katharine England