

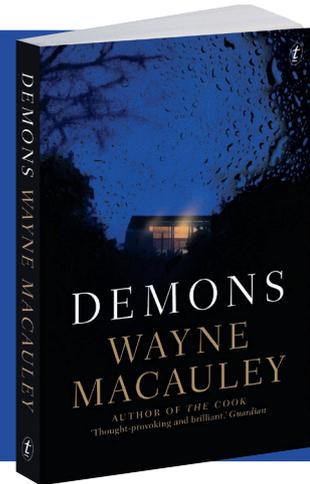
DEMONS

Wayne Macauley

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Fiction Trade Paperback



Praise for *Demons*

'Irresistible—The Cook reminds us just how exciting it is to read a wonderful and original novel.' Lloyd Jones

'A riot of a book! Gripping and subversive...' Nick Cave

'Blackly funny and deliciously satirical, this book skewers our culture of food worship while feeding our curiosity about kitchens.' *Age Magazine*

About Wayne Macauley

Wayne Macauley is the author of the highly acclaimed novels: *Blueprints for a Barbed-Wire Canoe*, *Caravan Story* and, most recently, *The Cook*, which was shortlisted for the Western Australian Premier's Book Award, a Victorian Premier's Literary Award and the Melbourne Prize Best Writing Award. His new book *Demons* will be available in August 2014. He lives in Melbourne.

A reader's introduction to *Demons*

Sharing its title with a novel by Dostoevsky, which in turn references the biblical parable of Jesus casting out demons from a madman into a herd of swine who then throw themselves off a cliff, *Demons* is at once a commentary on the modern world and an inquiry into truth, lies and storytelling.

A group of friends gather at a beach house in an attempt to get away from the frenzied pace of modern life. No phones, they agree, and no children. Just time to eat good food, drink good wine and tell good stories.

Tell stories they do, as they cook, get drunk, bicker, and, midway in the novel, get cut off from the world by a massive storm.

And so we have a novel that frames seven stories (as well as several other shorter stories), one from each of the friends. Each works as a stand-alone piece, but has additional meaning through its context in the linking narrative. They are not simple parables, but

each does have something to say about the world the characters inhabit.

The twin concerns of the novel – contemporary society and the possibility of truth – are often discussed explicitly by the characters. The dialogue is often about truth and lies, the difference between them, and how much truth matters. They debate whether the stories are true; Leon, Adam and Marshall as journalist, lawyer and politician respectively, all have complicated relationships with the truth; and at the end of the novel Marshall suggests that they all tell a truth rather than a story, suggesting there is a distinct difference between the two.

Which raises the question – how are we to understand the 'truth' of this novel?

Questions for discussion

1. Macauley references writers (e.g. Dostoevsky and Chekhov) who have written about the social upheavals of their time. Does *Demons* provide commentary or pass judgment on contemporary life? What are those comments or judgments?
2. Discuss each of the seven titled stories told by each adult. Does each one have an explicit meaning or moral? What does each reveal about its teller? What are the common themes between them?
3. How does each character see the world differently to the others? Do they each represent a 'type'?
4. 'I wonder if stories can change how things are in the world or if they're just us telling others what we think the world looks like?' Megan wonders after she finishes her story. (156) What do you think?
5. 'There are big lies and little lies ... good lies and bad lies, real lies and white lies.' (215) says Lauren. How do the lies told in the novel fit into these various categories?

6. When Adam and Megan are discussing Hannah's story, Adam asks whether illness can be metaphor. Megan replies pragmatically that allergies like the one Elena suffered have been established as clinical conditions. What does this conversation suggest in relation to the link between stories and truth? And what does it tell us about the two characters?
7. Adam observes that 'there's something a bit sad about us ... how we've only danced across the surface, had everything our own way, free education, free dole; no wars, no revolutions. We've not lived to the limit of human experience, we've moved in a little circle' (80). 'Us?' Lauren asks. Who do you think Adam is talking about? Later, Leon describes 'us' as 'a bunch of well-off, well-educated fucks, the generation in charge' and condemns 'us' for not doing better, for not leaving a legacy' (224). Is this the same 'us' Adam was talking about. Do you agree with Leon and Adam?
8. Following on from the previous two questions, are the novel's observations confined to a particular type, class or generation, or are they broader than that?
9. Does Tilly represent a threat not just to her father and his career, but to his generation? Talk more about Tilly's role in the novel.
10. How does the epigraph about how an arch holds together relate to the novel's themes?
11. What does the storm represent?
12. What is Marshall's motivation in suggesting a game of Truth?
13. 'The world's got problems, it's true. But if we really put our minds to it, I reckon we can solve them,' Marshall tells Evan (222). Does Marshall believe this? Does the novel support this possibility? Do you think Marshall is right?
14. Are we to understand that there really is a herd of pigs throwing themselves into the sea (222) when Adam is standing on the balcony after his fight with Leon? If so, why this moment of surrealism in an otherwise realistic book? If not, why does Macauley have Adam seeing this image at this particular moment?
15. What are the demons of the title?