

Book Reviews

Tim McQueen

With the current COVID-19 lockdown and restricted municipal library services I don't have much access to computer-oriented books for review for PC Update. However, I'm still reading and happy to share some of what I've been reading recently.

New books. As producer and presenter of *Cover to Cover* for Vision Australia Radio I aim to encourage new Australian writing. Elwood Writers have provided material for several programs. Barry Lee Thompson has recently had a collection of short pieces *Broken Rules and other stories* published by Transit Lounge. It's an interesting collection. Barry has a real knack for evoking relationships. *Broken Rules* will not be to everybody's taste; there is a pervasive homosexual element.

The whole collective (Barry, Jennifer Bryce, Margret McCaffrey & Helen McDonald) has an anthology *Every Second Tuesday* due for publication in November. The stories hang together well. They cover a period from the first World War to the far-too-soon future, with a variety of poetry, memoir, fact and fiction. The evocation of place, from the 1916 trenches near Boulogne to Luna Park in St Kilda is marvellous. Each of the authors has their own distinct voice - their voices blend together like a great choir.

Minor Detail by Adania Shibli. Glen Eira Library mailed me a copy of this. On the surface it's a straightforward tale: a young Palestinian woman hears of an incident from the war of 1948 which involved a brutal crime. When she discovers that it happened on her birthday (but 25 years earlier) she becomes obsessed with investigating this 'minor detail'. The fascination is in the casual revealing of the day-to-day banal inconveniences experienced living under occupation.

Tyll by Daniel Kehlmann. Tyll Eulenspiegel is the protagonist of a German chapbook published in 1515 with a possible background in earlier Middle Low German folklore. His career took him to many places throughout the Holy Roman Empire. He plays practical jokes on his contemporaries, exposing vices at every turn. His life is set in the first half of the 14th century. Kehlmann has written a delightful novel set against the thirty years war. This was a period I knew very little about.

That pile of books here at home that I've never got around to reading. Paul Ham's *1914 - the year the world ended*. Maybe the parallels between then and now aren't as close as some may think. Vikram Seth's *An equal music* - the intense emotional relationships of musicians, their instruments and music. Ingrid Betancourt's *Even silence has an end*. Her harrowing experience of six years captivity by FARC in Colombia.