

# LION'S HONEY

## A READER

### MONDAY READER

Stella Maynard

*Stella Maynard is an always library rat and sometimes writer.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Davis, Angela Y. *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.

Clare, Eli. *Exile and Pride*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1999.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Penguin Random House, 2016.

Whittaker, Alison. *Blakwork*. Broome: Magabala Books, 2018.

Boyer, Anne. *The Undying*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

Fogarty, Lionel G. *Eelabroo (Long Ago) Nyah (Looking) Möbō-Möbō (Future)*. Sydney: Vagabond Press, 2014.

Sullivan, Lou. *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan*.

New York: Nightboat Books, 2019.

Estes, Nick. *Our History Is The Future*. London: Verso, 2019.

van Neerven, Ellen. *Heat and Light*.

St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2014.

Gilbert, Kevin. *Because A White Man'll Never Do It*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014.

Boone, Bruce. *Wallpaper*. Oakland: Gauss PDF Editions, 2019.

### FLOATING READER

Kate Brown

*Kate Brown is a Sydney based interdisciplinary artist who works specifically with the human voice.*

### WEDNESDAY READER

Cynthia Florek

*Cynthia Florek is a history major who loves dance, textures and throwing certain books.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Winterson, Jeanette. *The Passion*. London: Vintage, 2014.

Dennis-Benn, Nicole. *Here Comes The Sun*. London: Oneworld, 2017.

Morrison, Toni. *Jazz*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

de Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. *The Little Prince*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1998.

Thomas, Dylan. *Under Milk Wood: The Definitive Edition*. London: Orion, 2014.

Miller, Gretchen, ed. *In Their Branches*. Sydney: ABC Books, 2015.

Gay, Ross. *The Book of Delights*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2019.

Asghar, Fatimah. *If They Come for Us*. London: One World, 2018.

Vértiz, Vickie. *Palm Frond with Its Throat Cut*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017.

### FLOATING READER

Saha Jones

*Saha Jones is the Next Generation Development manager at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, she believes not in a world without art (books included).*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

### FLOATING READER

Anna Hubble

*Anna Hubble is a student, stylist and newfound reader.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

de Waal, Edmund. *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*. London: Vintage, 2011.

Liu, Cixin. *The Three-Body Problem*. London: Head of Zeus, 2016.

### TUESDAY READER

Bri Lee

*Bri Lee is a freelance journalist and the author of Eggshell Skull and Beauty.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Levy, Deborah. *The Cost of Living*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018.

Brodesser-Akner, Taffy. *Fleishman Is in Trouble*. New York: Random House, 2019.

Porter, Max. *Lanny*. London: Faber & Faber, 2019.

Moshfegh, Ottessa. *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*. London: Penguin, 2018.

Pullman, Philip. *La Belle Sauvage (The Book of Dust #1)*. London: Penguin, 2018.

Massey, Sujata. *A Murder at Malabar Hill*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin Australia, 2020.

Garner, Helen. *Yellow Notebook: Diaries Volume 1 1978–1986*. Melbourne: Text, 2019.

### FLOATING READER

Jola Jones

*Jola Jones grew up in an experimental theatre. She is an electronic sound and performance artist, poet, teacher, sister to Saba and mumma to Kookaburra.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

### THURSDAY READER

Miriam Mubayyid

*Miriam Mubayyid is a student, writer and dreamer of radical futures.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Pascoe, Bruce. *Dark Emu*. Broome: Magabala Books, 2014.

Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001.

Srnicek, Nick, and Alex Williams. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. London: Verso, 2015.

Moshfegh, Ottessa. *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*. London: Penguin, 2018.

Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. London: Penguin Random House, 2004.

Kushner, Rachel. *The Mars Room*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2018.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* London: John Hunt, 2009.

Hamad, Ruby. *White Tears / Brown Scars*. Melbourne: Melbourne University, 2019.

Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita*. Translated by Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky. London: Penguin, 2016.

“What reader emerges from her study simplified?”

—Lisa Robertson

The first thing I like to do when I hold a book in my hands is crack its spine. Like a new pair of shoes, I think that books should be broken in. Loosening a book's glue, from the outset, develops an intimacy between fingers, hands, body, pages and text. When I crack a book's spine, I take a certain pleasure in removing the distinction between the body, the world and a word.

I am reading, all the time, but rarely books. Administration is leaky stuff: invoices, timesheets, emails, payroll, birth certificates, welfare payments, mental health care plans, calendars, driver's licences, passwords: the reduction of lives into data, x-rays, blood tests, surveys and our faces, carefully reduced to a machine-readable set of pixels, all draw the parameters of the unevenly distributed conditions of our lives and deaths.

These are all modes of reading and writing—some legal and corporate, others extra-governmental or technological—which at-once sever us from the reality of our collective and social lives, whilst also capitalising off those contextual forces. Meanwhile, the conditions of these writing and reading practices often disappear from view.

I've been thinking about our time reading in *Lion's Honey* less through what an accumulation of spines and titles might tell us, than through how they might enable us to see everything else.

We read *as* work, or for work. Every week a pay slip would arrive in our inboxes. This reflects a different kind of spine: a pay spine (that is, the structure an organisation uses to determine what employees get paid based on the work they perform). Our pay spine parsed the labour of reading—normally construed as leisure—through the state's conception of what constitutes work.

There is no labour category that adequately accounts for what it means to read *as* work. So, we were paid as if construction workers—casually employed under the *Construction Worker Level 1 Award*. This employment classification is usually reserved for fencers and labourers and fitters and riggers and more—forms of labour far from what we traded for money. Forms of work that produce, as Aaron Neiman writes, pains in the back. What does it mean to think of reading as an act of construction?

Everyday when we showed up at work us readers would post an image on Instagram. One image when we arrive, one image when we leave. At first, I thought *this* was the thing we were constructing: an online archive of our six-months in the chair. Later, Agatha told me that the account was started so that she could be sure that the readers showed up to work. We were, in other words, constructing our timecards—a record for our own surveillance.

My favourite post is a video: we see the pages of a book, the shadow of a hand, the passage of a book across a room, a dull thump. In a moment of frustration or rage, Cynthia (Wednesday reader) threw a copy of *Lion's Honey* across the gallery. The video concretely shows the way that books can move bodies to action. It also shows us (to quote Xari Rivera Maya, quoting Wendy Trevino), *poetry is not a brick through a window; but it is kind of like throwing a brick at a window, because usually the brick just bounces off and doesn't break jack shit*. At the end of the video the book is lying on the institution's floor.

After being invited to write this reflection on the time and experience of reading in, for and as *Lion's Honey*, I visited Agatha's studio. I had wanted to spend some more time with the books. I had wanted to construct something tangible, like an index of all of the first sentences we read, or an archive of the back covers.

Unpacking the books onto the floor of the studio, I realised that my impression of

### FRIDAY READER

Anne-Marie Te Whiu

*Anne-Marie Te Whiu is an avid reader, keen writer, weaver and cultural producer.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Birch, Tony. *The White Girl*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2019.

Harjo, Joy. *An American Sunrise: Poems*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2019.

Nicholson, Barbara, ed. *Dreaming Inside: Voices from Junee Correctional Centre Volume 7*. Wollongong: South Coast Writers, 2019.

van Neerven, Ellen. *Heat and Light*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2014.

Pascoe, Bruce. *Young Dark Emu: A Truer History*. Broome: Magabala Books, 2019.

AIATSIS and Bruce Pascoe. *The Little Red Yellow Black Book*. Acton: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994.

Grace, Patricia. *Dogside Story*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.

Makereti, Tina, and Witi Ihimaera, eds. *Black Marks on the White Page*. Auckland: Random House New Zealand, 2017.

Tibble, Taii. *Poukahangatus*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2019.

Stavanger, David. *Case Notes*. Perth: UWA, 2020.

Harkin, Natalie. *Archival-Poetics*. Sydney: Vagabond, 2019.

Langton, Marcia. *Welcome to Country*. South Yarra: Explore Australia, 2018.

Stavanger, David, and Anne-Marie Te Whiu, eds. *Solid Air: Australian and New Zealand Spoken Word*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2019.

Yunkaporta, Tyson. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. Melbourne: Text, 2019.

### SUNDAY READER

Sherri Hilario

*Sherri Hilario is an avid reader and volunteer library worker at the Jessie Street National Women's Library.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Street, Jessie. *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography*. Edited by Lenore Coltheart. Sydney: Federation Press, 2004.

Arruzza, Cinzia, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser. *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*. London: Verso, 2019.

Boochani, Behrouz. *No Friend But the Mountains*. Sydney: Picador Australia, 2018.

Hibberd, Lily, and Bonney Djuric, eds. *Parragirls: Reimagining Parramatta Girls Home Through Art and Memory*. Sydney: New South Books, 2019.

Krien, Anna. *Act of Grace*. Carlton: Black, 2019.

Goodall, Heather, and Helen Randerson. *Teacher for Justice: Lucy Woodcock's Transnational Life*. Canberra: ANU Press, 2019.

Roy, Arundhati. *The End of Imagination*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.

Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. *Wichcraze: A New History of European Witch Hunts*. New York: Pandora and Harper Collins, 1994.

Low, Tim. *Where Song Began*. Melbourne: Penguin Books Australia, 2014.

### FLOATING READER

Moones Mansoubi

*Moones Mansoubi finds solace in reading. She is a community arts and cultural development worker working specifically with people from refugee backgrounds.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. Translated by Mohammad Ebrahim Fatahi, 2014.

New York: New Press, 2013.

### SATURDAY READER

Hanne Marks

*Hanne Marks is a polyglot octogenarian and scrabble addict.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Forlag, Chr. Erichsens. *Vor Konge*. Denmark, 1940.

Brentano, Clemens. *Geschichte vom braven Kasperl und dem schönen Annerl*. First published 1817.

*The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*. Oxford University Press, 2008. First published 1611.

*The Koren Jerusalem Bible*. Jerusalem: Koren, 2010.

Franklin, Miles. *My Brilliant Career*. London: Penguin, 2007.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin, 2018.

Miller, Madeline. *Circe*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

Serong, Jock. *Preservation*. Melbourne: Text, 2018.

Goscinnny, René. *Astérix en Hispanie*. Paris: Hachette Livre, 1969.

Pizer, Marjorie. *Poems*. Sydney: Pinchgut Press, 2014.

### FLOATING READER

Xiaoran Shi

*Xiaoran Shi is a reader, writer and political organiser.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Eng, David L. *Racial Castration*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. London: Profile Books, 2019.

Pham, Larissa. *FantAsian*. New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2016.

Barstow, Anne Llewellyn. *Wichcraze: A New History of European Witch Hunts*. New York: Pandora and Harper Collins, 1994.

### FLOATING READER

Ellen O'Brien

*Ellen O'Brien is a Guringai woman and a big critical thinker / reader / feeler of emotions.*

Grossman, David. *Lion's Honey*. Translated by Stuart Schoffman. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2018.

Lucashenko, Melissa. *Too Much Lip*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2018.

Liu, Cixin. *The Three-Body Problem*. London: Head of Zeus, 2016.

Carlson, Bronwyn. *The Politics of Identity*. Acton: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2016.

Papertalk Green, Charmaine. *Nganajungu Yagu*. Castlemaine: Cordite Press, 2019.

the train pulls in to martin place  
 wind and city move around me  
 I lean towards pillared gallery  
 feel for friday at the sandstone entry  
 visitors cloak bags  
 and find a frame to hold them  
 security click and count  
 fluorescent light casts no doubt  
 shadows caught on polished floors  
 no cracks in these walls

four flights of stairs  
 lead me to us  
 our nook  
 thursday's imprint still there  
 on the green chair  
 sheepskin weaves us together  
 our seven shelves slowly swell  
 every page turned  
 books become time  
 holding the line

he approaches to stare  
 she observes from afar  
 they photograph the moment  
 and ask why I am there

I remember  
 each spine  
 sentences underlined  
 titles hold            tight  
 stories told            right  
 memories hold        light

honey

you were here before me  
 and you will follow me tomorrow

the sculpture—the seven bookshelves, which had grown horizontally over the course of the work's six months at the gallery—had entirely been constructed through an image of the spines stacked side-by-side on the wall. Bar those on my own shelf, all of the books' front covers were foreign to me.

One book had a plain leather spine, but its front cover was a marble page. Marble pages are one-of-a-kind imprints on paper, where the movement of ink and water is used to emulate the aqueous surface of smooth marble. They have their own literary history: the first marble page appeared in 1759, in Lawrence Sterne's book *Tristram Shandy*, but I came to know about them through Jordy Rosenberg's *Confessions of the Fox*.

In Rosenberg's book a marble page appears unannounced at a moment just before two characters have sex. It appears in lieu of a concrete description of bodies and intimacy. In the abstract space of the marble patterning, the reader's possessive gaze is refused. It is a generative elision, where the refraction of written details creates a space for the reader to speculate, to imagine, to sit with abstraction, and with the impossibility of capturing the world with words.

I think *Lion's Honey* is an equivalent marble page among Kaldor Public Art Projects' artist commissions. It is the work that is probably the least-spectacularised, the most-elusive. There are no flames, or coastlines covered in canvas, or monumental flower-filled puppies. Most people in the gallery, after all, walked past us. And, like a marble page, it enacts a refraction of the details of a text from the audience. Just the conditions of reading remain in view.

Sometimes people would just sit on the floor; watch us quietly turn pages.

The Letter of Agreement Agatha wrote us stipulates: *this is an improvisation*. Fred Moten once said that improvisation is the thing that we do in the face of history: *improvisation corresponds to the necessity of paying attention to our history, to the history that we are and the history that we live*. If this was a dance, attention would be the most acute of our gestures. What books we read; the position of our bodies in space; the people we turned our backs on; the people we didn't.

*Lion's Honey* spanned fires and floods, through endless news refreshes and map updates and devastation, and I am writing now through another kind of crisis—one that, once again, brings to the fore the precarity of bodies under capitalism. My attention is scattered, unable to be wrangled in this perpetually adrenalised atmosphere.

But sometimes, as Tiana Reid says, *the terror would stop, however momentarily, when I devoured the insides of a text*. Monday mornings were a time to regather, to regroup, to plan, to study, to rest. There was immense pleasure in sinking my back into that chair. I haven't found the space or attention to read in that concentrated way since the project ended.

But sometimes, as Lisa Robertson says, *sometimes my sadness in reading is that I can't stay. I fall away from the ability to receive*. The air-conditioned space of the gallery felt so severed from the ever-proliferating news that demanded confronting. Like a sterile hum. Sometimes I didn't show up to work, couldn't sit in that chair at all (although sitting there was all I really desired), and the work accommodated that absence, the need not to sit sometimes. They were months of improvisation; there was also precarity.

Bodies, like books, have spines that crack. My bones would often get so stiff from sitting all day in the fluoro green chair: the absorptive intensity of falling into a book so deeply—the gift of that hard-to-come-by reading—would sometimes come at the expense of remembering to stretch. Eventually, I stand up. I crack the bones in my back and neck to release the tension. I place my right hand on a wall, my left hand on my back, swivel my neck to the left, crack, feel the release of my spine, and repeat for the other side.

John sat before me in the space adjacent to the Art Gallery of New South Wales café. Emily sat beside me. We ordered tea. Small white pots arrived on black plastic trays with thick-rimmed hospitality-style saucers and little jugs of white milk. The escalators whirred beside us, people's bodies levitating in and out of our peripheral vision.

John looked unwell. His age, normally sitting somewhere in the background of his charismatic presence, had seeped forwards. The preparations for *Making Art Public: 50 Years of Kaldor Public Art Projects* had been all consuming and seemed to be taking a toll.

I had gone to the meeting on the edge of refusal. I wanted to withdraw myself as an inclusion in the exhibition. It was around June, and the exhibition was to open only a few months later. I had proposed a number of iterations of a concept, but none had landed. One, *Reverse Exhibition*, an augmented sonic experience in which the viewers leave a sonic trace of their names in the gallery, had become too technically and collaboratively complicated. To an extent I agreed, but I carried the rejection like a heavy stone in my pocket.

I inhaled, and as air filled my lungs, I prepared to say No—thank you John for this opportunity, I am grateful but I must remove myself; I cannot force an idea into being if there is no idea; I am tired; I have to be with my son; nothing is rising to the surface; I don't think this is the right time for me; I have given you my ideas; I have too many other things on; I feel compressed as if I can't breathe; I can't keep up with emails and expectations and my book-keeping; there are piles of clothes on my bed and the floor as I can't find the time and energy to put them away; I don't have any resources left; my partner needs more time; I have no space; but before that exhalation left my body carrying with it that one-syllable negation, John interrupted.

*Let me tell you a story. There was once a very strong man. The strongest man in the world. On the other side of a great desert, his girlfriend awaited him. She was the most beautiful woman in the world. The desert itself was hot and dry. Its sand hills rose and fell. The man, so determined to reach his girlfriend, and so strong, was not concerned by the desert. Suddenly, a huge Lion rears up before him. This man is so strong the Lion's roar and rearing up means nothing to him, and he tears it apart limb from limb. The Lion is dead, and the man continues to the village. There he meets his girlfriend, but the villagers are unfriendly to him, an outsider. Something bad happens. He leaves his girlfriend and her village. As he returns across the huge desert, he comes upon the place he murdered the Lion. The Lion has decomposed so that it is only a carcass now, its flesh rotten and dry. Its ribcage is exposed, and inside the cavity bees have made a very productive hive. Golden viscous honey trickles from the hive and pools in the carcass of the Lion. This strong man, believing the honey somehow to be a result of his actions and therefore his, reaches his hand through the exposed bones and scoops out handfuls of golden seeping honey.*

Take the honey, John said to me, as he reached his hand across the table at the Art Gallery café, where we had suddenly rematerialized. His hand, cupped, gestured towards my mouth. I looked around and saw the familiar tables, chairs, bustle of this room.

A book—I was reading it last night, he said. I will lend it to you to read, but please come back with an idea by Friday.

The next day, equipped with this small paperback book gifted to me by John Kaldor, I arrived at my studio. Here, I arranged a sheepskin on the floor and lay down for the first time in many months. I opened the first page of the book, and for the next five hours gave myself permission for the time to pass as I read without the nagging thoughts of emails or text messages or bills or cleaning. I sunk into the sheepskin as the book poured into me, animating a virtual world behind the translucent curtain of my face. This world of interiority, more so than the actual contents of the book, was better integrated and more complete than any augmented sonic reality I might have created in *Reverse Exhibition*, and yet it was triggered simply by the act of raising a small book to eye level and clearing a diary.

Perfectly inaccessible to anyone else, this world was both fertile and restorative. After five hours I felt sated, as if a cluster of obstructions had dispersed. And by Friday, I decided the work I would propose to John would involve the distribution of this golden honey to as many people as possible: permission to use time as one desires, to dwell and luxuriate in the permission granted to return to the most vital of tasks—reading a story.

Anne-Marie Te Whiu

Stella Maynard

Agatha Gothe-Snape