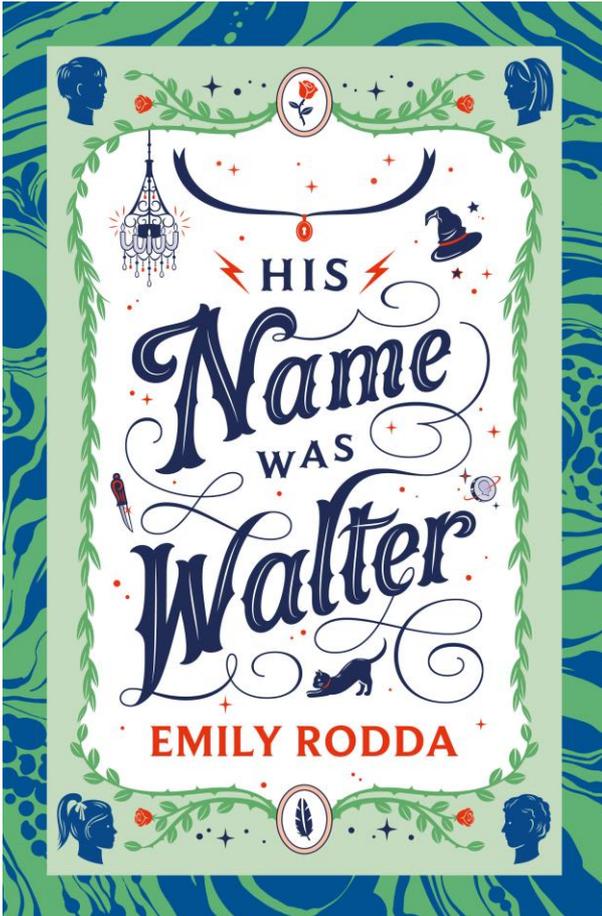


## His Name Was Walter

By Emily Rodda



### Notes Suitable For:

These notes are primarily for students in Year 4-6, although the book will appeal to readers beyond this range. This will engage a variety of readers, who are interested in history, magic, mystery and Australian places.

### Themes:

Identity, place, betrayal, friendship, loyalty, connections to the past

### Key Learning Areas:

- English & History

### Cross Curriculum Priorities:

ACELA1488, ACELA1501, ACELA1518, ACELA1525, ACELA1523, ACELT1603, ACELT1608, ACELT1610, ACELT1612, ACELT1613, ACELT1614, ACELT1800, ACELY1689, ACELY1700, ACELY1710

### General Capabilities:

- Ethical understanding
- Personal and social capability
- Critical and creative thinking
- Literacy

ISBN: 9781460756188

eBook: 9781460710203

Notes by: Bec Kavanagh

Date of Publication: July 18

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.*

## CONTENTS

\*a note – For clarity, I will refer to the framing story and the nested story throughout these notes. The framing story is the story of Colin and his classmates reading the book in the abandoned country mansion. The nested story is the story within the story, of Walter and Sparrow, and Walter's journey to fulfil his destiny.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Emily Rodda's first book, *Something Special*, was published with Angus & Robertson in 1984. It marked the beginning of a career that has seen her become one of the most successful, prolific and versatile writers in Australia.

Since then, Emily has written or co-authored over ninety books for children. Her children's books range from picture books to YA novels, and include the award-winning *Rowan of Rin* series as well as the outstandingly successful *Deltora Quest* fantasy series.

A full-time writer since 1994, Emily has won the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year award a record five times, and seems to instinctively know what children want to read.

## AUTHOR INSPIRATION

*I wanted to write a 'story within a story'. I love the traditional belief that ghosts can linger in a place where injustice and wickedness have happened, unable to rest until the truth is told. The idea that truth is all-important, and must be pursued however other people try to distract you, or make fun of you, or frighten you is important to me.*

*These three ideas came together to make *His Name Was Walter*, in which my three great loves – high fantasy, magical reality and a mystery to be solved are combined.*

*This book was technically the most difficult I've ever written. At the same time, it was deeply satisfying. The 'fairytale' in particular gave me the richest writing experience I've had since, I think, *Rowan of Rin*. I lived and breathed Walter's story till it was done. Then I wove the contemporary story around it, exactly as if I were reading it along with my characters, reacting according to their individual personalities, problems, talents and attitudes, and drawing the appropriate conclusions.*

*We can explain away the magical fairy tale elements in Walter's story as Mrs Fiori and Lucas do. Or we can accept them as real, like Tara.*

*As Colin says, it's up to every individual reader to decide.*

Emily Rodda

---

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.*

## CHARACTERS

### The Significance of Character:

The heart of this book can be found in its characters, whose understanding of themselves and each other develops as the story progresses.

There are two layers of major and minor characters in the book, due to the nested story structure of the work. In the framing story, where Colin and his classmates seek refuge in an abandoned country mansion, the five characters are Mrs Fiori, Colin, Lucas, Grace and Tara. Although all play significant parts in the story, it is Colin and Tara who are focused on as the key characters, particularly as the story within the story unfolds. Colin and Tara, whose interest in Walters story borders on obsession, become the two major characters as they are drawn deeper and deeper into the world of the book.

The nested story is the book that Colin finds in the old desk inside the abandoned mansion - His Name Was Walter. This story forms a major part of the narrative, and the characters are of equal significance to Colin and his classmates. Here the major characters are Walter and Sparrow, with a number of minor characters discussed below.

### Major Characters:

Colin:

*Colin nodded. Already he regretted opening his mouth. He saw that Grace was looking amused. Lucas hadn't even bothered to look around. They probably thought that anyone Colin's age who cared about old furniture must be incredible boring.*  
p10

- Does Colin fit in with the other characters? Does he care?
- Why does Colin care about old furniture?
- How do you know that Colin is an important character?
- What does Colin want?

Tara:

*The frail-looking girl called Tara Berne, the one who'd had the nosebleed just before the breakdown, was sitting on the ground with her back propped against her pack. She was so pale that her skin looked almost transparent, and she was shivering all over.* p3

- What are your first impressions of Tara?
- Do you think she will be important to the story?
- Does Colin respect her? Why/why not?
- How is Tara different from the other four characters?

Walter:

*'Once upon a time,' Colin read, 'in a dark city far away, there lived a boy called Walter who had nothing but his name to call his own. A name does not sound much, but it was everything to Walter, because only he knew what his really name was.'*

p17

- What does this introduction tell you about Walter and his situation?
- Do you think names are important? What does your name mean to you?
- What similarities can you see already between Walter and Colin?

Sparrow:

*Sparrow had expected him to be repulsed by the feathers. She had expected him to recoil from her in fear and disgust. Because – it could only be because everyone else in her life had done so.*

p126

- How is Sparrow described by others?
- How does Sparrow feel about herself? How does Walter feel about her?
- What is Sparrow afraid of? Is she brave?

**Minor Characters:**

Mrs Fiori:

*Even Anna Fiori, so conscious of keeping her dignity in front of her students.*

p7

- What impact does calling Mrs Fiori 'Anna', have in this sentence? How does it make you see her differently?
- How does fear affect the way Mrs Fiori interacts with her students? Should teachers be afraid?

- Why does Mrs Fiori want the students to spend the weekend without their phones and laptops? Does this make her a mean character?

Lucas:

*Not for the first time, Colin thought how observant Lucas Cheah was. Lucas' give-away-nothing eyes took in everything there was to see, and he seemed to forget nothing. p82*

- Why doesn't Tara like Lucas?
- What does Colin realise about Lucas during this scene?
- Why does Mrs Fiori think that Lucas is hiding a phone? Is he? How does this impact his interactions with the other characters?

Grace:

*She sounded really childish, and her eagerness should have been annoying, Colin thought, but somehow it wasn't. p14*

- Is Grace a shallow person? What makes you think this?
- What surprises you about Grace?
- Do you think that Grace behaves differently when she is around her friends than she does around Colin and the others? Why might this be?

Lord Vane:

*Lord Vane was tall, handsome and dignified, with a solemn but benign manner guaranteed to put other people at their ease. He had a fine head of iron-grey hair, a well-trimmed grey moustache and piercing blue eyes. p106*

- Do you think Lord Vane is a kind character from this description?
- What reasons does Walter have to dislike him? Could he be mistaken?
- How do the villagers feel about Lord Vane?

Magda:

*Walter and Magda never spoke again of her lost children, or the enchantment of the three white ducks. At night, when the curtains were drawn to shut out the darkness, Magda talked of the herbs in her garden, their many uses and her plan to paint them all. p73*

- What role does Magda play in Walter's story?

- Why do you think she helps him?
- Why doesn't Magda talk about her lost children? What does this tell you about the way she feels?
- What is most important to Magda?

### Character Arcs:

Consider the following definition of a character arc:

*A character arc is the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story. If a story has a character arc, the character begins as one sort of person and gradually transforms into a different sort of person in response to changing developments in the story.*

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character\\_arc](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character_arc))

- What is your understanding of a character arc?
- Does it matter whether characters transform or change over the course of a book? How might the story be different without character arcs?
- Do all of the characters in the book have character arcs? Discuss who does/doesn't and why you think this.

Use the following quotes and questions to understand the character arcs for Colin and Walter. After you have completed this, choose another character (major or minor) from the story, and use the prompts to map their character arc.

#### Colin:

Colin misses his grandfather, and the farm he grew up on. Although he is introduced as a happy enough character, he clearly misses the life he was forced to leave behind, and there is a sense that he hasn't let anyone become truly close to him. Stumbling on the old mansion, and the beautiful desk and story inside, he feels invested in something for the first time. The story helps him to share more of himself with his classmates, and to learn more about who they are in return. Like Walter, we start to see cracks in the emotional wall that Colin has kept up, and his connection with the story provides him with a way to find meaning in his own life. When he first begins to read *His Name Was Walter*, Colin is described as an uncertain and unwilling reader. But the more he reads, the more confident he becomes. His transformation mirrors Walter's in many ways, as he learns to understand the complexities of the people around him, and grows a quiet confidence in doing the right thing.

*Colin did as he was told. 'What can't be cured must be endured.' That had been one of his grandfather's favourite sayings. Grandad would say it when there was drought, when the*

*rains came early and wrecked the wheat, when a bill was bigger than expected, when the hens didn't lay, when there was no marmalade left for breakfast.* p15

- What do these descriptions tell you about Colin's life before? Do you think things were going well on the farm?
- Does Colin seem like the kind of person to always do what he is told?
- Why doesn't Colin want to read?

*Now! It was now or never! Colin felt Tara press his arm, exchanged glances with Lucas, who was obviously going to leave it up to him, and spoke up.* p260

- Would Colin have disobeyed Mrs Fiori at the start of the book? What gives him the confidence to do so now?
- How does Colin behave differently around Lucas and Tara than at the beginning of the book? What does Tara pressing his arm, and the glance he exchanges with Lucas show you about the change in his character?
- Colin's transformation is similar to Walter's, but more subtle. Is it less significant? What does he lose over the course of the story? What does he gain?

#### Walter:

When we meet Walter at the beginning of the story he is shy, alone, and unsure of his place in the world. His character arc begins when he stops to talk to the beggar woman, who gives him the first clues to his identity. This moment is significant because he learns that his mother is dead, and so his goal changes – he no longer wants to find his mother, but instead wants to discover who he is. As the story unfolds, as demonstrated in the quotes below, he loses his innocence and naivety, learning hard truths about himself and the world he lives in, but he also learns how to love, and to be loved, and how to become the kind of man that a mother could be proud of.

- What does the image of Walter's heart cracking represent?
- Is Walter's transformation a sad one? What does he lose? What does he gain?

*'Puny, wrinkled little scrap you were, but the poor girl held you and kissed you as if you were the most beautiful thing in the world. Weak as she was, she asked me for paper and pencil and wrote something down. Something about you being called after your father, I think it was.'* p38

- What does Walter learn about himself in this conversation?
- How does it inspire him to run away?
- What changes can you see in his behaviour and attitude in this scene from earlier scenes?

---

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.*

*Walter's timid appearance and manner probably helped, too. Lord Vane preferred underlings who did not have too much confidence in themselves. It made them easier to rule.*

p107

- What kind of physicality do you imagine from the phrase 'timid appearance'?
- Is Lord Vane right to believe that Walter doesn't have confidence in himself at this point?

*Walter's inner being had not changed, but a sort of innocence had left him, and would never return. A sterner gleam now mingled with the warmth in his honest eyes.*

p191

- What is meant by 'Walter's inner being'? What has not changed about him?
- How does the 'sterner gleam' contrast with the 'timid appearance' from the previous quote to show how Walter has changed?
- Is his change only physical?
- How does Walter's transformation lead to the climax of the story?

Activity:

Choose a character from the book and use the following questions and prompts to map their character arc.

Name of your character:

Find quotes to match the following prompts. For each quote, answer the following set of questions, noting any changes that you observe in the character.

- Who is speaking?
- What do they tell us about the character?
- Does this quote show us how the character sees themselves, or how they are seen by others? Are these different?
- What does the character want at this point in the story?
- What is their behaviour towards other characters at this point in the story? What does this tell us about them?
- What do they believe they are capable of? What do you believe they are capable of?
- Who or what is important to them at this point in the story?
- What is their physical appearance at this point of the story? What does this tell us about the character?

A quote from when we are first introduced to this character that tells us something about their situation, their location or their appearance:

---

---

---

---

---

A quote from the middle of the story, that says something either about the character's appearance, or shows an interaction they have with another character:

---

---

---

---

---

A quote from the end of the story, that shows what the character has achieved:

---

---

---

---

---

## EXPLORING THE TEXT

### Historic context:

The book takes place across two times – contemporary Australia and historic Australia, in the fictional town of 'Long Rest'. As the story unfolds, and we learn that the book Colin has found is the true story of a boy from the town, we also find out that it's narrator (Sparrow) has coded the name of the town itself and the people living there to prevent anyone from discovering and destroying her record of events. When Colin and the others realise that the events from the book took place in the abandoned mansion, they start to decode other elements from the book, which eventually lead them to the place where Walter has been buried.

*'I should explain', she said, raising her chin, 'that we took the liberty of looking for this – ah, treasure trove – because we read about it in a book we found in the house.'*

p258

- Why do you think the author has chosen to tell a love story in this way?
- Mrs Fiori's class were visiting Grolsten to learn about its place in Australian history. Do you think Colin, Grace, Lucas and Tara would have cared as much about this experience if they hadn't read Walter's story and solved the mystery of his death?
- Why do you think writers like Emily Rodda choose to revisit the past in their work?

### Individual responses to the text:

Use the following questions as starting points for a classroom discussion that explores your individual responses to the book, and encourages readers to think about why they responded the way they did, and how they interact with a particular book.

- Is the book similar to any other books you've read recently?
- At first glance, what draws you to the book – is it the title, the cover, the blurb?
- Read the blurb aloud in class. What do you think the book will be about? Do you think it will be a happy story or a sad one? What makes you think this?
- Once you've started to read the book, what surprises you about the story or the characters? Does anything?
- Are any of the characters similar to you or people you know? Is this important? Why?
- Would you have approached the book differently if you were told that it was historical fiction, or a war story? What genre do you think the book is? What do you expect from stories in this genre?
- Is the setting of the book familiar to you? How does this make you relate to the story?

### Exploring Setting:

The setting of the novel is important, as it provides a physical connection between the nested story and the primary story. The clues in the setting are what first suggest to Colin and Tara that Walter's story took place in the old mansion. Setting is also used to develop suspense, and create mood. The evocative language used to describe the weather and the isolated location build the tension by removing Colin and his friends from their normal, comfortable surroundings.

- In the opening paragraph of the novel, 'dark purple clouds, were rolling over the vineyards of Storm Valley, heavy with rain and growling with thunder.' Highlight the words in this sentence that refer to an emotion or action. How do these words make you feel? How is colour used to set the mood? Would you feel differently if the clouds were described as light and orange?
- Later, as Colin and Tara are drawn further into the story, and begin to feel the rage of the Beast disturbing the house, the 'wind gusted and moaned outside' (p168). The interior of the house is also used to layer the tension of this scene, as it echoes 'with creaks, scuffles, rattles and taps' (p168). How is the mansion used to amplify the fear

and tension that Colin and Tara feel as they read? How might you create this same tension in a different setting?

- Discuss the importance of setting as a class. Talk about:
  - Setting as a physical place, and how that grounds the reader in the story
  - The elements of setting (such as weather, colour, feel, surrounding areas, time of day)
  - The way setting can amplify the emotions of the characters
  - What kinds of words you might use to describe setting to make a story feel sad. What words might you use to make a story feel happy?

### Examining text structure and organisation:

There are many ways to examine the structure and organisation of a particular text, but I have chosen to use the structures of 'the hero's journey' and the nested story to examine *His Name Was Walter*. You may choose to use either or both to work through the structure of the text with your students – each will offer up different information and insights about the story.

#### The Hero's Journey:

The hero's journey is a twelve-part structure, typically found in fantasy or quest adventure novels, but frequently used to examine other narrative journeys as well. There are many resources for this structure online, however the following website provides a simple outline of the steps to begin with.

<http://www.movieoutline.com/articles/the-hero-journey-mythic-structure-of-joseph-campbell-monomyth.html>

Choose a character and trace their hero's journey for each of the following twelve steps.

#### The Nested Narrative:

The nested narrative, or story-within-a-story, structure uses the introduction of a second, parallel story, embedded into the primary story, to provide insight and revelations into the primary story.

In this case the nested, or embedded narrative, is the book that Colin finds in the antique desk. This is the story of Walter and Sparrow, of Lord Vane and Magda. Walter's story provides insight both directly, and indirectly. Directly, because as Colin, Tara and the others unravel the mystery surrounding Walter's death, they solve a decades old mystery involving the town of Grolsten and the old mansion. Indirectly, because as we watch Walter struggle to find his place and to accept love, we can more easily recognise these traits in Colin, Tara, Grace, Lucas and Mrs Fiori.

- What is the purpose of a nested story?

- What do the following extracts from Walter's story tell you about Colin and his friends?
  - *It soon became clear to him that the crow's name for Abby's home was not the same as the name by which it was known to humans, but he solved that riddle after a day or two, and steadily moved towards his goal. He still shied like a nervous colt and slipped out of sight whenever he saw a troop of soldiers, but was half ashamed of his caution. Three years had passed since he ran away from the city. He was over eighteen now, old enough by law to live without the King's protection. (p91)*
  - *And he was. He had been horrified by what the witch told him, certainly. He knew that never again would he be able to pass the duck pond without a shudder. But for some reason he wanted to stay in the clearing now more than ever. Perhaps it was the aching sadness he had seen behind the anger in Magda's eyes. Perhaps it was a kind of fascination at her strangeness. Or perhaps it was simply that the shell around his heart was now so crazed and brittle that love had found its way through. (p72)*
  - *Walter wanted to protest that there was a world of time for them to talk of such things, but the girl's eyes were so beseeching that he could not bring himself to refuse her. (p133)*
- Does the nested story have to follow exactly the same pattern as the primary story?
- What is the difference in the ending of Walter and Colin's stories? Can you see any similarities in the way each piece ends?

## RICH ASSESSMENT TASKS

*His Name Was Walter* blurs the lines of genre and time, blending the detail of historical fiction with the rich imaginative worlds of fantasy and grounding both within a contemporary setting that will resonate with readers. The following activity will give students an opportunity to research their personal history, and then use their imagination and the writing skills they've learned from the text to write a story of their own.

- Choose a member of your family (they may be living or deceased, there's no limit to how far back you can go! But choose someone that interests you – if their story doesn't interest you it won't interest your readers!)
- Create a character profile for the person you've chosen. Include:
  - A photograph of them (if you can get one, otherwise think about drawing a portrait from the descriptions you've found)
  - Any key information about them you can find (it could be useful to interview them)
  - Details about where and when they lived, including descriptions of daily life during this time (newspaper cuttings might be useful here)
  - Any examples of their language – any direct quotes, or sayings they used
  - A short summary of what made you choose this person – what part of their story are you interested in telling?

- Using this as a starting point, start mapping out your story. You will need to make the following decisions:
  - What genre is your story?
  - What is the structure of your story?
  - Who is it about?
  - What happens to them?
- Building on your knowledge from above, write an arc for your character, thinking about who they are at the beginning of your story and who they are at the end. What do they want?
- Start writing! Use the techniques you've learned – incorporate setting, evocative language and mood. Think about the way your characters interact with each other. Consider writing a piece that transforms your slice of personal history into something new, in the way that Emily Rodda has done with her exploration of WWII in Walter's remarkable fairytale.

### Notes from the Author

#### The Importance of Truth

Both the inner and outer stories describe a battle between people who want to uncover the truth, and people who for their own reasons want to keep the truth concealed or obscured.

In chapter 20, Colin spells out the methods used by the Beast to stop Sparrow's tale being told: 'He tried to distract me, tried to send me to sleep, and when neither of those things worked he started trying to scare me off.'

Students might like to discuss whether distraction, boredom and fear are used in the real world to sway opinion and/or keep secrets.

Other 'truth' references:

Cynical Lucas says important people will always be believed over 'nobodies'.

Mrs Fiori says that the truth has a way of coming out in the end, if journalists and historians do their jobs properly. Colin thinks that truth is like a sword that cuts through fear and lies. True or false?

In the last chapter, Tara tells Bridie Hatton that in the end, Sparrow 'needed all of us'. Emily Rodda says that this was not just a throwaway line, this was the mainsprings of the story.

Discuss.

Colin has the practicality to open the desk, the sensitivity and artist's eye to be drawn into the book, the empathy to sympathise with Tara, the honesty to face unpalatable facts and the courage to resist the Beast.

Tara has the ability to 'feel' other-worldly things that other people don't feel. She readily believes in magic, ghosts and angry spirits. She 'feels' Sparrow, and hears Walter's whistling before anyone else does. Beneath her shy, timid exterior she is brave, single-minded and extremely determined, and it is because of her that the book is read right to the end.

Lucas, whose scientific mind will not accept anything that smacks of superstition, is the only one who can go on reading the book under the onslaught of the Beast. He is also the one who sees Sparrow's final picture for what it is—a map showing Walter's grave.

Enthusiastic, vivacious, quick-thinking Grace is the only one who could have persuaded the angry Mrs Fiori to calm down and go on reading the book in chapter 23. It's interesting that it's Grace who's able to comfort old Ginger in the second-last chapter, not just by telling him his old friends are mentioned in the book, but also by being so young and alive.

And Mrs Fiori, the historian and the only adult in the group, has the authority to deal with 'young' Ginger, to put a respectable face on the discovery of the treasure trove, and explain when the story was written.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books can be used as comparative text by theme and/or structure, or for students who have enjoyed *His Name Was Walter* and would like to continue their reading.

### The Hero's Journey :

*Song for a Scarlet Runner*, Julie Hunt  
*Nevermoor*, Jessica Townsend

### Other books by Emily Rodda:

*Star of Deltora* (series)  
*Rowan of Rin* (series)  
*Rondo* (trilogy)  
*Something Special*  
*Pigs Might Fly*  
*Finders Keepers*  
'The Three Doors (trilogy)'  
*The Shop at Hoopers Bend*

### Story within a story books:

*A Monster Calls*, Patrick Ness  
*Inkheart*, Cornelia Funke  
*The Princess Bride*, William Goldman

---

*These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.*

## BOOK SUMMARY

While on a history excursion, an ill-assorted group of four kids and their teacher are left on a country road when their minibus breaks down. At the suggestion of a friendly tow-truck driver, the five take shelter in a nearby old, deserted mansion. There they find a little old desk with a secret drawer. Inside the drawer is a book containing a handwritten story and a series of vivid, strangely lifelike paintings. The book is called *His Name Was Walter*.

The story begins: 'Once upon a time, in a dark city far away, there lived a boy called Walter, who had nothing but his name to call his own.' And so begins the tale of Walter - his lonely childhood, his flight from the haunted streets of the city, his discovery of Magda the witch, his quest to find Magda's lost daughter, and his meeting with the love of his life, the mysterious, tragic girl he calls Sparrow.

As the night closes in around them and the story of Walter and Sparrow unfolds, the kids read it avidly. Slowly the outer and inner stories begin to mesh. Slowly the story of Walter draws the five members of the group together. And in the end every one of the five plays a vital role in the uncovering of the truth.

### Author of the Notes

Bec Kavanagh is a Melbourne based freelance writer, reviewer and YA fiction specialist. Bec has appeared at the Melbourne Writers Festival, on Radio National's Books and Arts Daily and has judged a number of literary prizes, including for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Writing for Young Adults. Her work has been published by Bookseller + Publisher, Australian Book Review, Kill Your Darlings, and a number of education publications. She has had fiction published by Seizure and the Review of Australian Fiction. Bec is currently completing a Masters of Creative Writing at Melbourne University.