

Revisiting a Tassie classic

Blue Skies
by Helen Hodgman
Text, \$29.95

IT'S been 35 years since Helen Hodgman's *Blue Skies* first appeared on bookshelves. But despite the extraordinary changes in society in the intervening years, this novel still has a masterpiece's power to thrill and discomfort.

Text's re-release of this classic is a brilliant move, reminding audiences of the strange dark roots of our island and forcing us to consider the mania that may lie dormant inside us all.

Blue Skies is set in an almost recognisable beachside suburb outside Hobart. It is the story of its anonymous narrator – a young mother adrift in the loneliness of her new role and miles away from the art, words and laughter she so desperately needs to keep her sane.

Like the anti-heroines of *Jane Eyre* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator has some comprehension that she is neglecting her baby and acting in increasingly outlandish ways. Despite a rising sense of panic, she seems incapable of holding herself back from the squalid morass that gapes its ever-widening mouth at her. She finds herself moving through seedy affairs to even more dangerous territory.

What is phenomenal is that her spacey commentary continues to shine with insight, unruly beauty and terrible humour. The sublime climax of this urgent and honest work more than speaks for itself, but audiences are sure to be delighted to find a new introduction by Danielle Wood.

As an eminent academic familiar with the Gothic stereotypes that drench our literature, and as a dynamic young mother herself, Wood is ideally positioned to deconstruct this text.

Wood carefully examines the narrative arc of "young woman going mad in a Godforsaken setting", and then explains why Hodgman's re-imagining of this narrative is so important. Wood then goes one step further, interpreting what this book really says about its setting and illustrating how it has been misunderstood and misquoted abroad.

Blue Skies is sure, once again, to hold readers in thrall, daring them to read to the shocking end in one sitting.

ANNA FORWARD

● Danielle Wood will discuss *Blue Skies* at Fullers from 2pm on Sunday, March 13.

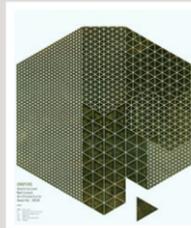


Grand designs



SHOWCASE STRUCTURE: The Barcardine Tree of Knowledge (Brian Hooper Architect in association with m3architecture). Picture: JON LINKINS

INSPIRE:
Australian National Architecture Awards 2010
REVEALbooks
\$99.10



THIS stylish book is the first in a planned series of 10 limited-edition annual publications featuring the winning projects in the Australian National Architecture Awards.

The award categories cover domestic, commercial and public architecture and last year's state and national winners included bridges, train stations, restorations of old pubs and a showcase structure for what remains of Queensland's Tree of Knowledge at Barcardine, which was poisoned by a person or persons unknown in 2006.

Pavilions – those elegantly arranged boxes of wood, glass or concrete – still dominate the drawing-boards for new houses. (I predict burrows and caves will be the logical countermovement to that trend.)

The influences in new multiple-dwelling, commercial and public buildings are much more diverse, though Gaudi curves have seduced a few of the winners.

The stunning project that won both the national Urban Design and Heritage Architecture awards was the conversion of a Victorian-era reservoir in the Sydney suburb of Paddington into a public park.



STUNNING: Paddington Reservoir Gardens (Tonkin Zulaikha Greer with JMD Design and the City of Sydney). Picture: Tonkin Zulaikha Greer and Brett Boardman.

The firm that carried out the project, Tonkin, Zulaikha Greer, comments on the brief: "The general expectation was that the underground site would be capped off and a

brand-new arrangement built on top. Instead we found ourselves captivated by the possibilities of revealing the 19th century structures as a ruin through which members of the public could wander . . . The council was persuaded to build the park in the ruin itself, to open and expose the old underground building and weave garden courtyards through the site, below street level."

We should all be grateful that the architects' view prevailed. Also very lovable is the LulaMae pop-up shop, made of cardboard, which was won a Victorian small project award.

“We should all be grateful that the architects' view prevailed”

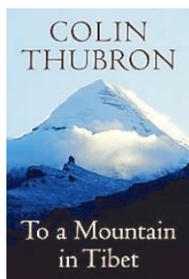
Several Tasmanian projects were national winners, including Maria Gigney Architects' conversion of a landmark sandstone barn in West Hobart

into a residence (best small project) and HBV, which won the Robin Boyd residential architecture award for its concrete extension to a house at Trial Bay, on the Channel.

GABRIELLE RISH

Thubron takes sacred circuit

To a Mountain in Tibet
by Colin Thubron
Chatto & Windus, \$29.95



DIAMOND-shaped, symmetrical and never climbed by man, Mt Kailas rises 6714m in the mountains of western Tibet. It is a peak holy to one-fifth of the world's people: Hindus, Buddhist, Jain and Bon, a place of pilgrimage for centuries and source of India's great rivers.

Through these sacred landscapes British travel writer Colin Thubron sets out with his guide Iswor and a cook called Ram for a trek along the shores of the sacred lake Manasarovar, past hermit's caves, monasteries ruined and active, and tiny villages where each ridge or crag is steeped in the legend or tradition of the ages. To complete one 56km kora (or sacred circuit) around the mountain is to wash away the sins of a lifetime and believers are drawn from around the world to attempt the arduous trek.

It is for Thubron, too, a pilgrimage of sorts. Having buried the last of his relatives, his journey nudges him to confront his own feelings on the fleeting impermanence of life.

"I am doing this on account of the dead," he writes. "I need to leave a sign of their passage. My mother died just now, it seems, not in the way she wished; my father before her; my sister before that, at the age of twenty-one."

The tale unfolds at the gentle pace of a foot-borne traveller, with detours into history, myth and legend and into the memories of Thubron's relatives who have gone on their own eternal journey.

Thubron is an acknowledged master of travel writing and travel in his company is well worth taking. His landscapes and characters are painted vividly, his reportage is unsentimental and without judgment.

He does not shy from documenting the appalling destruction wrought by the Chinese on the Tibetan people and their heritage, particularly during the cultural revolution.

Reminiscences of a lost sister, father, and mother surface gently here and there.

To a Mountain in Tibet is carefully researched, well observed and woven into story that offers the reader insight into one gentle traveller's three entwined journeys: along the narrow mountain paths, through the spiritual beliefs of the Himalayan peoples and back to memories of those dearly loved and lost.

DAVID KILLICK

Voice of horror and injustice

The Messenger
by Yannick Haenel
Text, \$32.95

THE *Messenger* may be small in size but it is a book with a big impact.

This 172-page novel, part fact and part fiction, was written by Yannick Haenel and is the story of Jan Karski – a Polish diplomat turned cavalry officer who escapes from a Soviet detention camp.

Karski joins the Polish underground and serves as a courier, carrying messages from occupied territory to the allied forces.

When the Nazis start systematically killing the Jews, Karski is given the job of getting the message to the leaders of the free world.

He is given a tour of the Warsaw ghetto, in its final death throes, and goes into an extermination camp dressed as a guard so he can give an eyewitness account of the slaughter.

The idea was to shake the conscience of the world but, 70 years after the liberation of the European death camps, the world's conscience has still not been shaken.

The world leaders listened to Karski's message from the Warsaw ghetto and did nothing and millions of Jews perished.

Karski argues that there should no longer be crimes against humanity because humanity ceased to exist with the death camps.

The Nazis were responsible for the Holocaust but they were aided and abetted by the leaders of the allied forces who did nothing to stop the killing.

Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt had their own agendas and the Jews were not part of it.

Karski also argues that the Polish people were also deserted by the free world. He said the allies did not react when his country was dismantled and towards the end of the war, during the Warsaw uprising, they left the Poles to be



massacred. When Karski gave his message to world leaders, they said they did not believe him.

He said they knew what was happening but pretended not to know because the British and Americans did not want a Jewish refugee problem.

Until the end of the war, the allies refused to bomb the Auschwitz gas chambers or rail tracks because they said the resources were needed for military objectives.

In 1944, American bombers attacked industrial targets just five miles from the gas chambers.

The Messenger is a harrowing and compelling read which is certain to prick the consciences of people in high places.

It is also a remarkable story of survival as Karski is captured and tortured by the Nazis before escaping to deliver his most important message of all.

The book is about brutality and evil and the simplicity of the storytelling heightens the sense of overwhelming injustice.

It leaves the reader with a profound feeling of despair for the future of humanity.

ROSS GATES