

**ROSIE SCOTT**

**Launch Speech for *Indelible Ink* by Fiona McGregor**

Gleebooks, Thursday 3 June

As Aviva mentioned, Georgia was unable to make it and my thoughts are constantly with her and her family at the moment, which I'm sure is true of all of you who know her.

Being called in on such short notice- it's lucky I'm a speed reader, a friend of Fiona's, a long-time supporter and fan of her work and have no false pride about being second choice.

It's a privilege to launch such a wonderful novel.

I first met Fiona in the year the Howard government came into power - those dark days - and she was gallantly organising a half page ad in The Australian newspaper about human rights for Indigenous people. It was in response to the attacks that were being made on them by the government. She contacted me as she was getting snowed under and needed help. We became friends straightaway.

What I was immediately attracted to in her was that rare personal quality of hers that also makes her work and this book *Indelible Ink* so compelling – she is a true original.

She has own fierce take on the world which is very refreshing and is reflected so clearly in this novel – because she is both truthful and forthright, remarkably unaffected by convention in the way she lives, yet at the same time keenly aware of the rhythms of ordinary day to day life respectful of and highly knowledgeable about them.

As a performance artist touring in Australia and internationally, as a teacher and mentor, she has never followed a conventional path and all of these experiences have fed into and nourished her work, and are portrayed with perfect judgment in *Indelible Ink*.

In a literary world where there can be an awful lot of self-promotion, hype, and over-inflation of reputations ( the Peter Carey syndrome I call it) she remains desperately uncomfortable in interviews, is very truthful to the media in a way she often regrets later and private about her work and herself. She has no *side* in other words; she has not crafted a profile or a personality or a brand and seems to have no interest in that side of being a writer. I find that very admirable.

As an example, the other day I saved a couple of really good reviews for her when she came round and she didn't even want to read them! Astonishing behaviour for any writer- desperate as we all are for any crumbs of approval- as I'd assured her they were raves.

But what Fiona does have is a passion for writing and a serious lifelong commitment to it - she is one of the most hardworking writers I know. I remember her talking about her ideas for *Indelible Ink* five or six years ago. Each of her books has this long gestation period – she becomes obsessed, does research, mulls over the ideas involved –in other words lives and breathes her work as a true writer does. *Indelible Ink* has that strong sense of an almost perfectly realised novel.

As most of you know Fiona has already written four excellent novels, *Au Pair* shortlisted for the Vogel award, *Suck my Toes* winner of the Steele Rudd Award and *chemical palace*

shortlisted for the NSW premiers award. She was also voted one of the Best Young Novelists by the SMH..

Like many writers she has had many periods of financial hardship but unlike many, throughout all these bad times she has never given up on writing. *Indelible Ink* is a triumphant affirmation of her great talent and, I believe, her best.

Earlier I mentioning about her understanding of the rhythms of ordinary life- this is reflected with unerring accuracy in this novel.

*Indelible Ink* is full of the details of day to day life, conversations with friends, gardening, family dynamics, the worlds of advertising, real estate; death and betrayal, all beautifully realised and absolutely accurate. Here is an example of her close attention to detail and powers of observation which is quite Alice Munroian (which for me is the highest praise.)

‘A fly had landed and was busily rubbing its forearms together. Marie was astonished by the clarity of her sight, and the urgency of the fly’s task. A surge of respect for the tiny insects in all their profligate industry moved through her like grief.’

And here’s another one

‘Marie didn’t want to talk to anyone for fear they would blame her. She hadn’t looked after herself, she had drunk too much and eaten badly, she had held sadness and anger in her stomach all these years until they turned against her. She hadn’t gone to the doctor early enough, she had ignored her symptoms. She only had herself to blame.’

‘Nothing had changed, people were still the same. Every sickness was a curse, every dying a punishment. And every death a murder or suicide.’

‘The garden at night was a cool deep space filled with the sound of crickets and one willy-wagtail. Marie stepped across the lawn, lifted her nightie and squatted beneath the lemon tree. The moon slid from its veil, flooding her to the marrow and everything around her lit up like a stage. She could see the crinkled furls of hibiscus and high up in the angophora the lit cigarettes of possum’s eyes. And so it might happen as she had originally wanted. The garden might outlive her.’

Her style is a compelling and original mix of a very sharp satiric eye on society and on people, underpinned by a tender understanding of human foibles and celebration of the natural world.

In *Indelible Ink* she never goes for the easy or obvious target in her satire or gives way to sentimentality in her portrayal of her characters. There is a slow build up of the rhythms of life, told with such accuracy, vividness and calm insight that we become more and more immersed in the lives of the people she is writing about .

As well as being a loving evocation of Sydney this book has the calm authority, poetic rhythms and control of material of a marvellous writer at the height of her powers.

I am very honoured to launch this book.

— Rosie Scott