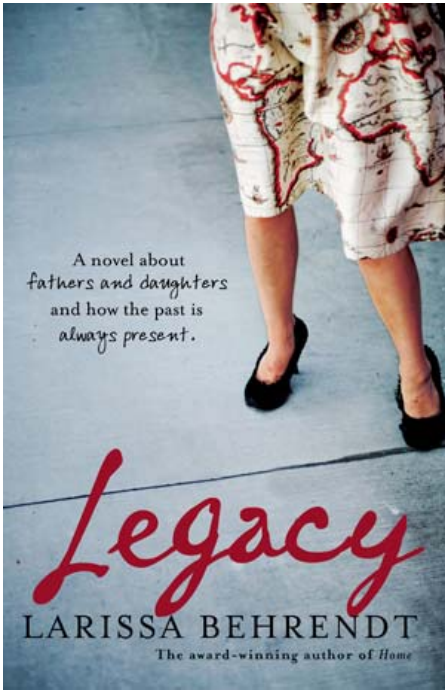


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BOOK CLUB NOTES

LEGACY

LARISSA BEHRENDT

Published: 26 October 2009 | ISBN: 978 0 7022 3733 1 | Fiction | 382pp | AU\$24.95

Simone Harlowe is a brilliant young Aboriginal lawyer pursuing further studies at Harvard when complications in her family life draw her home. She has always had a troubled relationship with her father, Tony, a prominent Aboriginal rights activist, who has both inspired her to study law, and also disappointed her, but she is further torn when she discovers the latest in his string of illicit affairs. Her best friend Tanya's lover leaves her, and Simone begins to realise that Jamie, her former boyfriend, didn't really love her either. To add to this cocktail of domestic drama, the supervisor whom Simone has admired unreservedly dies, and the reader is gradually made aware that his life may in some ways mirror hers. She eventually decides to

visit her grandmother in order to discover more of her father's past and her own. But she has no idea of the secrets she'll uncover.

In a novel which briefly details the history of the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia, Behrendt has also written about families, relationships, love, betrayal, the fraught nature of memory, and the conflict between personal and public histories – universal human struggles.

1. 'The only redemption we have is when we understand the way we have affected other people's lives.'(p. 18)

Discuss the concept of redemption.

2. The novel alternates between Simone's first-person view of things and the third-person view of her American supervisor, John Young, and later his ex-wife, Louise Baxter, Darren Brown, Arthur Randall, Tony, and other characters. This style involved choices on the part of the author, for the alternating narration might just as easily have been that of her former boyfriend Jamie, for example, and might also have been written in first person.

Why do you think Behrendt chose to tell these other stories in this way? What bearing does each person's story have on the themes of the novel?

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3. Tony Harlowe refers to his five rules for survival on pages 53–4, mentions them again several times later in the novel, and then they are listed in full on p. 281.

Discuss these maxims. How successful might they be in practical terms?

4. Simone ponders her father's infidelity by comparing him to her supervisor, John Young: 'an embodiment of what a perfect father can be' (p. 58). Conversely, we learn that John's daughter does not admire her father, and also that Beth Ann believes that Tony is actually a model father (p. 85). Later Tanya suggests (pp 74, 126) that perhaps Jamie is not the paragon of virtue Simone thinks he is.

How often is one person viewed in such different ways?

5. Simone chooses not to tell her mother that she knows Tony is having another affair, and then we discover that Beth Ann has always known about Tony's infidelity but has kept it from Simone for fear of her losing respect for her father (pp 84–5).

Secrets are common in families. Was Beth Ann right in keeping Simone from the truth? How has this secret shaped Simone's character and her relationship with her mother?

6. 'There's a sadness in outgrowing your parents but I guess it happens to everyone.' (p. 19)

Discuss the various child–parent relationships depicted in this novel, in relation to this statement.

7. Aboriginal sovereignty is not only at the heart of Simone's thesis but lies at the very heart of this novel too. Read Kevin Gilbert's words (pp 58–9) and discuss the implications of them in terms of future reconciliation.

Has Australia progressed towards sovereignty? How important was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples for past injustices, issued on behalf of the nation on 12 February 2008, in achieving reconciliation and recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty?

<*transcript of apology*: www.pm.gov.au/node/5952 >

8. This novel is about Aboriginal self determination and sovereignty but it's also about romantic love. Not only is it about Tony and Beth Ann's relationship, but also Simone's, John's, Tanya's, Rachel's, Rachel's parents', Arthur's and Patricia's relationships. What view does it present in terms of the challenges of long-term relationships?

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9. Rachel makes two big decisions (pp 244–5).

Would a man be expected to make such changes in similar circumstances?

10. When he's being interviewed by Darren Brown, Tony lists men who have played a part in Aboriginal politics in recent decades (p. 101).

What do you know about any of them? Read further and discuss some of their achievements.

11. In his interviews with Darren, Tony doesn't mention the role of women like Patricia who were also at the Tent Embassy.

Why do you think the roles of women often get written out of history?

12. 'Do you think that when some people today say "land rights didn't work" they are wrong because we didn't really have them?' (p. 149)

Discuss the implications of this statement and Tony's explanation on the following pages (pp 149–152).

13. When Patricia advises Simone to go home to visit her grandmother (p. 186), she's speaking about more than the physical address.

Compare this journey to the one Candice takes in Larissa Behrendt's first novel, *Home*. What does the journey mean to Simone?

14. 'We need to understand our history before we can make sense of the future.' (p. 269) Beth Ann's education began with her friendship with old Murray Simms (pp 88–9); Tony's began with the Tent Embassy; Rachel's with her search for her birth mother.

Should we each seek to educate ourselves about Aboriginal history? Is fiction an effective way to communicate the issues being addressed by the Aboriginal Rights Movement?

15. The title of the book suggests that heritage or inheritance lies at its heart.

What legacy has Simone inherited?

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