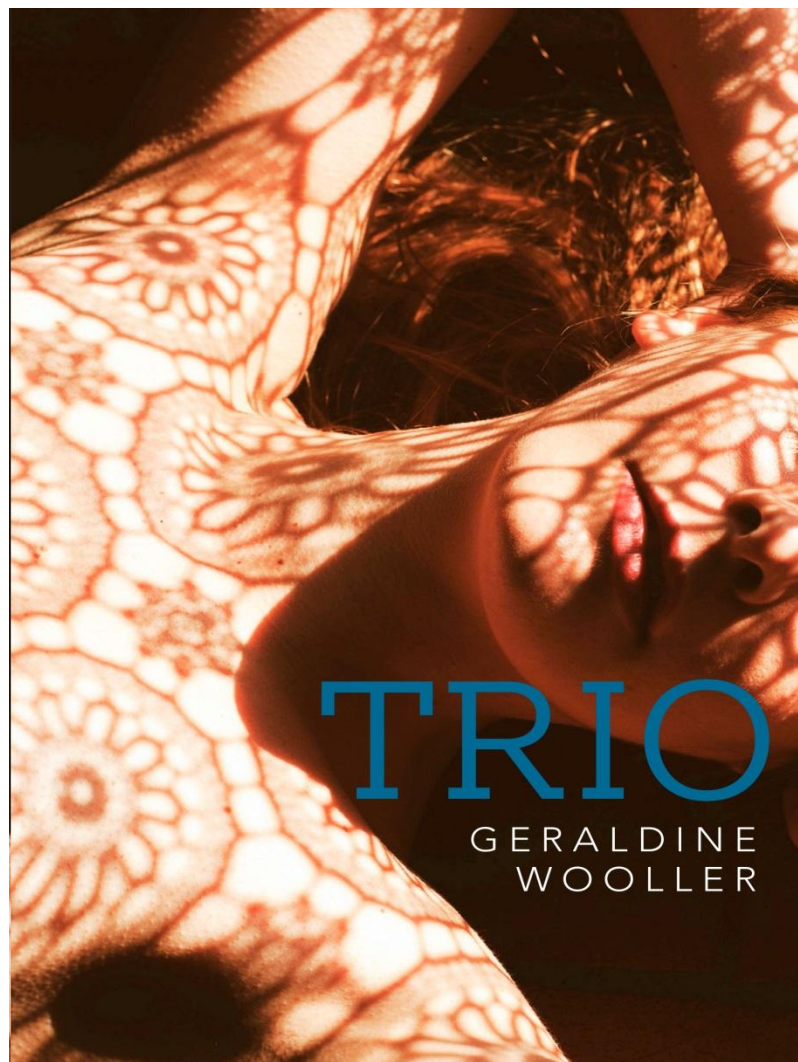


# READING GROUP NOTES



**Contents:** About the book; About the author; The author on writing the book; Suggested points for discussion by Lucille Fisher; Suggested reading; Suggested viewing.

## About the book

Celia, Marcia, and Mickey meet and become friends in London. Searching for work and success in the theatre, they end up sharing a flat and a deep bond of friendship.

Set in Italy, London and Australia from the sixties to current times, *Trio* is the story of their complex personalities and relationships, of the betrayals and desires that threaten to undermine what is in hindsight most important to them. London is vibrantly alive in these pages, filled with music and drama, as is eighties and contemporary Perth, Australia, and Calabria, Italy. But at its heart this is a novel about love and friendship, loss and memory; about three unforgettable characters, and the special moments in all our lives that, through perceived hurt or fear, sometimes threaten to fall away and be lost forever.

In this, her fourth novel, Geraldine Wooller captures with masterful wit and intelligence, and without a hint of sentimentality the essence of the human predicament.

## About the author

Geraldine Wooller was born in Perth and started travelling at the age of twenty, living in London for two years, then later in Rome also for two years, and later in Sydney.

In London she worked in the Earl's Court Exhibition building's cafeteria, in the industrial canteen, dishing Yorkshire Pudding and then Spotted Dick onto plates for the workers. Later she trained as a comptometer operator and earned her living thus for several years. In Rome in the late 1960s she worked as a bilingual secretary for an executive in an American company, where she ran up and down stairs in between taking down letters in almost indecipherable shorthand. In the 1970s she took out a degree in Italian and Linguistics from The University of Western Australia and subsequently completed a Diploma in Education. Since then she has worked in a number of positions in Western Australian universities and as a teacher of European languages. Still later she trained as a teacher of English as a Second Language and worked for some years as a teacher at Perth TAFE.

*Trio* is her fourth novel. Her second novel, *The Seamstress*, was shortlisted for the Barbara Jefferis Award, the Western Australian Premier's Award and long listed for The International Dublin IMPAC Award.

Find more about Geraldine Wooller at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geraldine\\_Wooller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geraldine_Wooller)

## The author, Geraldine Wooller, on writing *Trio*

I had long been struck by the number of young male relatives who were drinkers. It was a family background, on my mother's side, of Scots and Irish, and from early years I was an observer of continual drinking at riotous parties, with good food cooked by my favourite cousin. These were parties to mark birthdays and anniversaries and they were happy times. There was plenty of singing and dancing (we had a wide hall in the middle of two flats) and there was no fighting. An accordion-playing uncle starred, someone else was good at telling jokes and most people danced. Each person sang a favourite number to the usual praise. No parties since have ever measured up to these times. But the amount of beer drunk was formidable and it took its toll.

So, to create a lovable Celtic male character was my first idea. But the story gradually changed into a tale of three people, two women and a man who had left behind their own place of birth. There were many memories for me to draw on, not only of early times in London and other places which became familiar, but the numerous people whose lives have touched mine.

As I'm very interested in the vagaries of life and the uncertainties of friendship, my tale was to become one of close friendships forged in foreign parts. I invented two of the characters, Mickey and Marcia, while Celia – from whose point of view much of the story is told – is loosely based on myself. However most of the book is fiction.

There was no research. If the book had been, say, a historic novel then it *would* have required much research. However, as with most of my work, it is an account of life and death, loss and renewal, based on memory. Nevertheless as I progressed through the writing I had to check certain facts made reference to: French philosophers for example; dates of political incidents in the twentieth century; dates of natural disasters in Italy – many of these that were happenings during my lifetime which had become slightly blurred. However I don't really see this checking as research.

I was writing other material in between, such as a dissertation and a collection of short stories, so *Trio* took a number of years to complete, with several re-writes. Recalling places I've known – the cities and villages of Italy, the relatively quiet energy of London and the free-wheeling life of Australia – was all a kind of melancholy joy.

## For discussion

- Friendship is a central theme of *Trio*. It's described as fickle and fragile. How is this demonstrated? Do all three characters show friendship's fickle side?
- 'Not everyone is meant to be a friend for life, there is a season for friendship,' says Mickey. Is he right? How does this relate to him and Celia and Marcia?
- Estrangement follows friendship for the characters. What does this say about the nature of friendship? Towards the end of the book, Celia puts off contacting Marcia after a long separation. Why? Should either of them feel guilty, about their estrangement, or about Mickey's death?
- Celia is largely celibate, but with a strong unexplored love for Marcia. Marcia has a very active sex life. Is this the result of a strong sex drive, or is there a more complex impetus?
- There's a line 'some people are better at being happy than others'. Is it true of the book's main characters? How do their personalities and actions determine their chances of happiness? Do you find it true of your lives or those of people you know?
- The 'trio' have professional ambitions, initially in the theatre, and all achieve modest success. Many years later, as Mickey, hampered by his drinking, continues to struggle in the theatre world, Marcia has reinvented herself as an English teacher and Celia a published poet. Do you think the women are happy with, or even simply accepting of, the way their lives have turned out?
- Alcoholism is a major issue for all three. As children, Marcia and Celia's lives were bighted by it. How does their traumatic upbringing affect their life choices? To what extent can such trauma explain or determine adult behaviour? For Mickey, whose childhood 'seemed uncomplicated', alcoholism is a growing problem which eventually overcomes him. How do you think he would explain his descent into alcoholism?

- The trio all have secrets. Mickey reveals little about his past. In Italy, when Marcia tells Celia about her abusive father, Celia might have been expected to reciprocate the confidence, telling of her parents' wasted lives. Why doesn't she?
- James is a fourth major character, introduced after the trio members have become well established. What does his presence bring to the book? He describes Jeremy as 'almost like a son'? But is he more than that? How important is James in Celia's life after Marcia dies?
- As Marcia lies dying, she reminds Celia of a funny incident at a bank in Rome. Do you find such humour out of place in such an emotionally painful time?
- If you live in Perth, or have visited, do you agree with Mickey's complaint about 'the grinding bloody smugness of it. The conviction that there's nowhere else on earth.'
- The narrative spans 34 years, occasionally moving about in time (from 2000 to 1984 and back to 2000 for example) and place (London, Italy, Perth). Why does the author do this, and is it an effective writing technique?
- The writer describes her book as 'ruminative and philosophical'. Celia and Marcia are thinkers, introspective. Given this, a first-person point of view might have been chosen to convey their thoughts. What do you think?
- If you could use one or two words to describe each of the main characters, what would they be? Do your feelings about the characters, ie empathy, like, dislike, affect your enjoyment of a book? If so, give some examples.

## Suggested reading

*Reunion* Andrea Goldsmith [2009]

*Paula Spencer* Roddy Doyle [2006]

*Paradise* A.L.Kennedy [2004]

*Tipping the Velvet* Sarah Waters [1998]

*The Evening of the Holiday* Shirley Hazzard [1966]

*Engleby* Sebastian Faulks [2007]

*Honour and Oher People's Children* Helen Garner [1980]

*Joe Cinque's Consolation* Helen Garner [2004]

*The Smoking Diaries* Simon Gray [2004]

## Suggested viewing

*Roman Holiday* [1953]

*Obsession* [1943]

*Barfly* [1987]

*La Strada* [1954]

*The Fox* [1967]

*Bicycle Thieves* [1949]

*Trio*  
Geraldine Wooller

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Discussion notes by Lucille Fisher

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