

DOMINIQUE WILSON

Orphan Rock



'Her writing is finely crafted, her prose poetic and subtle,
and a joy to read.' Monique Mulligan

READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

Orphan Rock is a complex and richly detailed story of secrets and heartbreak that will take you from the back streets of Sydney's slums to the wide avenues of the City of Lights.

The late 1800s was a time when women were meant to know their place. But when Bessie starts to work for Louisa Lawson at *The Dawn*, she comes to realise there's more to a woman's place than servitude to a husband.

Years later her daughter Kathleen flees to Paris to escape a secret she cannot accept. But World War One intervenes, exposing her to both the best and the worst of humanity.

Masterful and epic, this book is both a splendid evocation of early Sydney, and a truly powerful story about how women and minorities fought against being silenced.

'Her writing is finely crafted, her prose poetic and subtle, and a joy to read.' Monique Mulligan, author of *Wildflower* and *Wherever You Go*

'Dominique Wilson is a wonderful storyteller. The research is impeccable, the realism unforgiving.' Brian Castro, author of *Blindness and Rage* and *Shanghai Dancing*.

About the author

Dominique Wilson was born of French parents in Algiers, Algeria. She grew up in a country torn by civil war, until she and her family fled to Australia.

Dominique holds both a BA [Professional Writing and Communications] and a Bachelor of Visual Communication [Illustration and Design] from the University of South Australia and, from the University of Adelaide, a Masters [Creative Writing] and a PhD, for which she was awarded the University Doctoral Research Medal.

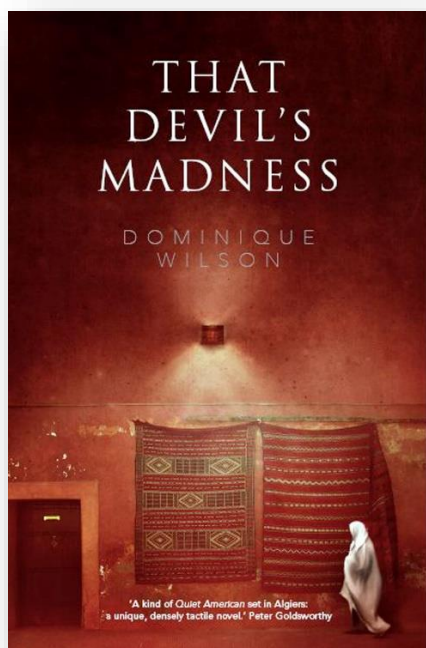
In 2005 she was founding Managing Editor of *Wet Ink: the magazine of new writing*, a position she held until she resigned in 2012. From 2007 to 2010 Dominique was Chair of the Adelaide branch of International PEN.

Dominique's short stories have been published nationally and read on ABC Radio, and one of her short stories was made into a film. Her debut novel *The Yellow Papers* [Transit Lounge, 2014] and her second novel *That Devil's Madness* [Transit Lounge, 2016] were both published to critical acclaim.

In 2014 Dominique was invited by the Australian Embassy in Beijing to participate in a number of events throughout China during their Literary Festival season, and to speak about writing *The Yellow Papers*.

<http://dominiquewilson.com.au/>

Previous works

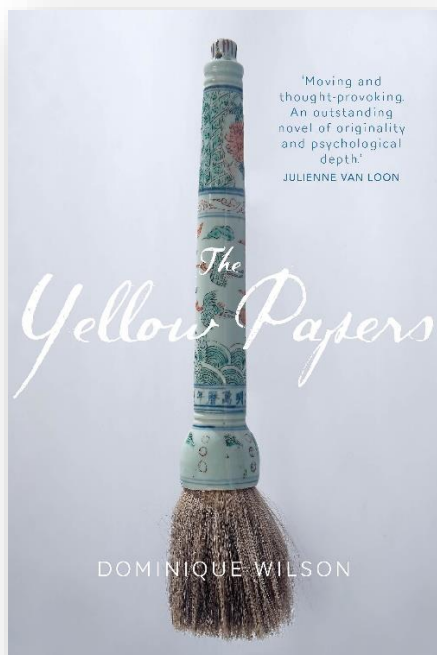


'A kind of Quiet American set in Algiers, a unique densely crafted novel in which the various strands of story-DNA – part multi-generational family saga, part Greene-land war zone, part Camus-like moral maze – entwine with the DNA of its characters – pieds noirs, Berbers, Australians – in a formal, satisfying helix.'

Peter Goldsworthy, author of *Maestro*, *Three Dog Night* and *His Stupid Boyhood*.

'That Devil's Madness is skilled and suspenseful fiction, its meticulous research worn lightly, its dual narratives handled with dexterity.' Cameron Woodhead – *The Age*; *Sydney Morning Herald*

'That Devil's Madness is a compelling narrative with an uncompromising conclusion ... it's destined to be one of my best books of 2016.' Lisa Hill – ANZLitLovers



'To compare The Yellow Papers to the historical sagas of the kind that consistently rise to the tops of bestseller lists may seem to trivialise the importance of its subject matter, but the book will still satisfy a readership hungry for a gripping, grandiose read.' Jennifer Peterson-Ward – *Books + Publishing Magazine*

'In its uncompromising examination of the impact of historical events on individual lives, this first novel is an engrossing, emotionally charged tale of friendship, love, prejudice, betrayal and tragedy.' Maureen Eppen – *Good Reading Magazine*

' Beautifully written from the first paragraph, the story of Chen Mu unfolds with all the delicacy of fine Chinese scroll work, designed to intrigue and enhance.' Janet Mawdesley – *Blue Wolf Reviews*

For discussion

- *Orphan Rock* opens with an epigraph. How does this quote set the scene for the rest of the book? Discuss how this plays a part in the story and the time period.
- *Orphan Rock* spans eighty-five years. How does the author show the passing of time and the changes that occur in society during that time?
- Consider Cornelius' personality. Is he, as he believes, 'a modern man', or is his behaviour more that of most men of his class and position?
- How do you see Mercy? Is she simply a jealous woman, or is she someone trying to survive in a society where women had little control?
- In your opinion, was Bessie wise or foolish to cut herself off from her family? Would staying home, and eventually marrying someone Cornelius thought 'suitable', have given her a happier life? Why/why not?
- Consider Bessie's friendship with Lottie and her friendship with Josette. How are they similar and how do they differ?
- Compare Bertram and Julian – why do they differ so much, and what do their personalities illustrated, regarding Australian society in the late 1880s/early 1900s?
- Wilson has included a number of people in her novel who were actually alive at that particular time of history [ie: Louisa Lawson, Quong Tart, Paul Poiret, Tilly Devine] – what effect does this have on the story?
- What do the books *Les Misérables* symbolise throughout this novel?
- Though they led what at first appears to be very different lives, there are many similarities between Bessie's and Lottie's lives. Discuss.
- Do you think Bessie was right in not disclosing to the alienist that Mercy was her mother? Why/why not?
- Consider Augustin's relationship with Kathleen. In your opinion, is he, as Josette and Margot decided, simply lonely, or do you think he fell in love with Kathleen?
- Are Kathleen's reasons for thinking she is 'bad luck' reasonable in your opinion? Would you have felt the same in her situation?
- Was Jonathan right to lie to Kathleen before going back to the front? Discuss.
- There are times when Kathleen does not like Gabriel. Did this seem reasonable, considering the circumstances? Is it possible to like one's child 100% of the time?
- Imagine living in the caves of the Kurnell Peninsula – could you do it? What do you imagine the positive and negative outcomes of living there?
- Did you think Kathleen did the right thing by standing by Michael instead of Gabriel? Discuss.
- Imagine you could write one more, final chapter. What would it be? How would you end this novel?

Suggested reading

The Burning Island – Jock Serong [Text Publishing 2021]

Tussaud – Belinda Lyons-Lee [Transit Lounge 2021]

Stone Sky Gold Mountain – Mirandi Riwoe [University of Queensland Press 2020]

The Dictionary of Lost Words – Pip Williams [Affirm Press 2020]

The Birdman's Wife – Melissa Ashley [Affirm Press 2019]

The Dickens Boy – Tom Keneally [Penguin Australia 2021]

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Transit Lounge Publishing

Trade paperback - ISBN: 978-1-925760-87-3

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