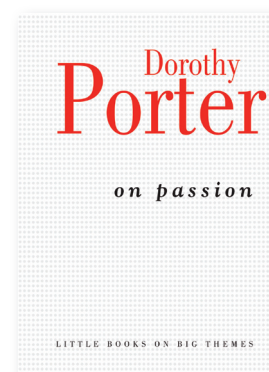


**On Passion** (Dorothy Porter, Melbourne University Press, \$19.99 hb, ISBN 9780522856019, March) ★★☆☆

The 'On' series from Melbourne University Press gathers together great Australian writers to ponder concepts, such as Robert Dessaix's *On Humbug*, Don Watson's *On Indignation* and Germaine Greer's *On Rage*. The essays are socially, culturally, and politically informed, but at the same time highly subjective meditations, replete with wit and humour. This contribution by the late Dorothy Porter is no exception. In what is largely a reflection on the passion that drives her own writing she segues between Nietzsche, The Beatles, Sappho, and Agatha Christie. She demonstrates the visceral nature of passion in startling and original ways; the torturous removal of Gloucester's eyes in *King Lear* is connected to her personal story of killing a tadpole as a child, both

with their 'vile jelly'. Equating the destruction of nature with the death of passion, Porter is nonetheless drawn to powerful literary images of death—the essay begins by recounting her adolescent fascination with the Spanish Inquisition. The abrupt shifts in focus, while initially jarring, further demonstrate the unrestrained nature of passion. Porter maintains consistency, however, by examining her own passions through myriad other writers. Her essay is a vivid exploration of what inspires one writer, and a warmly energetic addition to the 'On' series.

*Portia Lindsay works at the UNSW Bookshop*

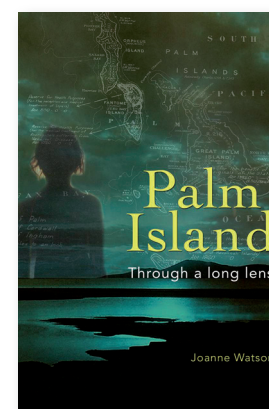


**Palm Island: Through a Long Lens** (Joanne Watson, Aboriginal Studies Press, \$34.95 tpb, ISBN 9780855757038, March) ★★☆☆

*Palm Island* tells the story of Palm Island from colonisation, through 1918 when it became a prison camp for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, to the tragedy of Cameron Doomadgee in 2004. The book is an absorbing and largely tragic history of racism, neglect and death. I knew about the death of Doomadgee and the controversy surrounding it, but it was fascinating to read of the history of the island and its inhabitants. Particularly interesting was the tale of Robert Curry, a superintendent on the island who suffered a mental breakdown, attacked the medical staff, poisoned his children, burned down various buildings on the island and was shot by residents on the instructions of the assistant superintendent. *Palm Island* has a chapter for all five of the longest serving and

most notorious of the island's superintendents. It also includes a chapter on the hospital on nearby Fantome Island, which served as the hospital for Palm Islanders as well as being a leprosarium. *Palm Island* is a brilliant companion for people who have read Chloe Hooper's *The Tall Man*, which explores the Doomadgee story in detail. Although *Palm Island* cannot be said to be an uplifting read, it is certainly a must-read.

*Jessica Broadbent is a former bookseller who is now studying to become a librarian*

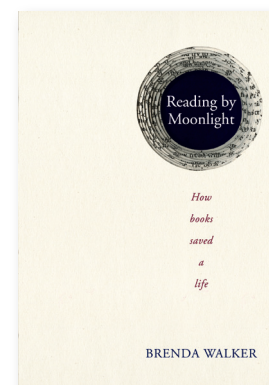


**Reading by Moonlight: How Books Saved a Life** (Brenda Walker, Hamish Hamilton, \$29.95 pb, ISBN 9781926428031, April) ★★☆☆

Brenda Walker, novelist and academic, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004. This is her memoir of that experience, with the difference that she focusses on the books she read that gave her support and helped her, not escape from life, but 'live it more deeply'. It is a richly satisfying book for those who love reading, prize the life of the mind, and appreciate its inextricable relationship to the body. She discusses certain authors and books in great detail, including Samuel Beckett's 'Malone' trilogy (which she clearly holds close to her heart), Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, *The Tale of Genji* attributed to Murasaki Shikibu, and J M Coetzee's *Foe*. Walker's language is poetic, her images strong, such as children in a pool being held up by the breaths of their parents filling the water wings. Her

own illness is described with a lightness of touch that has no self-pity, and some distance. A combination of factors actually saved her life, including medicine and family, but the reading rescued and steadied her sense of self. Some plot descriptions of valued books are overlong, but otherwise this is a treasure to be read and re-read.

*Sue Bond is a writer, editor, reviewer and former bookseller*



**Requiem for a Species: Why we Resist the Truth about Climate Change** (Clive Hamilton, A&U, \$24.99 tpb, ISBN 9781742372105, March) ★★☆☆

I opened this, curious about the title. Does Hamilton really think we are beyond the point of no return? Or is he being deliberately pessimistic to shock readers to action before it's too late? Although fronted by a perhaps superfluous chapter on the frightening recent science, this is not an attempt to convince readers of the existence of human-induced warming. Rather, like many alarmed by impending climate disaster, Hamilton has turned his attention to the psychological factors inhibiting human action to avoid it. Reprising themes from *Growth Fetish*, he ranges from the political to the psychological, casting light on the dynamics responsible for both denialism and passive inaction. In doing so he covers interesting ground. But the question remains, why this examination if disaster is already certain? This is a book that reads—and was perhaps

written—as an attempt to tease meaning from the author's own despair. It swings between optimism and despondency, but at its core is a break from disingenuous reassurances that minor personal actions will make a difference, and from arguments that the market, weak legislation or science itself will save us. Hamilton instead exhorts readers to 'Despair. Accept. Act', using his final chapter to make the case for civil disobedience. In his more optimistic passages Hamilton implies we have 10 years to take action to avoid the worst; the insights into human behaviours he lays out here can hopefully inform the shape of that action.

*Matthia Dempsey is editor-in-chief of BOOKSELLER+PUBLISHER*

