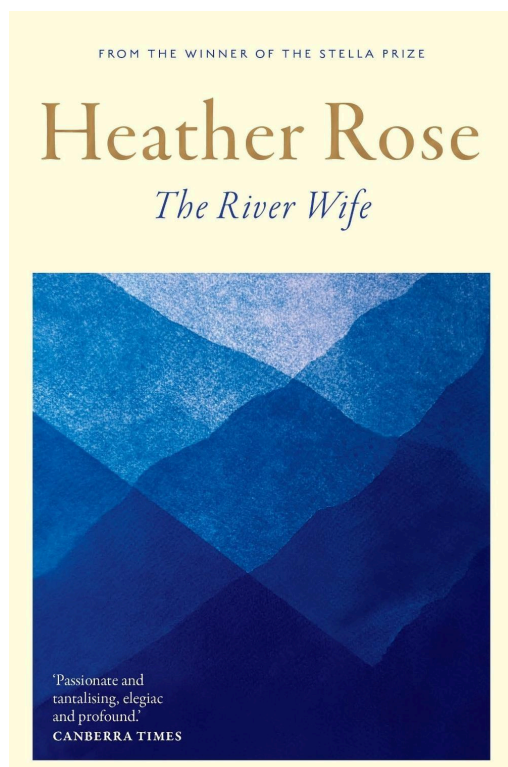


April 2026

The River Wife by Heather Rose. I came across this book by chance.

On Goodreads there are only 40 reviews with a 3.97 rating. In reading the reviews I kept coming across the following words to describe the book. *Lyrical, mystical, beautiful prose, a love story, full of magic.*



The book won the Varuna Eleanor Dark Fellowship in 2007 as an unfinished manuscript.

I thought the book, first and foremost, honors nature. Centred around the river, it is a story of how there is unseen magic in nature that sustains it, despite human interference. Interestingly the River Wife has no other name in the story. Her mother was also a River wife and fell in love with a man and had a child who was also destined to be a River wife. Her father was kind and cared for her and I loved the fact that he had a transformation rather than a death, turning into a tree on the riverbank.

One day she sees a man at the river and they develop a relationship. Wilson James is a writer of stories who fell in love with the River wife and she with him. Their love changes the course of both their lives. Wilson James starts to grow scales and eventually he becomes a fish and while she tries to

coax him back to human form she cannot and must seek guidance from the elder River Wives on how to return him to a human. She now has to make a choice with the understanding that her love for him and their time together must be the sacrifice. She makes the sacrifice and releases him from the magic but is now herself doomed to a life alone without the love of her life.

I like fables and fairytales, so an Australian fable was something new. I loved the story, for me it had some faint resemblance to the Celtic Selkie story but I can see where the Orpheus myth could sit in it too.

I think one of the things that sticks with me from reading the story is the softness of the narration and the rhythm of the narrative. I thought the writing was very clever to be able to create such a movement and rhythm through the sentence structures and word choices.

The story had an undercurrent of melancholy from start to finish but also acceptance. Acceptance of solitude and acceptance of fate. I found the book quite moving although I

acknowledge that it wouldn't be a book for everyone's taste. But my question is, is there a moral to the story, and if so, what lesson did people take from it?

There were mixed reviews from the group. Some could not connect to the book at all, and some loved it. It was felt that in the hands of a less skilled author it could have been a disaster. There was a lot of discussion on how different this novel was from Heather Rose's other novels. Most people thought the book was just the right length but that it wouldn't be a story which would transfer well to audio or film. It was a good reflection on human existence and how we as humans have messed things up. The story highlighted the environmental loss. Some felt the story had a biblical feel.

Ratings: Kim 3.5, Lynda 4, Nicola 3, Dianne 3.5, Sandy 2.5, Hetta DNF, Veronica DNF, Vivienne 3, Lesley 3.5, Margie 4, Janet 3, Pauline 3.5

Other Books We Read

On not climbing mountains by Claire Thomas, 4
Fierce land by Omar Musa, 2.5
Dancing on Coral by Glenda Adams, 3.5
Soft serve by George Kemp, 2.5
Mother Mary Comes to Me by Arundhati Roy, 4.5
Audition by Katie Kitamura, 3.5
The Land in Winter by Andrew Miller, 3
The Names by Florence Knapp, 4
Montpelier Parade by Karl Geary, 3.5
When the Museum is Closed by Emi Yagi, 3
Last Orders by Graham Swift, 3
Shuttlecock by Graham Swift, 3
England and Other Stories by Graham Swift, 3
Tomorrow by Graham Swift, 2.5
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (BBC audio) 5
Hamlet (BBC audio) 5
Beloved by Toni Morrison 5
Milkman by Anna Burns 5
A Terrible Kindness by Jo Browning Wroe, 4
What Remains by Carole Radziwill, 3.5
Theo of Golden by Allen Levi, 3.5
The Land in Winter by Alex Miller, 4
The Remembered Soldier by Anjet Daanje, 4
The Director by Daniel Kehlmann, 4
Women without Men by Shahrnush Parsipur, 3.5