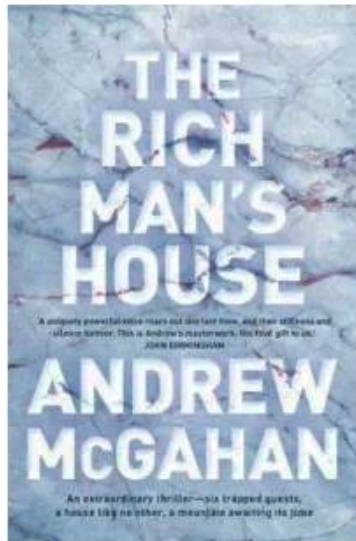


# January 2020



Andrew McGahan's 11<sup>th</sup> and final book, *The Rich Man's House*, published posthumously, is a 'haunted-house' novel. The origins of the book are the author's fascinations with the architecture of mansions, and with the ordeal of mountain climbing and the traits of many climbers.

The novel is an imagined alternative reality centred around an imaginary mountain rising from the Southern Ocean between Antarctica and Australia. The mountain, known as the Wheel, rises almost twenty-five kilometres above sea level, stretching far up into the stratosphere. Only one mountaineer has reached the summit, the multi-billionaire adventurer Walter Richman in 1974. Fictionalised accounts are given throughout the book of various climbing expeditions and explorers' encounters with the Wheel.

Fifty years later, Richman has purchased nearby Theodolite Island and built his mansion into the rock called the Observatory, designed by architect Richard Gausse. After Gausse's sudden death, his daughter Rita is invited to the Observatory to honour his final work.

The novel is told primarily from the perspective of Rita, the 'witness character'. She previously held beliefs about 'presences' in the environment, the inorganic awareneses of the landscape destroyed by the organic that is humans. She gradually learns of Richman's true character as the supernatural force of the Wheel unleashes its wrath upon Richman and others trapped in the Observatory after an earthquake and tsunami.

McGahan tells the story in several styles. It switches from events in the Observatory to geological accounts of the Wheel, extracts from magazine and newspaper articles, accounts of dramatic attempts to climb the mountain.

There was a mixed response to this book and lively discussion.

A number of readers didn't finish the book, finding it too long, had poor development of characters, disliked the fictionalisation of facts, and contained too much fantasy. Others 'couldn't put it down', finding it both 'compelling and ridiculous', suspenseful, graphic and a 'slow build'. Most agreed that it was well researched and contained convincing historical (fictionalised) narrative and detailed architectural descriptions although the writing could have been 'tighter and crisper'. For some the novel contains an environmental message that is to respect it, and is a 'morality play' about wealth, possession and power.

**Ratings:** Claudia 2, Janet 3.5, Jen 4, Lynda 2, Margie 2, Nicola 3.5, Sandi 3 and Pauline 3

Our February meeting will be 10/02/20 at 6:30PM at [Preece House, 50 Nerang St Bischof Pioneer Park, Nerang \(next to 54 Nerang St. shops\)](#) to discuss [Grace](#) by Paul Lynch.

Hope to see you all there and happy reading!

# Other Books We Read

January 2020

The Trauma Cleaner, by Sarah Krasnostein 4

Last Drinks, by Andrew McGahan 3.5

Olive Kitteridge, by Elizabeth Strout 5 and 4

No friend but the mountains by Behrouz Boochani, 4

There was still love by Favel Parrett, 4

After the party by Cressida Connelly, 2.5

The birth of Venus by Sarah Dunant, 2.5

A House for Mr Biswas by V S Naipaul, 3.5

The Secrets Between Us by Thrity Umrigar, 4

Olive, Again by Elizabeth Strout, 4.5

The Widow by Fiona Barton, 2.5

The Beekeeper of Aleppo by Christy Lefteri, 3.5

Born a Crime by Trevor Noah, 3.5

Olive Again by Elizabeth Strout, 4

Beyond the Sea by Paul Lynch, 4

Blue Dog, by Louis de Berniers, 4

The Lemon Table, by Julian Barnes, 3

Cult of Two, by Michael Faudet, 3

My Year of Magical Thinking, by Joan Didion, 4

The Erratics, by Vickie Laveau Harvie, 3.5

My Name is Why, by Lemn Sissay, 4

Lanny by Max Porter, 4.5

The Idea of Perfection by Kate Grenville, 4

In Cold Blood by Truman Capote 4.5