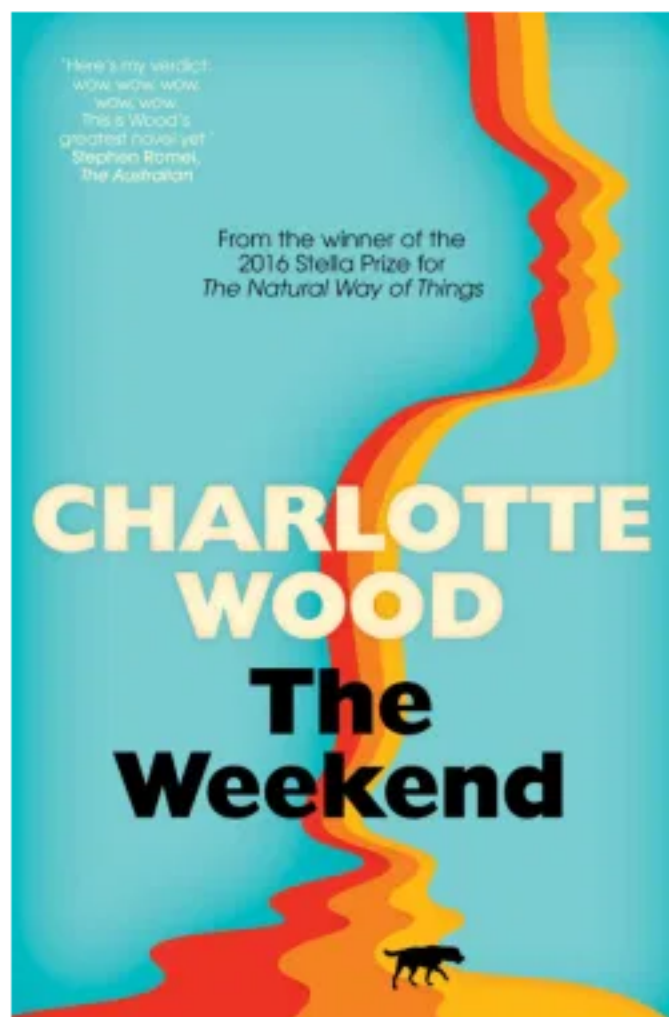


# July 2020



*The Natural Way of Things* brought Charlotte Wood sensational success: an Australian bestseller, published internationally, winner of the 2016 Stella prize, and numerous other awards. The novel was sharply contemporary in its portrayal of women under duress and evolved into the unwilling sisterhood of [The Weekend](#), our book of the month, also short listed for the Stella Prize in 2020.

The aging characters spend a weekend emptying the holiday house of a deceased friend, Sylvie, opening a number of issues formerly hidden. Wendy, a fading feminist academic, “impossibly but surely” looks like Patrick White as she ages, missing her dead husband, alienated from her adult children, devoted to her

ancient dog. Jude organizes the group and methodically cleans the kitchen while Wendy tosses everything into garbage bags and Adele, an out-of-work broke actress with a great body (“for your age”), procrastinates among piles of clothes and records. The true fourth member of the ensemble is Wendy’s labradoodle, Finn, who, demented and deaf, spends the weekend pacing, peeing and threatening Jude’s cast-off white sofa.

Food plays a visceral part in the relationships. Every morsel is significant, from the predictable “stock cubes and tins of lentils” in Sylvie’s pantry, to Jude’s carefully roasted chicken, her prized pavlova and the Wild Hibiscus Flowers in Syrup that Wendy drops into each champagne glass “like a blood clot”.

Baby boomers – and others – will recognize themselves in one or more of these believable characters, whom Wood deftly distinguishes without turning them into caricatures.

In an interview Charlotte Wood told how she “was interested in looking at the difference between how we see ourselves and how other people see us. We don’t necessarily recognise our own flaws while we’re very conscious of other people’s flaws. I find great pleasure in creating characters with that kind of complexity”.

Some readers were annoyed by the ‘childishness’ of the characters, but most felt that they recognised either themselves or their friends in the novel.

Behind the laughs there is deep humanity, intellect and spirituality, qualities that mark *The Weekend* as much more than old-chook lit.

With thanks to [Susan Wyndham’s](#) review in *The Guardian*.

**Ratings:** Janet, Pauline, and Diane 3.5; Lynda, Margie, Kim, Jenny, Nicola, Viv, Claudia and Sandie 3.

All going well, our next meeting will be at Preece House on 10/08/20 at 6:30PM to discuss [On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous](#) by [Ocean Vuong](#).

Hope to see you all there and happy reading!

# Other Books We Read

July 2020

The Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafon, 3

Elizabeth Costello by J.M. Coetzee, 4

Friend of my Youth by Amrit Chaudri, 3

The Shepherds Life by James Redbanks, 4

Agnes Grey by Anne Bronte, 2.5

The Midwich Cuckoos by John Wyndham, 2.5

The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 4

The Outsider by Stephen King, 3

How To Kill Your Husband (and Other Handy Household Hints) by Kathy Lette, 2.5

Flaubert's Parrot by Julian Barnes. 4.5

The Witch of Exmoor by Margaret Drabble, 3

Moon Tiger by Penelope Lively, 3.5

Grandmothers by Helen Elliott 3.5

The Whole Picture: Colonial story of art in our museums by Alice Proctor 4

Beowulf by Seamus Heaney 4.5

Ex Libris by Anne Fadiman 3.5

Mudlarking by Lara Maiklem 4

The Bell in the Lake by Lars Mytting, 3

Stone Sky Gold Mountain by Mirandi Riwoe, 3

Anything is possible by Elizabeth Strout, 4

Humankind by Rutger Bergman, 4

Here we are by Graham Swift, 3.5

The grammarians by Cathleen Schine, 3.5

The anarchy: the relentless rise of the East India Company by William Dalrymple, 3

A Fortunate Life by Albert B Facey, 3.5

In the Quiet by Eliza Henry-Jones, 3.5

On Quiet by Nikki Gemmell, 3

After by Nikki Gemmell, 4

On Violence by Natasha Stott Despoja, 3.5

See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control... by Jess Hill, 5

Flesh Wounds by Richard Glover, 4

The Children's Bach by Helen Garner, 3

The Cockroach by Ian McEwan, 2.5

Boy Swallows Universe by Trent Dalton, 3.5

Waiting for the Barbarians by J M Coetzee, 4

Olive Again by Elizabeth Strout 4.5

Actress by Anne Enright, 4

Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell, 4

The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro, 4

Elizabeth Costello by J M Coetzee, 3

Funny Weather, Art in an Emergency by Olivia Laing, 3

The Art of Rest by Claudia Hammond, 3.5

By the Sea by Abdulrazak Gurnah, 4

The Thing Around my Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 3.5