

In pursuit of family truths

FICTION

TRUST. By Kate Veitch. Viking. 368pp. \$32.95.

Reviewer: LOUISE CROSSMAN

I'm going to be upfront here: the title, cover and first few pages of *Trust* made me think this was going to be utterly dire. I'll be equally honest in saying that it was a mistake to judge the book by the cover.

Trust is appropriately divided into "Before" and "After", and explores the truth, as much as the trust, within the Greenfield family. "Before" sets up the characters, their relationships with each other and the way they think they interrelate. "After" deals with the reactions to a life-changing incident which shows that the Greenfields haven't always been honest with themselves, or with each other. Some of the Greenfields have been deliberately lying to their family; others haven't known themselves well enough to be able to tell the truth.

Susanna Greenfield, husband Gerry and children Sebastien and Stella-Jean live in what appears to be domestic bliss in an inner suburb of Melbourne. Susanna and her mother, Jean, share an unusually close, and somewhat dependent, relationship. Susanna's sister, Angela, has a young son, a troubled past and a distrust of her mother. Each of the characters seems to have developed their own particular niche within the family structure, and no one seems to question the particular slot they or the others around them occupy. The perspective is always changing so that you see the development of various characters through their own eyes and through the eyes of others.

As a whole, the plot crept up on me. Even while reading, I thought it was a slow novel which was more dependent on exploring the characters and their relationships, until I realised I'd stayed up late one night to read most of it and couldn't stop until I'd finished the whole thing. I wanted to know what the truth was that the characters would find out about themselves, and how they would deal with telling their truth to the family, and handling the truth from other family members. It's probably hinted here that there are plenty of plot lines that aren't very nice. Sebastien battles with his sexuality; Angela's son, Finn, suffers child abuse; there is a death, an accident and relationships built on a false foundation.

Kate Veitch is obviously talented. The ability to drive the plot through the interaction between the characters was surprising and something that is difficult to do. There are plenty of books out there that try to explore universal themes or truths but it's rare to have this kind of success. My perception of the characters changed entirely by the end and I get the distinct impression that this was exactly what the author had intended.

Overall, the pace is faster than you would expect, and the multitude of plot lines means that Veitch could easily have divided this into several entirely separate novels. Great to see another book from a talented Australian author, and I can't wait to read her next one.

✦ Louise Crossman majored in Australian studies at the ANU and works in the public sector.

