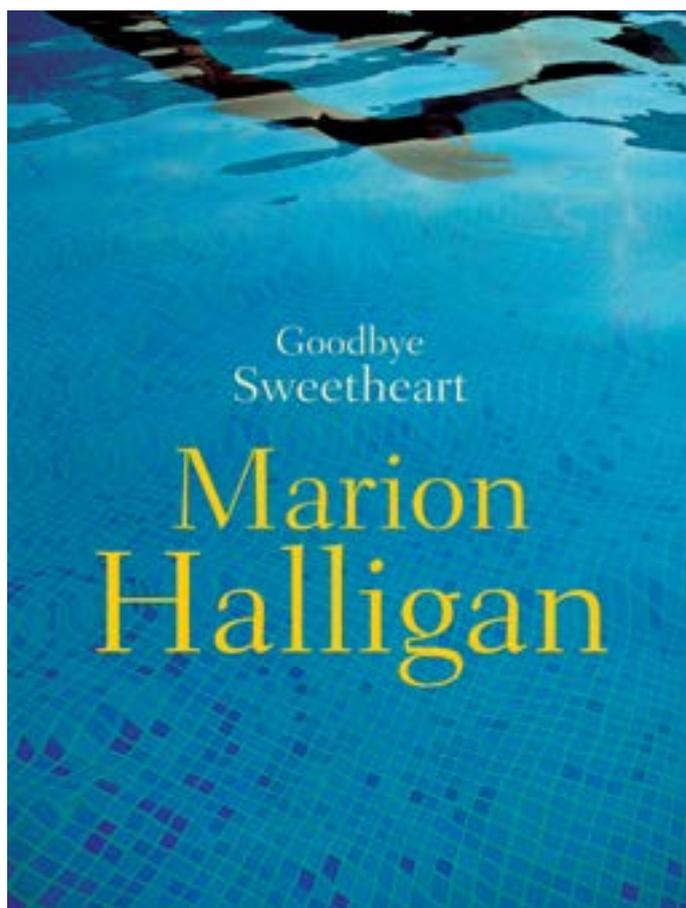


ALLEN&UNWIN



READING  
GROUP NOTES

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## About the book

A successful lawyer, bon vivant, loving husband and father, has a heart attack and dies while swimming in the local pool. A man apparently happily married, yet, with two divorces behind him and three puzzled children. In death it seems that he is not the person everyone thought.

As his extended family gathers to mourn, secrets and lies unfold uncomfortably around them. Those pornographic images on his laptop? An unexpected lover - is he still philandering? But somewhere in the turmoil of mourning each of them has to find an answer to the question - who was this man really? What mysteries has he taken to the grave with him?

From the author of *Valley of Grace* comes a powerful novel of love, the desire for understanding, and the inevitable messiness of life.

## About the author

Marion Halligan is one of Australia's most important writers, with a long list of literary prizes to her credit. She has been short-listed for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Miles Franklin Literary Award, and has been awarded the Age Book of the Year, the ACT Book of the Year (three times), the Nita B. Kibble Award, the Steele Rudd Award, the Braille Book of the Year, the 3M Talking Book of the Year and the Geraldine Pascall Prize for critical writing. She lives in Canberra and has an AM for services to literature.

## For discussion

- ☞ The book starts 'This story begins by water', and water is a central motif throughout the book. Grief is represented as waves dumping Lynette so that she can't get back on her feet. Helen describes rage as a tidal wave that sweeps through her. Nerys' house is washing into the sea. Barbara's daughter has drowned. Discuss the references to water throughout the book. What do you think water symbolises in the story?
- ☞ "Love asks all, and demands that all be forgiven." (pp26) Consider this observation by Lynette. In what ways does this affect the relationships between the characters in *Goodbye Sweetheart*?
- ☞ Each character has a chapter in the book that recaps their life up to this point. In this way, the book is like a series of short stories. In explaining her style of writing *Goodbye Sweetheart* in this manner, Marion has said "I rather like that way of looking at things because it seems to me that there's a quite serious truth in it, that when you have a bunch of characters, each one of them is the sort of hero of their own life, and they're bit players in other people's lives." How did switching between different points of view change your opinion of each character?

- ☞ “Do you ever regret . . . said Bill. Do you ever have regrets, I suppose I mean. No, I don’t regret, said Jack, I don’t think things are for regretting. How can that help? You do what you think is the right thing at the time and you have to stick with that.” (pp39) Do you think any of the characters are left with regrets at the end of the book?
- ☞ “Greed, ambition; are they the same thing?” (pp 39) Discuss this question by Jack. Do you agree?
- ☞ On page 71, Pepita refers to marriage as a trap. How do you think the four women who loved William would react to this statement?
- ☞ There are no quotation marks to denote speech throughout the book. Why do you think the author made the decision to write the story like this? Did this style of writing appeal to you?
- ☞ Consider Lynette’s character at the beginning and end of the book. What has changed for her? What has stayed the same? What do you think she will do next?
- ☞ “The sin of Casaubon was envy. I know despair is supposed to be the most terrible sin of all, and it is bad, but it doesn’t hurt others, except as they love you. Which is an occupational hazard of living. But envy, resentment of the happiness or good of others, so that you desire to do things to harm them, that is very bad. Other sins—lust, sloth, gluttony, even covetousness—are benign in comparison. Ah yes, wrath. There you are, a good honest sin. And often, I should think, appropriate, even necessary. I have been wrathful and most righteously so on occasions. But envy, no. A mean and withering and poisonous sin. Self-poisoning. To be feared, worst of all, then.” (pp72) Do you agree with Pepita?
- ☞ In what ways does William’s death challenge, but ultimately strengthen the relationships between the characters in the book?
- ☞ “Farewell, thought Ferdie, moved by Jack’s choice of words. He is a good man, he thought. Could you have said that of William? He wasn’t a bad man. He was charming, witty, good company, but he wasn’t a good man. Would I want that for my epitaph?” (pp 243) How does your opinion of William change throughout the book, as you see him through each character’s eyes? What do you think would have been a fitting epitaph for him?

## Other books by the author

*Shooting the Fox*

*Valley of Grace*

*The Apricot Colonel*

*Murder on the Apricot Coast*

*The Taste of Memory*

*The Point*

*The Fog Garden*  
*The Golden Dress*  
*Cockles of the Heart*  
*Wishbone*  
*The Worry Box*  
*Lovers' Knots*  
*Eat My Words*  
*Spider Cup*  
*The Hanged Man in the Garden*  
*The Living Hothouse*  
*Self Possession*  
*The Midwife's Daughters* (for children)  
*Out of the Picture*  
*Collected Stories*  
*Those Women Who Go to Hotels* (with Lucy Frost)

## Suggested further reading

*The Wonder Lover* – Malcolm Knox (to be published May 2015)  
*The Secrets in Silence* – Nicole Trope  
*The Eye of the Sheep* – Sofie Laguna  
*Mothers and Daughters* – Kylie Ladd  
*This Picture of You* – Sarah Hopkins