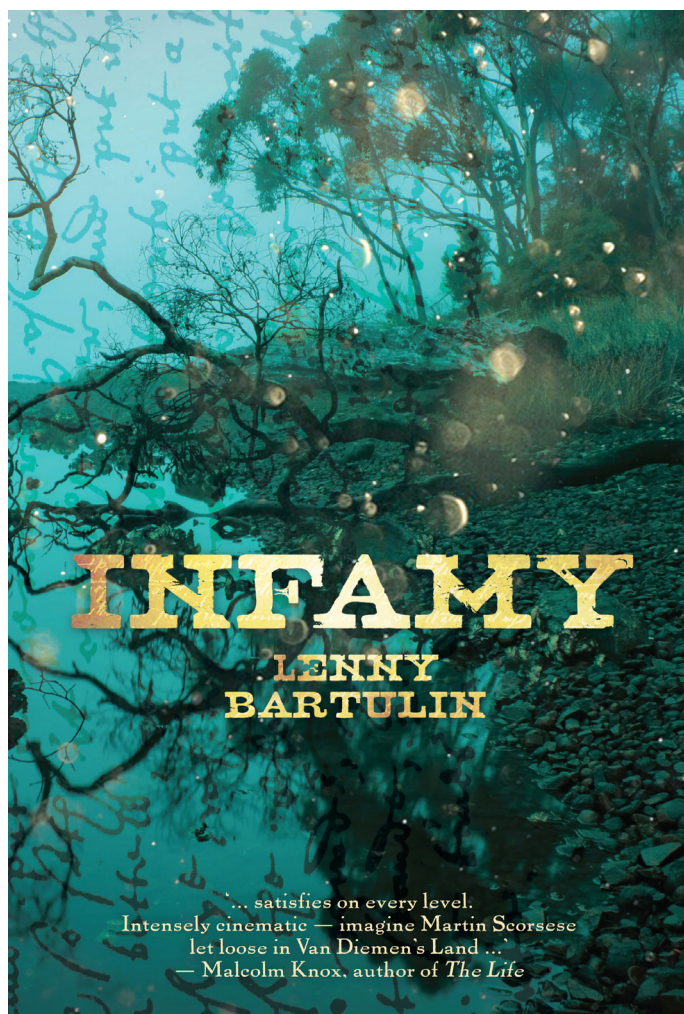


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

Contents: About the book (2) About the author (2)
The author on writing (2) Reviews and quotes (2)
Suggested points for discussion (3) Further reading and viewing (4)

About the book

REWARD: Twenty gallons of Rum for the Delivery into My Custody of one Colonel George Bloody Arthur. The Reprobate's Offences include Fraudulently Impersonating a Lieutenant Governor. For I Am the TRUE George!

William Burr, the son of an English settler in South America, had a steady job hunting mahogany pirates in British Honduras. One day, injured and recovering after a jungle skirmish, he receives a letter from John McQuillan, his old friend and now Chief Police Magistrate in Hobart Town, with the offer of a reward for the capture of a notorious outlaw: and so Burr sets sail for the Antipodes, though with little idea of what to expect. He arrives in Van Diemen's Land, the most isolated and feared penal colony of the British Empire, in 1830 to find a world of corruption, brutality and mystical beauty. Following the trail of Brown George Coyne, the charismatic outlaw leader of a band of escaped convicts, Burr is soon rushing headlong through the surreal, mesmerising Vandemonian wilderness, where he will discover not only the violent truth of British settlement, but also the love of a woman, and the friendship of an Aboriginal tracker, himself an outcast on an island of outcasts.

A brilliant and beguiling Australian Western by a writer of astonishing talent. Visceral, phantasmagoric, explosive and exhilarating - you have never read anything like it.

About the author

Lenny Bartulin is the author of the *Jack Susko* trilogy and a published poet. Born and bred in Hobart, he is currently living in the Blue Mountains.

The author, Lenny Bartulin, on writing *Infamy*

'The first time the idea came to me was while I was researching a story that I'd planned to set in the present; but once I'd begun, I had a strong sense that without a prologue of Tasmanian history, it was going to be difficult for me to make the novel what I wanted it to be. So I started looking into the past and that took over very quickly. And I was kind of pissed off that a lot of stuff I'd discovered about the history had been completely absent throughout my education in Tasmania through the 70's and 80's.

Writing the book took about three years in total, from idea to manuscript. It involved returning to Tasmania for a year after some time away, travelling to the west coast and midlands, the usual historical research and about two years worth of reading.'

Reviews & Quotes

'Lenny Bartulin sets the scene for a rollicking, dark tale set in the bloody midst of Tasmania's colonial past ... *Infamy* will no doubt face comparison to other epic Australian historical novels in similar settings. It will acquit itself very well.' - Tim Coronel, *Books & Publishing*

'Written by a Tasmanian author, *Infamy* is brilliant. It's intriguing, fast-paced, historical and uncensored, with just enough romance to satisfy ...' - *The Launceston Examiner*

For discussion

- ☞ *Infamy* is set at a time of intense cultural conflict and violence between the colonial and native inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land. Consider the character of William Burr and his position as an outsider brought in to this conflict. Where do you think his sympathies lie and in what ways does he challenge these turbulent relations?
- ☞ Lieutenant Governor George Arthur appears in the novel as a man both cruel and considerate. How do you see him? What do you make of his attitude and policies towards the indigenous population of Van Diemen's Land?
- ☞ How much of a role do you think the Vandemonian landscape plays in the novel? Is it a character in its own right?
- ☞ Consider the vision of Brown George Coyne. Do you think that he is truly mad? Or is he a product of his environment, i.e. the convict system and transportation, and subsequently the island of Van Diemen's Land itself?
- ☞ 'And he cursed this land, that would not open up to him, that wasn't his land and he not of it, and so its secrets remained hidden' (p. 78). Discuss the impact of the landscape of Van Diemen's Land to Robert Ringa's sense of identity. What assumptions are made by the authorities about his relationship with the landscape? And what implications does his role as a tracker have in shaping his relations with the natives of Van Diemen's Land?
- ☞ Consider the role of wealth and gold as a primary motivator for the characters of *Infamy*. In what ways does it control, corrupt and shift allegiances? Particularly consider its significance in the final destruction of the dream of 'Alluvium'.
- ☞ Discuss the cultural and communication barriers in the developing relationship between Ellen Vaughan and Robert Ringa. How are the characters initial assumptions challenged and ultimately, how is their developing relationship integral to their survival?
- ☞ Despite brown George Coyne's vision for a new civilization, discuss the similarities between his vision and the current state of colonial governance in Van Diemen's Land. Consider his visions of wealth, treatment of the natives, use of violence and hierarchy of power.
- ☞ Discuss the significance of the final burial ritual of the young native girl by Robert Ringa and Black Betty (pp. 319 – 320). In what ways have all three indigenous characters suffered at the hands of the invading white colonials and how does this sense of ritual, culture and identity help them begin to heal these wounds?

- ☞ Discuss the ways in which *Infamy* may have challenged your own understanding of the genocide of the native Indigenous inhabitants of Tasmania. How are these events translated into fiction and what impact do they have upon the reader?
- ☞ *Infamy* is described as an 'Australian Western'. In what ways do you think this is true? What elements does it share with the genre? How does it differ?

Suggested further reading

Lost Voices by Christopher Koch
The Roving Party by Rohan Wilson
The Sisters Brothers by Patrick De Witt
Robbery Under Arms by Rolf Boldrewood
Blood Meridian by Cormac McCarthy
Wanting by Richard Flanagan

Suggested further viewing

Dead Man (1995)
Van Diemen's Land (2009)
The Hunter (2011)
The Proposition (2005)