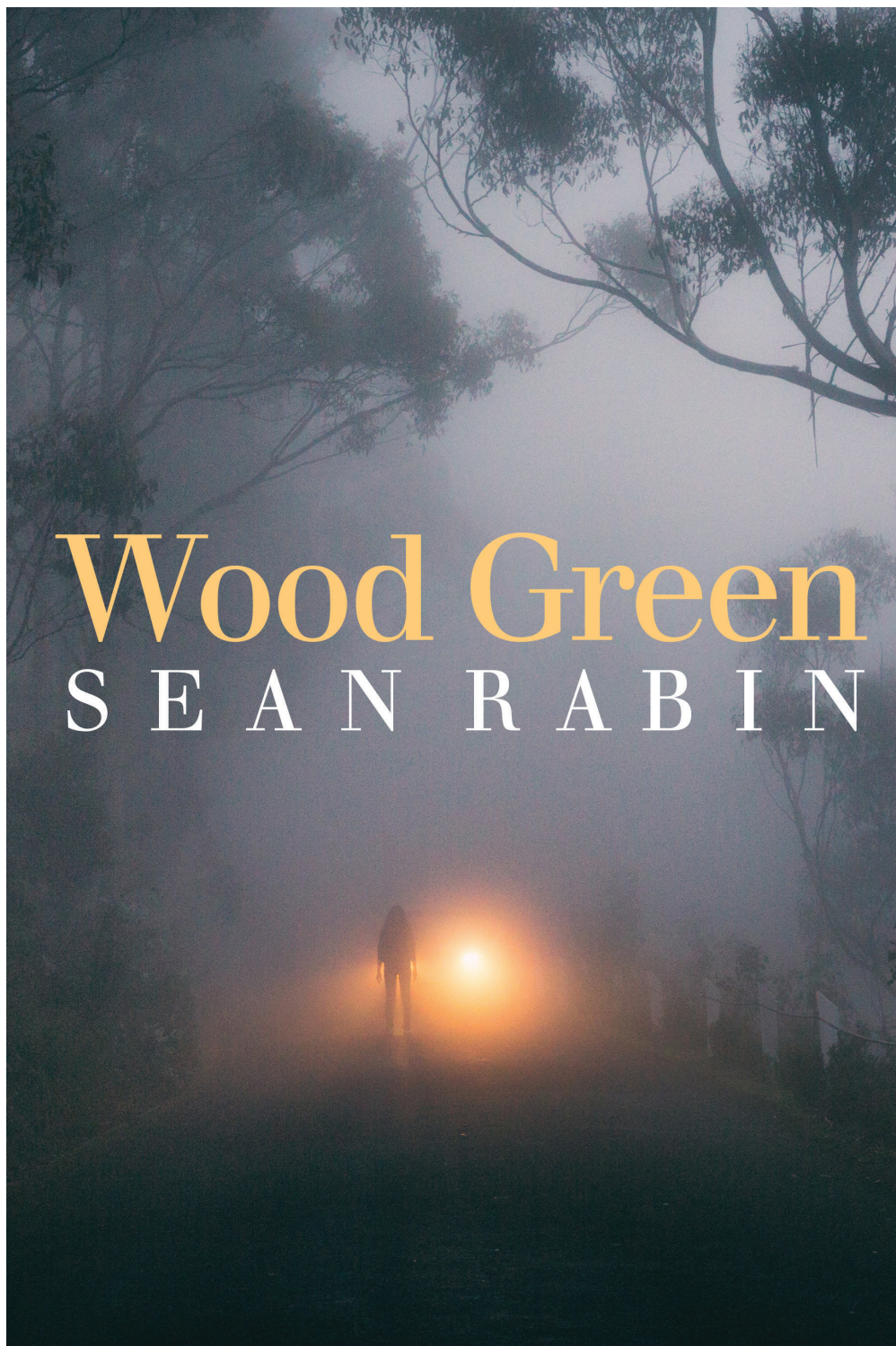


Reading Group Notes



Reading Group Notes *Wood Green*, Sean Rabin

About the Book

Michael, an aspiring writer who has recently finished his PhD, takes a job as the secretary to his literary hero, Lucian Clarke, a reclusive novelist with a mysterious cosmopolitan past, who lives in a cottage in a village on a mountain outside Hobart which gives the book its title, *Wood Green*. Peopled by an ensemble cast, the local publican, the single mother who manages the pub's kitchen, the unhappily married couple that runs the corner store, a newcomer from Johannesburg with a murky past, a snivelling B&B proprietor and a determined ex-girlfriend, *Wood Green* artfully evokes the claustrophobia of small-town life. While Michael believes he is making a new life for himself, Lucian has other plans. Rabin writes with wit and intelligence – and deftly executes unsuspected plot twists – in his exploration of the perils of literary ambition and the elusive prospect of artistic legacy.



About the Author

Born in Hobart, Tasmania, Sean Rabin has worked as a cook, script reader, copy-editor, freelance journalist and librarian. He has lived in Ireland, Italy, London and New York, and now resides in Sydney, Australia. He has written about music for *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. His short stories have been published locally (*Best Australian Stories 2012* and *Wet Ink*) and in the United States (*Permafrost*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Eyeshot*, *Toad Suck Review* and *The Worcester Review*).



Reading Group Notes

Wood Green, Sean Rabin

Sean Rabin on writing Wood Green

Wood Green is a love letter – to Tasmania, to music, to books, and most of all to writing.

At the heart of the novel exists a question – What is the cost of becoming an author?

These days aspiring writers are willing to pay thousands of dollars to complete university degrees, attend private writing academies, participate in online short story courses, or invest in manuscript assessment services. But what if the cost of becoming an artist is something completely disconnected from money?

Wood Green is the story of two writers. Lucian Clarke, the author of four highly idiosyncratic novels, has hired Michael Pollard to help organise his papers and research his past. While Michael, an English literature academic, has willingly abandoned his Sydney life for the opportunity to work beside Lucian and hoping that being in the presence of genius will benefit his own writing. As a power struggle emerges between the two men, both are confronted with the real price they must pay for wanting to write.

Wood Green is also about Tasmania. I was born in Hobart, then moved to Western Sydney at the age of nine. Though Sydney became my home, I remain fundamentally connected to Tasmania and recognise the degree to which it has informed my imagination.

So when it came time to write the story of Lucian and Michael I decided to set it in Tasmania. *Wood Green* is a fictional town on the side of Mount Wellington, overlooking Hobart. It's a small community, with only a pub and a general store, but to the people living amongst its ancient trees and occasional snowfalls it feels like a world of its own.

Choosing to set *Wood Green* in Hobart also gave me the opportunity to depict Tasmania in a contemporary context. Rather than focus on its brutal colonial history or gothic undercurrent, I sought to depict Australia's southern-most city with a little more humour, and show it to be a modern capital populated with writers, shop owners, publicans, taxi drivers, B&B proprietors and cooks, all willing to pay the necessary price to fulfil their dreams.

Wood Green is a story about ambitions and how far people are willing to go to achieve them. It is an examination of writing and our current ideas of literature. It's a cheer for diversity in books and music. An ode to risk. To failure. To trying again. And a plea for understanding that being true to your artist vision is the only genuine measure of success.



Reading Group Notes

Wood Green, Sean Rabin

Discussion Questions

1. What effect does the small-town setting have on the book? How does Wood Green figure in your imagination?
2. How does the characterisation of Lucian fit with your ideas about what great writers are like? Does his lifestyle and behaviour seem typical or atypical for a contemporary author?
3. What role does humour play in the book? How do satire, parody and dramatic irony affect the tone of the novel?
4. How does Rachel's arrival shift the course of the novel? What does her presence signal to the reader and what does it reveal about Michael and his past?
5. One of the hallmarks of the book is its use of free indirect style. This gives the reader access to multiple characters' points of view within the one scene. How does this technique play into your understanding of the different characters? For example, Maureen and Andrew.
6. The book features a few uneneven relationships – such as between Carl and Paul, Andrew and Michael, Tim and Maureen. How do the different representations of their relationships play out? What effect does the ensemble cast have on the pacing and structure of the novel?
8. What do you think will happen between Maureen and Lucian? Should he tell her about the change that he has undergone?
9. What does the novel have to say, finally, about the individuality of the writer?
10. How important is it for a writer to establish a legacy? Is receiving a positive but short-lived reception better than relative obscurity followed by extensive posthumous success? Do you think that contemporary reviews and critical reception should have an influence on a writer's practise?