

It's getting to that time of the year. The early cicadas are beginning to chirp, doonas are being folded and put at the back of cupboards for another six months and the sun is rising earlier and setting later. Bliss.

With the holiday season nigh and given our collective love of reading, I thought I'd point you in the direction of some good books to help you relax and enjoy the break.

Australian author Hannah Kent burst onto the literary scene in 2013 with her first book, *Burial Rites*. Winning a swag of awards, it has been lauded by both readers and critics. Her second book seems destined for the same rapturous reception. *The Good People*, like its predecessor, has been meticulously researched. Set in rural Ireland in the 19th century, the novel is about Nóra Leahy, who is struck by tragedy with the loss of both her daughter and husband within a year. Now she is responsible for her four-year-old grandson, Micheál, who cannot walk or speak. She hides him from her community but, unable to cope, she enlists the help of a 14-year-old servant, Mary, who soon hears talk about a creature that may be the cause of the tragedies that have befallen Nóra and her family. If you enjoyed *Burial Rites*, I don't think you'll be disappointed with this new tale.

Another author who has notched up a number of bestsellers is Emma Donoghue. Her 2010 novel *Room* was a disturbing but compelling read, and her new book, *The Wonder*, also reveals the darker side of human behaviour. The story focuses on a child who is determined to fast and has successfully done so for four months. She is proclaimed a wonder for her ability to maintain the fast, and her devout parents have put their faith in God to protect her. This fascinating novel would be a great conversation starter for a book club too.


Short stories don't generally meet with great success – unless you're Nobel Prize-winner Alice Munro. I have often wondered why they aren't more popular. Great short story writers can quickly draw you into the worlds they create and give you a quick and satisfying reading fix. I'd recommend delving back into the short stories of Roald Dahl (particularly *Kiss Kiss*), and also Michel Faber's *The Fahrenheit Twins*. I think you'll find them really rewarding holiday reading.

A new Ian McEwan story is always cause for celebration, and his new book, *Nutshell*, is one out of the box. It may be unlike any book you've ever read. The title makes sense when you realise the story is about a foetus that narrates the story from inside the womb. But it's also a thriller, so put those two facts together and that should be enough to tempt you to read it.

The last quarter of the year in publishing is always packed with staple authors: a new Tim Winton, *The Boy Behind the Curtain*; Michael Connelly's 19th book in the 'Harry Bosch' series, *The Wrong Side of Goodbye*; and Ian Rankin, not to be outdone, is publishing his 21st book in the 'John Rebus' series, *Rather Be the Devil*. If you're a hardcore fan of the 'Outlander' series then Diana Gabaldon's prequel short story to the series, called 'Virgins', will be on your must-read list.

Biographies are typically published for the Christmas holidays. If you're a fan of music or sport, you'll enjoy cricketer Michael Clarke's *My Story*, Jimmy Barnes's *Working Class Boy* or Bruce Springsteen's *Born to Run*.

If you enjoy non-fiction you might like *The Hidden Life of Trees*. It's a quirky read in which the author, a forester, passionately and convincingly argues that trees are social organisms. And with *Van Gogh's Ear: The true story*, author Bernadette Murphy has taken a different tack on researching van Gogh's life up to the point where he cut off part of his ear and his suicide. She builds a picture of his world through the people he knew, putting together the parts of his life in the French city of Arles from a different perspective from that used by other biographers.

So for your days spent at leisure over Christmas, put up your feet, pick up a book, and let's all enjoy getting lost in the world of words. I'd love to know what you've been reading and what you think of what you have read. Drop me a line at incite@alia.org.au 



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Fiona Murphy & Donna Wileman	25
Terri Pamment	34
Paula Pfoeffler & Mark Norman	32
Catherine Ryan	26
Megan Smith	21
Gemma Steele	28