



The Sound of One Hand Clapping

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The Australian Booksellers' Association Book of the Year begins in 1954, in Tasmania where Bojan Buloh brings his family to start a new life away from Slovenia's privations of war and refugee settlements. Bojan's wife abandons him to care for their three-year-old daughter Sonja alone. Sonja returns to Tasmania 35 years later, and to a father haunted by memories of the war and other recent horrors.

The Sound of One Hand Clapping Details

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From Reader Review The Sound of One Hand Clapping for online ebook

notgettingenough says

Is the sound of one hand clapping like the sound of free speech in a vacuum?

I don't know if I will ever read Flanagan. Too many people I know think his work is weak beyond belief. But I note today his defence of diversity and free speech in the marketplace (sic) of the 'writers festival'

[https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2...](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/sep/03/alan-flanagan-writer-festival)

Understand there is no free speech in writers festival, only what the organisers/sponsors/audience want you to hear. I've never really understood why people want to listen to writers talking, but if they aren't even allowed to say what they want, it gets so much worse.

Chrissie says

This author's manner of writing doesn't fit me. I tried to read Death of a River Guide several years ago and gave up. I don't quit books very often! I found that one confusing and disjointed. There is such praise given to this author. I felt my dislike had to be a misjudgment on my part, so I decided to try another book, this one: The Sound of One Hand Clapping. My view remains the same. At least this time I finished the book!

I will try to be very specific about what in the writing disturbs me. The words chosen are too dramatic, meant to excite, too excessive, too exaggerated, too over-powering. I feel more can be said through subtle wording, through small events. Quietly. When you write in a more subdued manner a reader can reach insights without them being bashed in the face. Not only the words but also events are put there to increase excitement. I will cite just one example: when Bojan (view spoiler).

Bojan, Maria (his wife who shortly dies) and their daughter (Sonja) are the main protagonists. Bojan and Maria have Slovenian roots. They came to Tasmania to build a future after experiencing the horrors of WW2. Their parents had worked for partisans against the Germans. The past is best described as a dark shadow that hangs over the two. Bojan is one of the many refugees employed to build the hydroelectric dam at Butler's Gorge. The Butler's Gorge Power Station exists: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butlers....](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butlers_Gorge_Power_Station) Such dams were to bring electricity, industrialization and progress to Australia. Dam construction jobs were despised by Aussies themselves. The central focus, although there is some historical content, is primarily about the complex relationship between father and daughter. It is a book about physical abuse, abandonment and screwed up family relationships. It is about communication, or more aptly lack of it. It is about how past events shape the future. Are you shaped by your past or your dreams? Half-way through I discovered I needed to understand why each was behaving as they did.

This leads to my next complaint. Sonja I came to understand. Bojan too, but Maria's behavior is not covered with adequate depth. Way too many questions remain about her actions. What happens to her is clear, but you do not get into her head to understand her thoughts. The events are dramatically told, but the psychological underpinnings are weak. Her behavior is an essential part of the story; her actions immensely influence both her husband and daughter. I find this a huge weakness of the book.

I named above that the writing is disjointed. Its construction is too. I cannot think of another book that has such short chapters! Tons of short chapters. They disrupt the flow. With 86 chapters and a length of 10 hours and 40 minutes that yields an average of only about 7 minutes per chapter, many are only 3 or 4 minutes! Each chapter begins with a date. This I liked. The story flips back and forth from the present in 1990 to past events which are related in chronological order. The story begins in 1954, when Sonja is 3 years old and when her mother walks off into a blizzard. Many chapters could have been put together, for example those about 1954 until the story flips to 1989-1990. Honestly, reading this was like incessantly being interrupted by a hiccup.

The ending isn't believable and too (view spoiler).

Some of the writing is beautiful. Landscapes, views. The skies, the forest, the beauty and utility of wood. A few events are quite touchingly told. I particularly liked when I saw the tenderness of Bojan, not just his dark side. I liked that untranslated Slovenian lullabies are sung. They create a feel, conjure an atmosphere. Remember I did give this book 2 stars, and by that I mean it was OK. It just has too many things that bothered me to give it more. I will not be reading more by this author. Writing style is important for me and his simply doesn't match up with what I am looking for.

The narrator of this audiobook is Humphrey Bower. I have not been pleased with all of his narrations but here it was fantastic. Superb. He does dramatize events, but he is only reflecting the author's words. You should hear his intonation for Dean Martin. I couldn't help but smile. The Australian dialect is well done, not hard to follow for those of us who are not Australian.

Kim says

This is a powerful and intensely sad novel, which deals with loss, alienation and the power of human beings to inflict pain on those they love most. The title comes from a Zen koan - a philosophical riddle - formulated by the Japanese Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku, who asked "You know the sound of two hands clapping; tell me, what is the sound of one hand?" As I understand it, the student of Zen is supposed to meditate on this riddle until insight or enlightenment occurs. The point is that there is no correct answer. The answer students come to depends on who they are, what they know and what they believe.

To me, the connection between the title and the narrative is that the reactions of the characters to the events that occur in their lives are formed by intricate web of history, geography, personality and circumstance. There are no easy answers to life's questions, neither for the characters, nor for the readers who come to know them.

The novel is set in Tasmania in the post-World War II migrant community. It focuses on the relationship between Slovenian migrants Sonja Baloch and her father Bojan. The narrative goes back and forward in time from a snowy night in 1954 when Sonja's mother Maria leaves her husband and child and walks away from the dam construction camp in which they live, to 1989 when Sonja returns to Tasmania after a 22 year absence, with events taking place in various periods in between.

Although I was immediately taken with Flanagan's writing and the structure of the novel, it took me longer to engage with the characters, as Sonja and her father are deeply damaged and not very likeable. However,

the more I listened to the work, the more it packed an emotional punch. It portrays the devastation of family trauma set against a background of displacement and alienation. It's also a snapshot of recent Australian history, that of post-WWII European migration seen from the perspective of the migrants rather than from the society into which they entered.

This is not a book to read when you're feeling down, particularly if you've had a seriously dysfunctional relationship with your father. On the other hand, it ends on a note of hope and renewal, so it's not all doom and gloom, even if there is little light and even less humour in Sonja and Bojan's story.

The audiobook version is narrated by the truly excellent Humphrey Bower, whose voices for the characters are perfect. Well, except possibly for Sonja's voice. But younger female voices are always difficult for male narrators and at least Bower doesn't go all falsetto.

Melaslithos says

This is the second book I've read from Richard Flanagan. I have to thank the World's Literature for the discovery.

The first book I read from this author for our tour down under was *Death of a River Guide*. In a certain way, I feel that both books are kind of the same, but with *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* being better. After all, it was written after the first one, so the author had time to better himself.

Both books are about poor families trying to survive in Tasmania, with jumps through times. Both are fantastically well written, with a beautiful style and powerful images. But where I was annoyed with *Death of a River Guide* because it felt too me too stilted and not natural enough, as if it was an exercise in style for the author and not really a story from the heart, I found it was not (or less) the case for *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*. The story flowed much better for me, even though sometime I couldn't help myself from wondering if Flanagan was writing for him and the readers or for critics.

Anyway, this book having rubbed out most of what was bothering me in the first one (or maybe am I getting more used to Flanagan's style?), I enjoyed it much more.

I liked the echoes between the past and present of the Bulohs tale, and the echoes between the two periods, advancing in parallel, how we can really see how the past shaped the present as it is unfolding. Sonja and Bojan are both poignant characters, at times loathable, at times pitiful, but yet so human. We can clearly see how life was hard for migrants in Tasmania at that time. But even though the book can be really hard at times, I loved how it ended on a touch of hope (even though a birth being both a redemption and a start for a new life is a bit cliché), how it finishes on a ray of light for Sonja and Bojan.

If his next book, *Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish* improved as much as this one, I will be looking forward to reading it!

Vicki says

This book came with rave reviews but I have struggled with other Richard Flanagan books. The slow start had me thinking this would be another tortured read. I can't define the point which it took off but before long I couldn't put it down. I now understand why this book is considered an Australian classic.

Ravi Gangwani says

Thus, it is decided now that this Book wins the most painfully depressing and heartbreakingly frustratingly traumatizing sad book of 2016.

Though it is written beautifully still I hated to read it. **I do not recommend** to all. It was so depressing that even while reading suicidal thoughts wrapped me in its gust. Thanks to Sir Salman Rushdie, I picked his books and read 20-30 pages in between to switch me into neutral gear.

The story was pretty simple between a troubled relation of a father and daughter and traumatic childhood. Around two decades of breach in their relation, reunion and past nostalgia and following trauma. But the book holds the nerves of reader the way Richard Flanagan inject emotions in the pages.

Giving this book a benefit of doubt that Sir Flanagan wrote this work as one of his initial, I must say some early traces of 'The Narrow Road To the Deep North' were very visible.

Still from next time I will be careful to pick such books.

The next Flanagan book that I will read now is : 'The Gold's Book of Fish' for sure.

Emma says

After reading *Gould's Book of Fish* I was eager to discover more of Richard Flanagan's work.

In this book I found the same creative, descriptive writing style as in *Gould's*. And despite there being instances where the writing style blends the past and present, magic and memories and borders on the surreal, the story itself comes through as clear and real as anything, without any of the eccentricities that made the plot of *Gould's* rather bizarre and confused at times.

The Sound of One Hand Clapping is a beautifully told, touching and often heartbreakingly story of a father and daughter, and a mother who packed a small suitcase one night and walked out into the snow.

It is also the tale of how refugees sought a free life in Australia, their challenges in living with a past of atrocities they could not forget witnessing and a new, different land they could not always understand.

I adored the description of how Sonja, the daughter, having seen lunch served at her neighbour's house, proudly makes her father baked beans on toast for dinner - an Aussie meal. Her father eats it politely "all the while inwardly cursing the infernal, comic backwardness of Australians and all the awful things they mistook for food" (p201).

I would highly recommend this book, just don't approach it as a light read, it is afterall a sad, and for some characters, an incredibly tragic story.

Velvetink says

I knew the title was a koan, but had to look it up.....

"What is the Sound of the Single Hand clapping? When you clap together both hands a sharp sound is heard; when you raise the one hand there is neither sound nor smell. Is this the High Heaven of which Confucius speaks? Or is it the essentials of what Yamamba describes in these words: "The echo of the completely empty valley bears tidings heard from the soundless sound?" This is something that can by no means be heard with the ear. If conceptions and discriminations are not mixed within it and it is quite apart from seeing, hearing, perceiving, and knowing, and if, while walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, you proceed straightforwardly without interruption in the study of this koan, you will suddenly pluck out the karmic root of birth and death and break down the cave of ignorance. Thus you will attain to a peace in which the phoenix has left the golden net and the crane has been set free of the basket. At this time the basis of mind, consciousness, and emotion is suddenly shattered; the realm of illusion with its endless sinking in the cycle of birth and death is overturned." p.164, Yabukoji, in The Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings, Translated by Philip B. Yampolsky,

In the winter of 1954, in a remote Tasmanian hydroelectric construction camp of migrant workers, Sonja Buloh's mother walks out of their hut, leaving her three year old daughter alone. Her distraught father Bojan perseveres with the dream of a new life in a new country, but he is soon crushed into an alcoholic despair. By the time Sonja turns 16, she is driven to leave him. Nearly 20 years later, single and pregnant, she returns to Tasmania's highlands and her father, in an attempt to put the pieces of her life into some perspective. Initial awkwardness and pain notwithstanding, she slowly unravels her family's history, especially a secret she never knew about her vanished mother.

This is also about a hidden dark side of Australia's multiculturalism, of the struggle of migrants & refugees in a new unfamiliar land, in a time when there were no counsellors and people were expected to get on with living and not talk about their past. While Sonja and her family are from war torn Slovenia you don't find too many facts about it here and although Bojan does talk about it briefly, it's more their emotional limbo & pain you become immersed in as you read, & not so much the particulars of their past horrors. Personally would have liked more background about their life in Slovenia, but it isn't that kind of story - it's not a history in that sense. Flanagan manages to get inside Sonja's head so well you begin to think the writer might be a woman. On the other hand sometimes I felt Bojan's character a little typecast and undeveloped until the end of the book where he begins to blossom and find hope and redemption. Perhaps that was Flanagan's way to show him speechless & lost in a new land.

While not all migrants suffered like Bojan's family when they arrived in Australia, from what I know the hydroelectric construction camp in Tasmania was remote and conditions would have been hard & bleak. As a child I visited the Snowy River Scheme in NSW with my parents, my father thinking of working there. My mother took one look at the camps and refused point blank. Not everyone would have had that option. The Snowy River Scheme took 25 years to build and was completed in 1974. More than 100,000 people from over 30 countries came to work in the mountains. It makes you think what were their stories and were they redeemed like Bojan?

About to re-read this again (2010), I was distracted the first time around (2000).

This is also a film, has anyone seen it?

Halfway through.

So far.... Infinitely sad, infinitely brutal, infinitely beautiful.

M?d? says

Recenzie : <http://cititoriferoce.weebly.com/blog...>

Beata says

A strange book, don't think I'll recommend it to my friends...

Donna says

I loved the cover. I loved the title. Both created expectations but ultimately, I was left feeling disappointed. This wasn't awful. It just wasn't what I like in a book. The story had a fair amount of family dysfunction but I needed a glimmer of something good or of something good to come and I was left unsatisfied there. This was violent and ugly. The characters were so damaged and prickly.

The story line also shifted to different times in the lives of the MCs and that is not my favorite writing style. I kept asking myself, "Why?". It wasn't until the end that the answer to that question came. I get the reasoning behind all the shifting, I just didn't care for it. I also had one major question about the reveal and I still have it, which compounded my disappointment. So 2 stars. If it had answered my question, I could have gone with 3.

LindaJ^ says

3.5 starts rounded to 3.0 stars.

This was the sad but hopeful story of an immigrant family to Australia post-WWII. The Buloh family were from Slovenia. Father Bojan was a teenage partisan during WWII and saw many individuals killed by the SS and others, some grotesquely. Mother Maria was equally, if not more, traumatized. Daughter Sonja was born after the war and was 3 years old when the family immigrated to Australia, specifically to Tasmania. There were many immigrants to Australia post WWII. Australia needed workers. Both Maria and Bojan were deeply damaged. Maria deserts the family one night and disappears into the snow, leaving Sonja and Bojan. Initially Bojan pays two other families to let Sonja stay with them. But when she is about 8 years old, Bojan takes over raising her. In the late 1960's Sonja finally leaves and does not return for 22 years. Bojan was not a model parent. He drank to forget and often turned violent. After Sonja returns, she and Bojan manage eventually come to understand.

The story moves between 3 time periods - the 1950's, the 1960's, and 1989 into the 1990's. Over the course of the book, the reader learns the back story of Bojan and Maria and sees Sonja recover childhood memories that were long buried. There is also a look at Australia and how it changed.

I found the Buloh family's story well-told. What I did not connect with were what seemed to me to be an attempt to merge the family story with what was happening in Australia. This book appears to be the second that Flanagan wrote and it read like an early writing. I enjoyed it but no where near as much as The Narrow Road to the Deep North.

Dana says

"S? ba?i din palme cu o singur? mân?" este un amestec de agonie ?i momente sublime de fericire, construit pe baza rela?iei complicate dintre tat? ?i fiic?. Sonja penduleaz? între dorin?a de a-?i ierta ?i în?elege tat?l alcoolic, ?i încrederea naiv? c? mama ei s-ar putea întoarce, în ciuda abandon?rii sale la vârsta de doar trei ani. Regresia în trecut este o c?l?torie spre sine ce o ajut? s? în?eleag?, de exemplu, de ce nu poate s? men?in? o rela?ie adult? stabil?. Via?a Sonjei pe t?râmul îndep?rtat al Tasmaniei, un loc ce frâng? destinul imigran?ilor, care amor?e?te ?i anihileaz? orice speran??, porne?te ca un exod spre P?mântul f?g?duin?ei, când, în urma celui de-al doilea r?zboi mondial, tinerii s?i p?rin?i ajung aici în c?utarea unei lumi mai bune. Ceea ce nu ?tiau Maria ?i Bojan este c?, distan?area geografic? nu îi ajut? s? se îndep?rteze deloc de ororile tr?ite în Slovenia, ci, dimpotriv?, este doar un loc îndep?rtat în care tr?iesc înstr?ina?i de propriile sentimente. Hobart, colonia postbelic?, cu apartamentele sale concepute pentru venetici, este un spa?iu claustr?fob, menit s? între?in? nevoile de baz? ale existen?ei, dar orb la nevoile afective.

Citi?i aici recenzia complet?: <http://www.bookishstyle.ro/sa-bati-di...>

•Karen• says

Too long. Or maybe I just took too long to get into it, left it too long in between times. That is death to any book. And it is a painful story. Flanagan is stuck with a quandary: two broken protagonists, damaged by the past, unable to feel, unable to speak, unable to reach out to each other. How do you build a bridge between them and the reader? How do you show the horror and the cruelty and the violence? Flanagan uses a sweeping allegorical style, with the force and violence of nature matching the human tragedy, with metaphors of fragmentation, with dreams, with translating emotion into artifacts. But the abuse is relentless and repetitive. Redemption comes just a little too late and a little too predictably. Flanagan usually sings, but this one is off-key and over-written.

Cristina says

recomand...
