



## The Red Shoe

*Ursula Dubosarsky*

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## **The Red Shoe Ursula Dubosarsky**

Funny, tough-minded and tender, this is the story of Matilda and her two sisters growing up in Sydney, Australia, in the early 1950s. Their father is mentally unstable and largely absent, their mother is possibly in the thrall of his brother, and a headline-making Russian spy defection is taking place next door. Punctuated by the headlines of the times, *The Red Shoe* depicts how the large events of the world can impinge on ordinary lives. This is a novel to savor by one of Australia's most gifted writers for young people.

## **The Red Shoe Details**

Date : Published May 1st 2007 by Roaring Brook Press (first published January 1st 2006)

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Author : Ursula Dubosarsky

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## From Reader Review The Red Shoe for online ebook

### **Muphyn says**

I can't quite put my finger on what I disliked so much about this book. Probably a combination of a reader reading far too fast, nothing really happening until the end of CD 3 (almost the end of the book) and just being really, really boring. If this YA book is supposed to make young people read and get interested in Australian history, then I don't know...

It just seemed like a string of not very exciting, random events... "Today Mathilda's family went to the movies, the next day they went to the beach, then they had a picnic". I kept wondering what the point of the story was - obviously had to do with the father but even that didn't intrigue me in the slightest. And I can't say that I thought the characters were great too - the most interesting part in the story was about Mathilda's pet hotel but I can't even remember for what kind of pet! And I listened to the book yesterday!!

And if the newspaper articles that are interspersed in the story are meant to give you an idea of what was going on in Australia in the early 1950s, I'd rather read the articles only, without the pointless story around it.

I do hope that people don't take this to be the prime of Australian YA fiction because there is stuff out there that is sooo much better.

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### **Gemma Wiseman says**

The scattered debris of post war worlds is all here. The headlines of the day cut into the home lives. Disturbingly, perspectives of home mirror the crises on larger scales. This is not a novel based on a traditional, linear narrative sequence. It is like mini memoirs co-existing spiced with flashbacks; mainly the memoirs of children growing up in a world they barely understand. The effect is mesmerising; a sense of sadness grappling with the right to find some kind of happiness - with a little help from some red shoes that could be magical.

For my poetic review, see my blog [Songlines on the Winds](#)

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### **Ksboydie says**

A very subtle and interesting story about three girls and their dysfunctional family. It is set during the time of the Petrov affair, when communist spies were receiving a lot of media focus. The father is a war veteran and tries to hang himself. I really loved the character of Matilda; she is curious and imaginative. Although I enjoyed this book I don't know that it would appeal to students. As I said, it is very subtle.

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### **Ashleigh Mathes says**

I finished this book earlier today and I'm still not fully sure as of what it is actually about. It's a good piece of

writing, but I found it a struggle to lose myself in this book. And I still can't make sense of the plot. I really wanted to like it and it started out really good, but it left me feeling disappointed in the end.

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### **Sean Harding says**

Nicely written story of growing up in 1950's Sydney Australia, with headlines from the SMH interspersed within the story. The story is vividly created and she makes you feel involved in this world.

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### **Corinne Edwards says**

I'm having a hard time putting my finger on a plot in this book. The setting is Australia post World War II and throughout the text are actual news headlines and stories about the events of the time. The newspaper clippings interested me and was why I read the book in the first place. The sad thing is, and maybe it's because I'm not Australian, but they actually added very little to the story for me. They were interesting in their own right, but almost distracting from the story.

You get a sense that it was hard to live then: dads who are home from the war are exhibiting signs of post traumatic stress, polio is rampant, the Cold War is beginning and Russia is in the news all the time. Six year old Matilda and her family are...what. I don't know. Just living. Her older sister has had a nervous breakdown. Matilda thinks spies are living next door. You get the sense that the uncle has the hots for the mom. But nothing really ever happens.

The one thing I can say for this book, and the reason it gets three stars from me, is that it is well written, in the sense that the author has a good way with words. I liked the way she expressed the thought processes of a six year old and some phrases were incredibly image provoking.

This book just left me with a weird taste in my mouth, which is disappointing because it won a major award in Australia. I guess I just didn't get it.

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### **Rogue Wilson says**

Another wonderful coming of age story from Ursula Dubosarsky. A short novel at only 181 pages, she manages to delicately weave a tale that kept me on tender hooks from the first chapter...strangely the retelling of a grim Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale. A mesmerizing story told from the perspective of the three central characters - 15, 11 and 6 year old sisters. The intertwining of real clippings from the Sydney Morning Herald from April 1954 it worked well and the story came together perfectly in the final pages. She has to be one of my new favourite authors.

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### **Meghanly says**

Yuck. Good thing this was a short one that I read in about an hour and a half. The plot was hard to find, and the author didn't seem comfortable switching between the three daughter's perspectives and voices. A little

bit of intrigue when you realize the father tried for suicide - but that doesn't happen until page 125, and by then you are BORED. Do not waste your time on this one.

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### **Summer says**

Sometimes I feel like we in America are now so accustomed to a shiny, glossy, corporate edited McMansion of a novel with a tight plot and rip roaring action, that we can't appreciate anything unusual. We can't find the patience to sit with something entirely new that whispers instead of roars.

The Red Shoe is unusual, and I found it incredibly stirring. Yes, like other reviewers have said, definitely subtle, like an E.M. Forster novel. Forster was the master of subtlety. The Red Shoe reminds me quite a bit of Room with a View. Neither of them are fast food reads. They are gourmet meals with subtle flavor you have to immerse yourself in, chew on, taste and savor. The rewards are tremendous.

Similar to Forster's Room with a View, The Red Shoe addresses the disaster of living in denial, and not facing Truth. The book only appears not to have a plot simply because, I believe, plot is often defined so narrowly as a linear easy-to-understand fast-paced storyline that requires very little introspection or soul searching. In actuality, right from chapter one of The Red Shoe, we are learning about how each character has been impacted by a devastating secret, by a Truth that no one will face or speak aloud. The youngest sister, Matilda, is the least in denial. Her imaginary friend, Floreal, is a manifestation of Matilda's own inner voice, speaking Truths that she tries desperately to push away. How many of us have a Voice inside of us, almost like an imaginary friend, that persists in telling us many uncomfortable things about our own lives, friends, and families...things we'd rather not hear, because then we might have to change.

For me this book was entertaining because it was deeply, gorgeously, and thoughtfully written, and all the little stories of each sister's unique experience created a rich, intricate web of individual and family psychology. Also, and most importantly, The Red Shoe gave me a piece of wisdom, of truth, that will stay with me forever and change my life for the better. That's a great and rare gift, and worthy of five stars.

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### **MissStan says**

3 ½ stars. Well written but I'm not sure I enjoyed the themes. It just made me a bit sad.

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### **Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says**

Matilda's dad isn't functioning well since he has returned from the war, Matilda's mom is spending lots of time with an uncle, and what is going on next door? This little story, set in 1950's Australia, shares a time of anxiety, both personal and societal. Beautiful writing.

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### **Krista says**

The story is told through the alternating point of view of three sisters: Matilda (6), Frances (11) and Elizabeth (15). The events of a mysterious neighbor "who looks like a spy" (according to Matilda) are recounted alongside flashbacks and hardships dealing with their father, a veteran of World War II, who suffers from post-traumatic stress and often leaves his family for lengths of time. The girls, who often experience related feelings of isolation and misunderstanding, live in a rundown home on the far-rural edges of Sydney, Australia with their uncle, a piano player at a dilapidated hotel in the city, and mother who may be carrying on a secret affair.

Dubrosarsky's descriptions of the girls' surroundings, as well as her subtle details about each one of their personalities, creates very vivid images of each character. However, the characters as a whole seem to fall a bit short, never being fully realized, as only Matilda seems to go through the greatest changes from beginning to end.

Not knowing much about Australian history, though very familiar with the Cold War, I found this book to be a unique addition to the literature on this topic. Often, the cannon is filled with mostly Vietnam stories or stories about the tension between the U.S. and Russia. It's nice to get a new perspective. I think that Dubrosarsky retells this story in a whimsical manner that would appeal especially to younger readers (though there are some tougher moments that deal with polio and then later themes of death and suicide that might need to be discussed). Overall, it's a unique spin on this era in history.

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### **Grace says**

I didn't really enjoy this book. It was written well and the original newspaper clippings from the time the book was set between each chapter was interesting, but it was just quite boring. The pacing was also a little odd, especially at the end.

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### **Louise (A Strong Belief in Wicker) says**

I can't believe that it takes me so long to get to reading some authors. Ursula Dubosarsky is a great discovery, and I am looking forward to reading more of her books. The Red Shoe is a clever exploration of an Australian childhood in the 1950s- 3 sisters growing up on the edge of Sydney- a story to show how the large events of the world can impact on ordinary lives. Beautifully written.

<http://astrongbeliefinwicker.blogspot...>

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### **Kelli says**

I liked this book. I think the narration is really clever - you mostly see the story through the POV of the

youngest sister, Matilda, but the occasional glimpses of perspective from other characters was elegantly done. I thought it might be an 'each chapter the perspective changes' story, but the perspective changes were more clever than that and Matilda remained the focus.

I've read some reviews here criticising the book for not having a story or plot. I did not find this a problem. The thing is, the Petrov affair in Australia is an existing plot, and this novel does an excellent job of delivering its promise of showing how big events impact on ordinary lives. Having lived in Sydney I could picture the places that this family lived in and travelled to, so the sense of history was strong for me.

Some reviewers have questioned whether the themes in this novel are too intense for a young audience - PTSD, adultery (maybe), suicide...I think this stuff is fine for high school, but primary school teachers and parents may think differently. The book opens with the characters reading a weird story by Hans Christian Andersen and that kind of foreshadows the tone of the story in terms of not being all 'sugar and spice'. And as Matilda reminds us, often, then adults don't know what she knows - does this speak to our inclination to censor 'difficult' themes for young children, despite them seeing the work anyway? I think so. Other reviewers have questioned whether the story would work as a 'hook' into Australian history...I think it would work! Many young people don't think about war or espionage happening here in Australia, surely this would get them curious. The contrast between wartime Australia and the post-war period in the 1950s is important for young people to grasp in terms of understanding Australian history, and if nothing else this novel makes very clear points about what it felt like to be a kid growing up 'after all the wars had ended'.

Teacher verdict: I wouldn't set this as a novel study (though it is a overly example of intertextuality and you could read HCA's fairy tale alongside), but would definitely recommend it to teen readers. Female readers will relate to the female narrators, male readers will like the real newspaper clippings interspersed throughout (<-- yes, stereotypes). A relatively easy read so recommend to ages 12 and up with no fear. Worthy of its award :)

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