Country Party. At the general election in September 1940 Labor and the UAP/Country Party tied with thirty six seats each. There were two independents who initially supported the government but the political landscape was highly unstable. On the UAP side the Country Party had refused to serve under Menzies and on the Labor side there were still two separate groups, the official ALP and Lang Labor from New South Wales. At a time when Europe had been overrun by the German armies and Britain was fighting for its life, Canberra remained as

detached from reality as it is in many ways today.

Menzies spent most of the first half of 1941 in London where he attended meetings at the British war cabinet. He returned to Australia in mid-year but in August was forced to resign by his UAP colleagues. If three of his strongest supporters had not been lost a year earlier, this vote might have taken a different course. In any event, Country Party leader, Arthur Fadden took over as prime minister but in early October the two independent

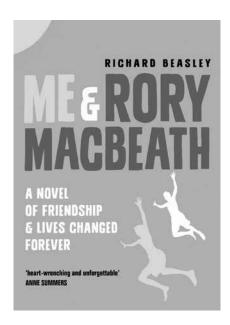
members withdrew their support from the government and John Curtin became prime minister in a Labor administration which was to survive, albeit without Curtin himself, until December 1949.

This book provides a fascinating interplay of law and politics and the author's extensive research has not inhibited his highly readable style. It is simply an excellent piece of work.

Review by Michael Sexton SC

Me and Rory Macbeath

By Richard Beasley | Hachette Australia | 2013



The seemingly endless summer holidays of our childhood: there are surely few periods in our lives that we remember with more nostalgia. Australian summer holidays, idled away with other local children at the beach or in neighbours' pools, and fueled by sausage rolls and meat pies, calippos and paddlepops, seem particularly evocative in retrospect.

Richard Beasley's new novel, Me & Rory Macbeath, begins with a kind of homage to those summer holidays of our childhood, as its narrator, the now grown-up Jake Taylor, describes the summer of 1977 - 1978, when he was twelve years old and living on Rose Avenue in the suburbs of Adelaide. Jake's depiction of that summer is almost palpable, and is replete with games of front-yard cricket, terrifying encounters with tenmetre diving platforms, and molten roads that scold bare feet as his band of local boys walk home. It is a beautiful start to the story (which is part coming-of-age,

part courtroom drama), and also a clever one, as it lulls the reader into feeling that very sense of 'vague yet secure optimism' which Jake identifies as coming over him and his best mate, Robbie, around the time they turned twelve.

Rory Macbeath is the youngest child of the Macbeath family, who has recently arrived from Glasgow and moved into Number 1 Rose Avenue, described by Jake as the worst house in the street. It is the entry of Rory into Jake and Robbie's world which changes things for Jake, at first only subtly, with the unsettling shift in dynamic that takes place when a longestablished duet becomes a trio, and then radically and irrevocably, as the Macbeath family takes centre stage on Rose Avenue. As Jake learns more about Rory and his family, the pace of the novel

picks up, moving inexorably towards the tragedy that is at the heart of the story.

It is in the novel's prologue that we first meet Harry, Jake's mother. Harry is a left-wing criminal defence barrister, who is bringing up Jake single-handedly. She is feisty and fearless, intelligent and outspoken, and a talented and tireless advocate. Jake tells us, in the prologue, that Harry's fearlessness - a quality which Jake so admires - is a quality which she shares with Rory. And as the novel unfolds, fearlessness, or more particularly, a preparedness to stand up for what one believes in, is a theme that is central to the events that take place. Friendship is another strong theme of the novel, and it is depicted in many forms. Between Harry, the single working mother, and Jake, her precocious and sensitive son, there is a singular and formative relationship; Beasley has evidently taken great care in constructing this relationship, which is not only

Beasley takes on some daring themes and explores a dark subject matter, but he does so lightly and with the humour that we have come to expect of him.

affecting, but also responsible for much of the novel's humour. We also see the blossoming friendship of Rory and Jake, at once complicated and uncomplicated, the bond that develops, by necessity, among the various women of Rose Avenue, and the evolving relationships which exist between Harry and members of her chambers.

It is a murder trial which is at the core of the narrative in *Me & Rory Macbeath*, and it is the courtoom scenes in that trial, featuring the fearless Harry as counsel for the defendant, where Beasley is at his best. Unsurprisingly, these scenes ring true; they are packed with tension, but are also comical at times, and I found

myself whipping through the pages where the story leaves the courtroom, just so I could get back to watching Harry at work. It would be giving away too much to reveal here the partial defence raised by Harry but suffice to say that Beasley's treatment of the subject matter is both sensitive and thought-provoking.

Me & Rory Macbeath is easily Beasley's best book yet. Though largely told through the eyes of a twelve year old boy, it boasts a depth and maturity not quite evident in his two previous novels. Beasley takes on some daring themes and explores a dark subject matter, but he does so lightly and with the humour that we have come to expect of him. It can perhaps then be described as a coming-of-age novel in two senses - both for the author as a novelist, and for the characters he portrays.

Reviewed by Juliet Curtin

Crossword solution

