

What We're Reading - 10 September 2021

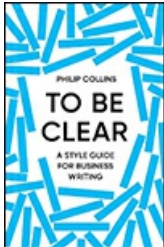
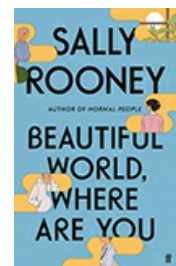
Lucy Nathan

Opinion - Books Friday, 10th September 2021

The BookBrunch team reveals what's on their bedside tables

Neill Denny

Have just got hold of a copy of Sally Rooney's *Beautiful World, Where Are You* and have made a start on it but this will have to be a two-part appraisal, one of the novels of the year deserves the space. First off, the hardback is a beautiful object with a striking cover Faber can be proud of. The plot so far: two young women, one a successful novelist, one an impoverished editor, best friends, compare notes on life and the universe whilst navigating the mating game. (No wonder Rooney is so widely read in publishing.) Plotwise, potentially hackneyed, but Rooney's writing is impeccable, with an ear for dialogue so perfect she must have a memory like a tape recorder. Great lines on every page, and a descriptive style so observational and telling you could be reading a report from a private investigator. More next week.

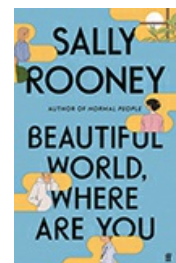


David Roche

Philip Collins has a fantastic track record as a political speechwriter and columnist and I was lucky enough to share a stage with him at a conference on the power of the spoken word at the Rose Theatre a few years ago. Collins' latest book, *To Be Clear* (Quercus), is a guide to clear business language and writing and the relationship it has with clear thinking and better communication. What is great are the quoted examples of how not to do it, which sound like every mission statement you have ever heard. Realising you should do the opposite of what you have been on the end of is a very effective way to learn. Collins then takes you through the alphabet and common pitfalls to avoid. How our businesses can learn from our authors is clear: 'the human propensity to tell stories is how we make sense of the world' and statistics 'tell no story unless embodied in a narrative proof'. Balanced scorecard learnings and customer-centric behaviours giving added value ideations to your strategy going forward, anyone?

Jo Henry

Sally Rooney needs no endorsement from me to make her latest book, *Beautiful World, Where Are You* (Faber), a huge success, particularly after a stunning marketing and publicity campaign from her publishers. Which is just as well, as I have to confess I am rather struggling with it. I realise that I am probably not the core target audience, but I loved both her earlier books, so this is a shame. It's written with two distinct storylines, the first (and the one I am enjoying the most) being intense email exchanges between two long-term female friends, 30-something Eileen and Alice, the latter a novelist who has enjoyed almost overnight success with her first couple of books but is finding the intense media scrutiny difficult to deal with. The second storyline feels like a TV script (he got up, he turned on the kettle, he made himself a cup of coffee, etc), but with lots and lots of sex. It's almost like the author is having a quiet laugh at the publishing and TV industries...





Lucy Nathan

Yes, my copy of Sally Rooney's new book is currently winging its way to me (I love her, I am thrilled that a new book can cause so much excitement, the world needs more literary rock stars) but what I'm reading right now is a YA novel, *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender (Faber). It follows the ironically-named Felix Love, who is afraid that he's 'one marginalisation too many - Black, queer, and transgender' to get his happily-ever-after. The journey that Felix goes through in this novel is exquisitely written. It involves a catfishing scheme and a sort of love triangle in great YA tradition, but most importantly it explores identity in a way that is beautifully delicate and finely drawn. I am glad that this

YA novel is out there and that it's so popular among teens and young adults: the kids really are alright.

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