



Crossing the Lines

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Sulari Gentill, author of the 1930s Rowland Sinclair Mysteries, jumps to the post-modern in Crossing the Lines.

A successful writer, Madeleine, creates a character, Edward, and begins to imagine his life. He, too, is an author. Edward is in love with a woman, Willow, who's married to a man Edward loathes, and who loathes him, but he and Willow stay close friends. She's an artist. As Madeleine develops the plot, Edward attends a gallery show where a scummy critic is flung down a flight of fire stairs...murdered. Madeleine, still stressed from her miscarriages and grieving her inability to have a child, grows more and more enamored of Edward, spending more and more time with him and the progress of the investigation and less with her physician husband, Hugh, who in turn may be developing secrets of his own.

As Madeline engages more with Edward, he begins to engage back. A crisis comes when Madeleine chooses the killer in Edward's story and Hugh begins to question her immersion in her novel. Yet Crossing the Lines is not about collecting clues and solving crimes. Rather it's about the process of creation, a gradual undermining of the authority of the author as the act of writing spirals away and merges with the story being told, a self-referring narrative crossing over boundaries leaving in question who to trust, and who and what is true.

Crossing the Lines Details

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From Reader Review Crossing the Lines for online ebook

Bec Hombsch says

I want to start by saying that I am in no way paid, endorsed or was offered any kind of compensation in lieu of this review.

Secondly, I will freely admit. I am a lover of Sulari's work. I have a review for The Hero Trilogy on my computer waiting to be posted, but between work, school and issues with Wordpress it hasn't happened. I am yet to read the Roland Sinclair series, but they are on my to read list.

From the moment, she posted the cover reveal for Crossing the Lines, I knew I wanted to read it. Honest to God, the stark white background with the black offsetting text had me. It was simple and beautiful. Then I ordered it. Well, tried. Turns out there was a miscommunication on how to spell her name. Which lead to her book not being found. But all's well that ends well. I did get my book. A lovely black covered book so vastly different to the Australian release. HAHA turns out I got the US version. But that's ok. I still loved it. And I still love looking at it. It's so pretty and captivating. Yet still has that simplistic approach that dragged me into the Australian cover. And yet, I think the US cover speaks so much more about the soul of the soul and where it leads.

Now onto the book...

Holy crap on a cracker! I spent seven glorious hours reading. I couldn't put it down. I couldn't step away. I had to know what was happening. I may have forgotten to cook dinner. Ignored my husband who was trying to spend some time with me after a long few weeks of study, work and illness. I may have eaten half what I normally would, jumped up from the kitchen table and flew back into the living room to continue reading. Leaving my husband to parent the kids and organise them for bed. I told my 6 year old we weren't reading The Magic Faraway Tree tonight, because I was busy and I can't say I remember saying goodnight to anyone. The book had hold of me. And it wasn't letting go.

Like all readers, like all writers, I can become obsessive. I can become so engrossed in my work that nothing else matters. But never do I become that obsessive I forget to parent. All I can say is 'Sorry kids. My bad.' But let's face it. I'm not sorry at all. The idea and basis of the story – a writer who is writing her character's story, who in turn is writing his author's story and their worlds become entangled – is different. As hubby said, "It sounds confusing." And it does. But to read it, not so much. It is enthralling, fascinating and captivating.

I can't compare it to anything else I've read. I think the closest I can come is Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn. The sheer brilliance of story writing and execution places Crossing the Lines in a category all of its own. It sits as one of those stories that you never forget. One that you offer up to anyone, regardless of their genre preference as a work of art, that will leave you questioning why writing hadn't been taken to this level before. One that stands out on its own and becomes a household name because nothing out there will ever be able to compete. It is and will always be a leader in psychological literature that will be spoken about among coming generations. And would be a worthwhile novel for literature studies within high school/college/university English classes. If only because it pushes the boundaries of the written word and how a story can be told.

As I began to read, I was surprised and a bit confused about the switching between perspectives. There wasn't always a page break, chapter or anything to define it. But it paid off, the way in which Sulari developed the story, blurring the lines as it progressed rolling it all together so it basically became one was

just amazing. I found myself relating closely Madeline. A panster writer who lets her characters tell the story. Someone who sits back and “watches” as the story plays out in her mind. Typing out what she sees. Never having any idea who did it or what will happen, until that vital moment when it’s revealed. The writer who is as much of a reader as they are a transcriber. One who gets heavily invested in their story.

I laughed, cos let’s be honest; I do that...and that... and that...and... I definitely don’t do that. Madeline’s relationship with her character reached levels that made me question if I had misunderstood the storyline. At times, I found myself wondering if Edward was real. Was there going to be some kind of twist at the end. Is she going to discover they are tied together somehow, both human, both seeking out the other? Did I get it wrong? Was Edward “real”? Was Maddie a character? No it couldn’t be, he’d just appeared in her bedroom. Holy crap, what was happening? Jesus Christ, it’s almost 9pm I needed more coffee. I was torn between needing sleep and having to know what the hell was happening. The characters won.

By the time I was finished I was questioning my own sanity. And the sanity of many, many writers I know. How involved is too involved? How many times have we blurred the lines to try and understand the character better? How many times have we come to realise we have written ourselves into our stories, even small fragments that end up shaping the book in some way. Letting out emotions unintentionally tell the story. We’re angry, they’re angry. We’re feeling trapped and betrayed, so are our characters. Three hours after I finished, all I could think of was wanting to message Sulari and claim she was an evil woman. Especially given the turn of events at home that evening. I can’t remember the last time I became so mentally obsessed after a book finished.

Oh no, wait... yes I do. I seriously need to know where the Herdsmen settled and what happened to them... We won’t discuss The Hero Trilogy x Outlander x Game of Thrones dreams I’ve had over that issue. FYI I gave myself some awesome answers. Unresolved issues seems to be a theme with this author. Only this time it wasn’t with the plot. It was with my own sanity.

I became immersed in the fast paced ending, the way in which the lines blurred and Maddie’s perception on reality escalated, that when I finished the book - which ended in a gaping, wide eyed “holy crap” gasp as I looked to hubby. He responded with something, but honestly I don’t know what it was – it was like coming down of some kind of exhilarating high. My mind spun, my heart race and I was still going well into the night. This sense of light headed giddiness that you face as you come back down to earth took me over. I felt like I had been absorbed for days, with little food and water. And yet, it was only seven hours. Even now. I can’t even begin to fathom just how much this book has suckered me in. I have so many people I want to run it over to and say, read this! Now! Here I’ll take you kids. I’ll go fill in a work. You sit here and read this! There won’t be any regrets.

Well... maybe not for my non-author friends. My writer friends may start with some personal questions about their own character involvement.

As a mother, I can safely say my kids can read it. Yes, there’s mention of sex. But it is implied, mentioned and the focus shifted elsewhere. It was refreshing to read a book what didn’t have detailed sex scenes that left me disappointed because I knew my teens would enjoy it but couldn’t read it as a result of half a page or more giving detailed descriptions on every stage of sexual intimacy. Sulari kept the focus on the story line, on the parts we needed to know. She didn’t allow for sex to be used as a filler which has just added to my love of the book. As it has now made this series suitable for pretty much everyone.

It is well worth the read. I cannot recommend this enough. I love books that leave you questioning things, society, life, rules, books that give more than just a story. Ones which enhance, embrace and encourage critical thinking and looking outside the square. And this book does that. I give it 5 quills/ stars. No hesitation, no debating. Straight up five.

Tundra says

3 1/2 rounded up. A very interesting plot concept having a writer writing about another author while he simultaneously creates her. I think Sulari Gentill executed this well and I was able to follow her transitions without problem. It was fun to watch both characters evolve and become involved in their intertwined lives and the crimes at the heart of each story.

I'm not sure I think the setting was completely successful. It was meant to be modern Australia but apart from some kangaroos I wouldn't have known it was. This novel had a very similar feel to her Rowland Sinclair novels the mannerisms and behaviour of many of the characters felt old fashioned, especially the character of Edward.

An interesting version of a crime novel.

Pam Tickner says

I shouldn't have read this so close to finishing *Magpie Murders* by Anthony Horowitz as they were very similar. Both were a story within a story, an author writing a book about an author writing a book, and both talked extensively about crime writers tools of the trade and both referenced Agatha Christie as their crime 'muse'. I found the setting and time period in this book confusing. It is modern day Sydney, as there are mobile phones, yet it felt more like the 1903's like Gentill's other books, with dinner jackets and Jeeves. The only reference to Sydney seems to be the kangaroo's that hop past on the road. I much prefer the Rowland Sinclair Mysteries - though Gentill does has a dig at readers who only want to read the series they know the author for, and not allowing the author the freedom to explore other genre's. That isn't the case here, this book just isn't as good in my opinion.

Jeffrey says

A tale that starts out with the query: "What if you wrote of someone writing you? In the end which of you would be real?"

So we are introduced to Madeleine - Maddie to her husband. She, a writer of mystery novels, is introduced to us by Edward who is writing Madeleine's story. But we learn immediately that she has begun an atypical novel writing about Edward, a writer of literary novels.

And here begins a story of Edward writing a novel about Madeleine who is penning a book about Edward - with a murder mystery intertwined.

What could have been either a confusing mess or a half-formed idea was neither. The story flowed well as the narrative flipped from Maddie's perspective to Edward's and back. It was interesting that I had thought that this entire tale had started off with Maddie writing about Edward but after re-reading the first chapter, I was surprised that we started off the other way around. It proved that I was soon convinced that each could be the writer of a fictional tale and the other was simply a character on the page until they swapped places.

Original in idea and execution, 'Crossing the Lines' was enjoyable and engaging. As the reveal of the killer approaches, the outcome seems only slightly less suspenseful as the unpredictable actions of the writers. The

idea of how a person's own motives can alter their behaviors towards someone they claim to love is just one of the underlying variables as the story begins to wrap up.

I have finished the book but am left with a mystery: which author was the writer and which was the character. Perhaps it is a debate akin to the 'which came first: the chicken or the egg'. Do they both exist? I have my own thoughts on Maddie and Edward. I'll leave it up to you to read 'Crossing the Lines' and come up with your own.

Liz Filleul says

Really unusual and fascinating novel by Sulari Gentill, best known for her 1930s historical mysteries featuring Rowland Sinclair. In *Crossing the Lines*, Gentill explores the blurring of reality and fiction in the life of crime writer Madeleine d'Leon, who is becoming obsessed with her literary writer turned sleuth Edward McGinnity. Or is it literary writer Edward McGinnity who's becoming obsessed with his crime writer creation Madeleine d'Leon?

I'm going to be thinking about this book for a long time as I've absolutely no idea which of the two protagonists is meant to be real and which one fictitious.

Very clever writing! This is the most intellectually satisfying book I've read in a while.

The publisher really needed to employ a proofreader, though. It's testament to how compelling this book is that I wasn't distracted by typos the way I usually am.

Emma says

I couldn't put this down! I was so interesting, the twists the turns. Maddie battling with herself, Edward as well.

I didn't exactly love the ending but it was an expected outcome. Brilliantly told story with suspense and mystery surrounding it!

3 1/2 stars. ???

Graham says

Brilliant.

Nikki "The Crazie Betty" V. says

Confusing, confusing, confusing. I'm still not totally sure who was the real writer and who was the character? The ending was more metaphysical and philosophical that I would've liked. Or, if that was the intent of the story, it didn't go *far* enough into that direction, in my opinion. The book played on a tightrope, unsure of which side to fall on, and ultimately my enjoyment suffered because of it.

I liked both the characters and how their lives and writing were affecting each other, but ultimately, in the end, I was hoping for at least one of their story lines to have an actual ending. As it were, it felt like all of the sudden everything was screwed, no one got a happy ending, and then the book ended. I don't need a happy ending, mind you, but I just didn't really feel like there was much for my mind to grasp onto once the book ended for me to feel like it really made a solid impact on me. I felt like I was pushed to feel a certain way for these people, to then feel like none of it mattered in the first place.

Maybe one day I'll read it again, now that I know where it goes, just to see if maybe a re-read would allow more understanding and depth on my end.

Received via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Vijaya says

Confusing.. didn't finish .

Gina Burgess says

Here is an excellent venture into the mind of a writer and mind of a character interacting. I've actually had conversations with my characters before... but not like this!

Excellent writing, but not so great an ending. I felt very deflated and disappointed. I guess, if I had read any other of her books, I might have been prepared for this kind of ending. This was my first read of hers and I completely and enthusiastically enjoyed it all the way to the last chapter, maybe last 2 chapters.

The characters are so well developed the transitions seem to be transparent. Head hopping is not really noticeable. That is the mark of an excellent writer. Description is not overpowering, but so deft that the authors places you right in the scene. You're sitting on the sofa, or the in the garden, or in the car, or at the bistro drinking coffee while they story moves around you. In fact it gets to the point where you aren't sure who is the real deal and who is the character.

The plot is quite intriguing, and the murder really isn't a murder--or is it really murder? You'll have to read to find out.

This one is a keeper.

Jen says

Review to follow in the Library Journal. I think it is worth noting that I finished this while waiting in the line to see Hilary Clinton speak at the 2017 ALA convention. 6AM line for speaker at 10. ??

Karen says

Known for her Rowland Sinclair historical crime series and her YA Hero trilogy, Sulari Gentill delivers something very different with this new novel. Full review at Newtown Review of Books

Rebecca Freeborn says

Such a clever book, and as a writer it was delightfully indulgent to read a book about writers writing about writers. Really enjoyed it.

Alyssa says

Madeleine d'Leon is a crime fiction writer who is taking a break from her successful series of mystery novels to write a whodunit with a brand new character – Edward McGinnity, a literary author who has found himself embroiled in the murder of art critic Geoffrey Vogel.

Edward McGinnity is writing a story about Madeleine d'Leon, lawyer and crime fiction writer whose marriage to doctor Hugh Lamond is waning after several miscarriages.

While this may sound confusing, *Crossing the Lines* cleverly explores how a writer's obsession with her fictional character evolves to a point where he literally comes to life. And although there is a whodunit, this is much more than just a mystery novel. In fact, the identity of who killed Geoffrey Vogel is deliberately not as compelling as the developing relationship between Madeleine and Edward and the concept of a writer completely absorbed by her fictional story.

The pair begin by simply observing each other – Edward envisages Madeleine in cloud print pyjamas, tapping away at her laptop, and ordering takeaway for dinner. Madeline imagines Edward writing long hand in his expensive beach house; a typical crime fiction hero with a troubling backstory – his family was killed in a car accident. He's in love with best friend Willow who is married and cannot return his love; deliberately written so Madeleine doesn't have to write a sex scene, and of whom she becomes envious as her passion for Edward intensifies. The viewpoints alternate seamlessly, as it appears both simultaneously occupy the same space, leading the reader to doubt who is really real.

They are startled to discover they can converse with one another – bantering about the conventions of their differing writing styles – crime fiction and literary fiction. Madeleine tells Edward something has to “actually happen” in the stuff she writes and Edward accuses her of being obsessed with “guns and masked bandits.” When Madeleine tells her father she could never be a literary writer as the women must be stick thin, Edward realises he cannot think of any fat female literary writer of note. Before long, their relationship crosses imaginary lines, progressing to physical contact, with Madeleine preferring Edward's company to Hugh's.

Crossing the Lines is an intricate metanarrative with Gentill, also a crime fiction author and former attorney, using “a familiar baseline” from which to develop the character of Madeleine. In April, I attended a seminar at Supanova where Sulari Gentill said she writes her mysteries without necessarily knowing where they will lead. And like Gentill, Madeline is also a ‘pantser’ rather than a ‘plotter’ – writing plot points without knowing where they will lead, including a sudden and brutal attack on Edward and a frantic car chase. And

the reader of *Crossing the Lines* will wonder at Madeleine's inevitable fate as she allows herself to sink deeper into her own imagination, separating herself from reality and descending into delusion.

Crossing the Lines is a must read novel, especially for writers who will relate to the concept of feeling real emotions for fictional characters and the consequences of what they make happen to them. As Madeleine's psychiatrist asks her: "Do you like that, Madeleine, deciding questions of life and death, having the power to take or give such things?" In this case, the authorial power is in the able hands of Sulari Gentill, who has crafted an intelligent and insightful story that will leave you contemplating the bounds of your own imagination.

Audrey says

Meta-fiction—fiction about fiction, or fiction that's conscious of itself as fiction—can often be tedious to read and self-conscious. "*Crossing the Lines*" is neither. It's a fast-moving, plot-driven mystery that also plays with the distinctions between reader and storyteller, character and writer.

The book's main characters, one a writer of crime fiction and the other a literary author, are also characters in one another's books. Somehow Gentill tells their entangled stories without ever confusing the reader. We always know exactly whose head we're inside. I found the most intriguing thing about this book to be how it plays with the idea of reality and fiction. Which character is "real?" What is the author's role in creating "reality?"

But, if you don't care about any of that, you can read "*Crossing the Lines*" simply as a rollicking good mystery. Gentill has crossed all sorts of lines, and you, as the reader will be the richer for it.
