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‘Simon Cleary, Everything is Water’

Geoff Keating

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Simon Cleary, *Everything is Water* (University of Queensland Press, 2024), 336pp. Paperback. A\$34.95. ISBN 978-0-7022-6850-2.

Books and stories are an opportunity to be transported to other worlds, other spaces, other times. They can be fantastical or grounded and are often only limited by the imagination of the reader. Simon Cleary's *Everything is Water* traverses these rifts between time, space, and imagination in such an awesome, yet familiar way. His 27-day journey follows the length of the Brisbane River, and is regularly halted by acts of nature, such as the 2022 floods. It is a challenging book to review, not due to being difficult or boring, but instead due to the amount of interest that each page provokes within the reader – having enough hours in the day to not put it down soon becomes an issue for the reader. I found myself regularly telling myself that there was only one more day before I put the book away.

The book focuses on a journey, though this is not a significant enough explanation. A pilgrimage, if you would, through the history, geography, and future of the Brisbane River, from its source high in the Great Dividing Range to the sweeping expenses of Moreton Bay in the East. Through the journey, Simon explores his own understandings of natural order, of settlement both Indigenous and European, as well as of his own personal understanding of who he is as a person and part of the wider picture of life. The reader can feel an appreciation for the way that his relationships with both family and friends grows and evolves, as well as his personal growth and evolution while on the walk. Simon effortlessly winds a natural gift for storytelling with his legal-analytical training to position the reader there alongside him, with a clear understanding of the history and environment he is experiencing.

Simon's journey is one which many people dream of. He manages to experience both rural and urban life and see the true power of the river in the lives of those who live alongside it. The serendipitous fact that his journey coincided with some of the largest flooding of the Brisbane Valley gives the reader a first-hand experience of the challenges of living in the catchment. It also acknowledges the long and complex history Indigenous people share with the river, as both provider, transporter but also destroyer. Here Simon shows a deft appreciation of how vital the river is and allows the reader to follow him throughout learning this.

Everything is Water is an inspiring true journey, one which I personally wish to replicate and have begun planning for myself. It is definitely one of those books that I have recommended to everyone that I know and will be a great addition to any personal library.

Geoff Keating, University of Southern Queensland