

Black Inc. Book Club Notes

TITLE: Night Games: Sex, Power and Sport

AUTHOR: Anna Krien

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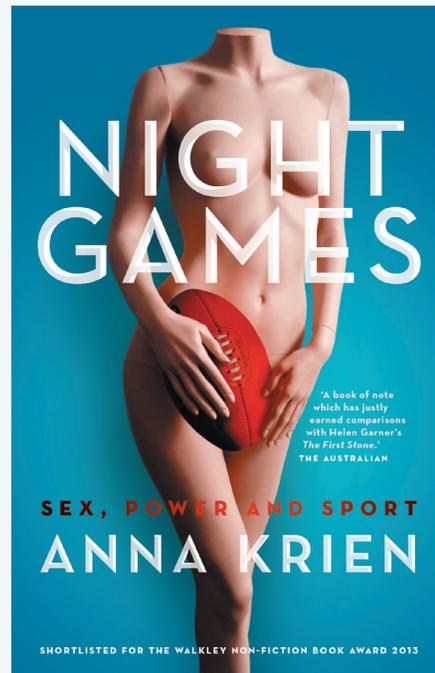
SUBJECT: Non-Fiction

About the Book

Towards the end of this thoughtful and nuanced book, Anna Krien writes that she wishes she had chosen a different rape trial to follow, one with an obvious villain. But it is the very complexity of the trial, and Krien's ambivalence about so many aspects of it, that opens up the many interconnected issues that she explores.

In fact, Krien's narrative of this trial of a football 'hanger-on', compelling as it is, serves as a background to the twin points of focus of her book. First, she dissects the culture surrounding elite sport (specifically AFL and NRL) and how such a culture supports and enables, even encourages, treating women like 'shit' or 'meat', or 'not fully human'. Second, she ventures into what she terms the 'grey zone' between rape and consent. The two are connected, she argues, because 'treating women like shit shades into a culture of abuse, which in turn can shade into rape' (p200). Not seeing a woman as fully human means not considering consent, or recognizing that woman's needs and rights. She is sure that what happened to Sarah was wrong, but she is not certain whether it is or isn't rape.

Related to these main issues, she also looks at rape and rape trials, racism and homophobia in footy, the justice system, how the rights of the complainant in a case of rape or sexual assault can be balanced with the rights of the accused, the changing place of women in football, and loyalty and how it can be misplaced and misused.



Krien feels a 'knot of dread' (p258) when she thinks about how feminists and footballers will respond to her ideas about the grey zone she identifies. But her careful probing of the issues comes from a strongly feminist perspective, and she is conscientious about not tarring individual footballers with the same brush at the same time as she is damning about the culture that surrounds the game.

Bringing her own thoughts, doubts, and convictions to the story, Krien makes this book as much about asking questions as answering them.

About the Author

Anna Krien's first book, *Into the Woods*, won the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Non-Fiction and the Victorian Premier's People's Choice Award. Krien is also the author of the Quarterly Essay, *Us & Them: On the Importance of Animals*, which won the 2012 Voiceless Writing Prize and was shortlisted for the John Button Prize and the Walkley Award for magazine feature writing. Her writing has been published in the *Monthly*, the *Age*, the *Big Issue* and the *Best Australian Essays, Stories and Poems*.

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Praise for *Night Games*

'Krien has produced a book of note which has justly earned comparisons with Helen Garner's *The First Stone*. Her detailed research, sharp observations and intelligent writing, mixed with compassion for the two lead players in this unhappy drama, make *Night Games* a serious addition to the literature on sport, sex, consent and power.' – *Australian*

'Krien is both adept and fiercely honest in her examination of male sporting culture.' – *Australian Women's Weekly*

'The work of a compassionate and expansive intelligence.' – *Sydney Morning Herald*

'For every superstar, club CEO, boundary rider, bar-propper and park footballer, it should be mandatory reading.' – *Sunday Age*

'A balanced and powerful exploration of the grey area of sexual assault' – *Advertiser*

'Anna Krien's *Night Games* exposes AFL culture. In a captivating dialogue, Krien explores sex, power and privilege in Australia's sporting culture. Read it and you'll never think about the Saturday game in the same way.' – *Sydney Morning Herald*, '20 Important Moments for Women in 2013'

'With a balanced yet fearless voice, Krien doesn't shy away from exploring the darker side of AFL' – *Walkley Magazine*

'Krien expertly teases out the shades of grey in her investigation of sex, consent and power.' – *Big Issue*, 'Top Books of 2013'

'Despite the challenging nature of its subject matter, Anna Krien's book is balanced yet fearless, and as compelling and involving as any previous winner. [It is] a painstaking, intelligent, but above all, open-minded examination of an immensely complicated area.' – Judges comments, William Hill Sports Book of the Year 2014

Awards

Winner, 2014 Davitt Award for Best True Crime Book

Winner, 2014 William Hill Sports Book of the Year

Winner, New Writer of the Year Award at the 2015 Cross British Sports Book Awards

Shortlisted, 2013 Walkley Non-Fiction Book Award

Shortlisted, 2014 Adelaide Festival Award for Non-Fiction

Shortlisted, 2014 Stella Prize

Shortlisted, 2014 Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Non-Fiction

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think Krien chose to start the book with what would usually come at the end – the verdict?
2. Krien didn't get to talk to Sarah or see her at the trial. She finds herself wondering whether it is 'dangerous' to write about the trial (p140)? What are the dangers?
3. Krien feels her objectivity slip because of her connection with Justin's family. Does she maintain a balanced perspective despite this lack of objectivity? Is the lack of objectivity a weakness in the book?
4. Even though she has access to him while writing the book and during the trial, Krien finds Justin a 'cipher' (p257). Did you get a sense of him? Did you feel sympathy for him? Do you think Krien felt sympathy for him?
5. The Dyers 'felt a great injustice had been done to their son' (p39). Do you agree with them? If not a great injustice, a small one?
6. Do you think this book would have been different if it was the trial of a superstar rather than a 'hanger-on'?
7. 'People talk about sex and power as if power is a seesaw, divvied up between two people. But in night games, where you come up against the power of a group, your sense of self dislocates' (p140). Can a woman ever maintain a sense of self and autonomy in the sorts of 'night games' Krien writes about?
8. 'If mere consent can result in a ten-person gangbang with a lone teenage girl at its centre, then what good is it? How to ascertain the calibre of someone's consent?' Krien asks (p49), going on to suggest that the 'no means no' slogan has meant notions of consent have

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been over-simplified. What do you think consent looks like? How else might it be understood? Should the 'no means no' slogan be sacred?

9. Krien argues that 'rape is not always easy to establish or identify, let alone to confirm beyond reasonable doubt' (p88) partly because it is 'subjective'. Do you agree?

10. In his closing address, the defence counsel says that 'It doesn't stop being consensual because it was later regretted' (p256). Is this a valid point? Is it the same point Krien is making in the book?

11. When the defence counsel describes Sarah as a 'liar', Krien feels rage (pp98-99). But she also feels uneasy about the assumption that if a woman feels raped a man must be guilty (p100). The space between 'She's a liar, or he's a rapist' (p101) is another grey area. How can this space be negotiated?

12. What should football clubs do when one of their players is accused of sexual assault or rape? Should they keep the player on the list, or suspend them?

13. Krien often describes the barristers and judge in the trial as a 'magic triangle', a cabal closed off from all the other players and observers. She describes the jury as 'precious children ... kept in a dark room with the occasional torch shedding light' (p93). What do such descriptions say about our justice system? Do you share Krien's unease about details of what happened in the townhouse being withheld from the jury?

14. Do you think that if Justin did something wrong it was something that could be dealt with by the criminal justice system?

15. Do you believe a restorative justice process would be a worthwhile complement to the criminal justice system for sexual assault and rape?

16. What do you think are the similarities and differences between attitudes to race and gender in football culture, and how racism and sexism have been addressed?

17. Krien can't make Justin a villain in her story: '[Justin's] been carved out of a pack. Whatever he did that night, he thought it was okay. The herd had said as

much. Teams, after all, require a certain amount of groupthink to succeed' (p258). Is this line of thought an excuse for Justin's behaviour or a reflection of one of the core arguments of the book?

18. If footballers live in a world where 'the "normal" barriers to consent don't exist' (p192), how can this change? Krien argues that 'Players ... who tread the grey zone of rape and treating women badly can be made accountable' (p260) but how do you think this can happen?

19. Do you feel optimistic that the culture around women in football is going to change for the better?

20. Has Anna Krien 'betrayed' feminism or football as she feared?