Nero Book Club Notes

Title: Rose's Vintage
Author: Kayte Nunn
ISBN: 9781863957991
**Price:** $29.99
Subject: Fiction

About the Book

An English Rose blossoms in the Australian countryside in this perfectly paced and beautifully written rural romance. *Rose's Vintage* sees its heroine become equally enamoured of the rural community as of her handsome and gentle boss, and she finds a new life in a new home along with a new love.

Or course, she doesn't like either home or boss at first. Broken-hearted and just out of her old job, Rose arrives in the Shingle Valley to find the weather cold and the grapevines bare. Her boss Mark seems gruff and disengaged, with 'all the personality and charm of a garden rake' (56). But as new growth greens the valley, so too does Rose come to life. Events follow the cycle of grape-growing and winemaking – prune, budburst, flower then vintage.

To start off, she is warmed by her relationship with Mark's children, with whom she develops a genuine bond. She also finds real friendship with the Austrian nanny Astrid. Soon there are other connections with people in the valley – the Trevelyn sisters, Bevan the barista, Thommo, the CWA bakers. Importantly, she also forges a deep connection with the land, as 'the valley steals its way into her heart' (99). People often tell her she 'belongs' there.

As this is happening, Rose comes to appreciate – and lust after – Mark. After chiding herself for her schoolgirl crush, Rose realises that the attraction is mutual. But she questions whether a relationship with him could ever work, and tries to keep her feelings under control.
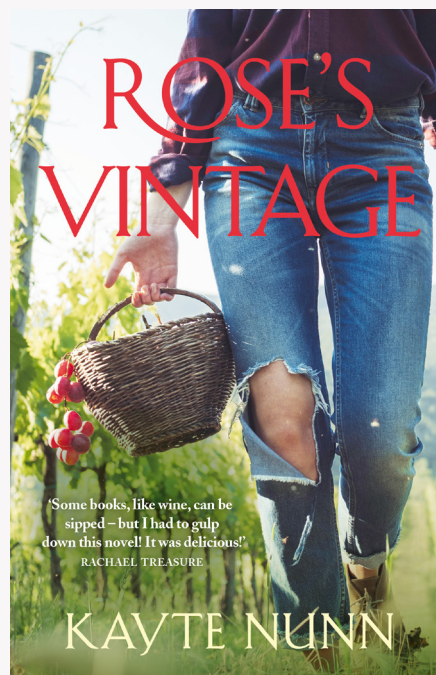
That's pointless, and eventually it's clear that there is more going on between them than a superficial attraction.

But the course of true love never runs smooth, and the threat to Rose's happiness comes from Mark's unbearable ex-wife Isabella. Rose abandons the Shingle Valley and goes to Sydney where she finds success on her own terms. Surely it's not a spoiler though to say that love triumphs in the end!

About the Author

Kayte Nunn is a freelance book, magazine and web editor and the former editor of *Gourmet Traveller WINE* magazine. She writes on travel, health, wellbeing, parenting and lifestyle topics, and has been short-listed for local and international short-story awards. She is a mother to two girls. This is her first novel.

Quotes

'Some books, like wine can be sipped – but I had to gulp this novel down! It was delicious!' – Rachael Treasure

'Fans of Maeve Binchy will delight in the romance of Kayte Nunn's sweeping tale – I know I did.' – Lauren Sams

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Discussion points

1. We know from early on in the novel that Rose is going to fall in love with Mark (especially if we've read the blurb) and indeed in romance fiction we often know the outcome. Without the element of surprise, where does the pleasure in reading romance come from? For example, is it in finding out how the couple surmounts the inevitable hurdles? Is it in following a familiar plotline? What do you enjoy about reading romance?

2. Rural romance (ru-ro), especially that set in Australia where the sub-genre was born, has become increasingly popular in recent years. Do you think this reflects a reality that women yearn for community as well as for a man?

3. Are the romantic and rural elements in *Rose's Vintage* equally balanced? Is the novel best described as rural romance or rural fiction?

4. Rachel Treasure, one of Australia's most successful writers of rural romance, has said in an interview that ru-ro is 'where feminism meets farming' (http://www. theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/rural-romance-is-a-bestseller-in-the-heartlands/news-story/63773e14f90c50f3 9f5057548ebc799c). Is this true of *Rose's Vintage*? Is it a feminist book?

5. When Mark first tells Rose why he has fallen in love with her, he talks about her relationship with his children, her cooking, and the way she makes his house a home (288). Does he love her mostly for her domestic gifts? How does that fit with your answer to the question above?

6. Do you think Rose's physical transformation was necessary for Mark to fall in love with her?

7. What draws Rose and Mark together? Can attraction ever be explained rationally, either in fiction or in real life?

8. When does Rose fall for Mark? Is there a single moment or a gradual dawning? What about in your experience – love at first sight or a slow realisation?

9. If you're a regular reader of romance, did you think *Rose's Vintage* was typical of the genre, or did it have significant differences from other romance fiction? If you're not a regular romance reader, was reading a romance what you expected?

10. How closely does Mark fit the model of a typical romantic hero? What about Rose – is she a typical romantic fiction heroine?

11. Violet talks about the land not belonging to her and her sister, but rather them belonging to the land (156). She is one of the people who think Rose belongs to the Shingle Valley too. Where does Rose's connection to the valley come from? How do connections with place get formed? Do you belong to a particular place?

12. Would you be or are you happy living in a small rural community? What are the attractions and deterrents?

13. How did you think the use of Australian vernacular – like 'took off faster than a bride's nightie' (70), or 'about as useless as tits on a bull' (82) or 'drier than a dead dingo's donger' (199) – added to the novel?

14. When Mark explains to Rose that Isabella had left her children behind because she would be busy and travelling in her new job, he points out that 'she's not all bad' (287). Does the novel support this view? Do you have any sympathy for Isabella? Rose doesn't believe Mark and can't imagine ever leaving her children. What do you think about women who leave their children as well as their husbands or partners?

15. After dinner with Astrid, Jake, Mark and the children, Rose reflects: 'It felt like she was becoming part of a family, albeit an unconventional one' (210). How does this book rethink the conventional family?

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