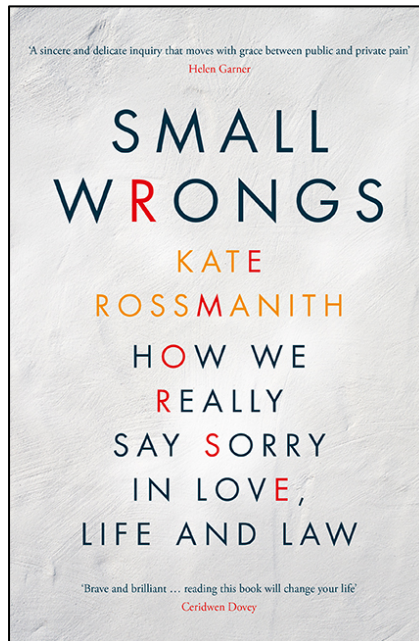


Book Club Notes

Small Wrongs: How We Really Say Sorry in Love, Life and Law
Kate Rossmanith



Praise for *Small Wrongs*:

'A sincere and delicate inquiry that moves with grace between public and private pain.'
Helen Garner

'Brave and brilliant... this book will change your life.'
Ceridwen Dovey

'A moving investigation into the inner-workings of remorse and forgiveness, not just as a legal concept, but a tool to opening up our common humanity. Kate is a brilliant storyteller.'
Alice Pung

'Intimate, revealing and fascinating, Rossmanith explores one of the most troubling expectations of those caught up in the criminal justice system, the performance of remorse.'
Anna Krien

About the book:

Kate Rossmanith studied people for a living, and thought she understood human nature well. But in the wake of her daughter's birth, the vulnerability and intensity of parenthood took her completely by surprise. Faced with a debilitating insomnia, she spent hours awake reflecting on her own upbringing and the unwelcome role remorse can play in even the most devoted parents' lives.

Increasingly fascinated with the concept of remorse, she was drawn to the criminal courts, observing case after case. She talked to criminals, lawyers and judges alike, trying to answer the fundamental question: how can you know whether a person is ever truly sorry?

But it soon became clear the project was creating seismic shifts in Kate's own life. The more she learnt, the more she saw how her relationship with her father, who for many years was a distant and often angry man, was steeped in remorse. The more she learnt, the more she saw the faultlines in her marriage, widening under the strains of parenthood. And ever present was a family history sketched across war-torn Europe, with the seeds of heartache taking root in Australia.

About the author:

Kate Rossmanith is an author and an essayist, her nonfiction appearing in *The Monthly*, *The Australian*, and *Best Australian Essays*. In 2013, her essay 'The Work of Judges' was nominated for a Walkley Award for Excellence in Journalism, and in 2018 her short documentary 'Unnatural Deaths' was published by *The Guardian* as part of a series exploring archives on film. She lives in Sydney and lectures at Macquarie University.

Questions and Discussion Prompts:

- Discuss author the author's research project. What is she investigating and what are the questions she is hoping to answer?
- Reflect on the judicial system and the roles within it – lawyers, judges, witnesses, perpetrators, victims and their relatives, and how remorse plays a role in sentencing, rehabilitation and forgiveness.
- Discuss the process of arriving at a sentence as described by the judges Kate interviews. What are your views on the systems in place to sentence offenders?
- Discuss the work of the parole board. What role does remorse play in its decision-making process? How do the video-link screens aid or hinder the process?
- How do the changes Kate experiences after Jemima's birth influence the formation of the remorse project?
- Discuss the insomnia Kate is faced with, and how remorse, or guilt, can play a role in the life of a parent. How does Kate's own upbringing affect her experience of motherhood?
- Discuss Kate's relationship to her father. Explore the link between Kate, her father, and remorse, especially in the context of intergenerational hurt.
- How do you think Kate's father's childhood influenced his parenting? How does his transformation in later life relate to this?
- What role does religion play in Kate's and her family's lives, and how is her research on remorse linked to her personal experience of spirituality?
- Kate and her husband, Brad, struggle in their relationship as they become parents. How do remorse and their own upbringings play a role in the dynamic between them?
- The homes Kate and Brad live in feature prominently in the narrative. What does each house represent in their lives?
- What did you make of Kate's account of the car crash and her response to it?
- When Kate visits the homicide victims' support group in Wagga Wagga, she is surprised to learn that the families of victims feel remorse too. Discuss why is this the case, and your thoughts on how remorse can be defined.