

The Weekend

Charlotte Wood

(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £14.99)

1 THIS BOOK is an example of what is both right and wrong with British publishing at the minute. Australian novelist Charlotte Wood isn't well known here – this is her sixth novel but only her second to be released in the UK. Her publisher has taken a chance with it, given it a bit of a push, and it's one that deserves to pay off. But there's something depressing about how it's being sold and received.

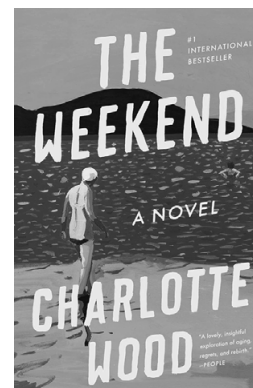
2 The publisher trumpets how Wood's books have done well in the Stella Prize – the Australian version of the Women's Prize for Fiction. The advance copy screams on the back cover: "MEET CHARLOTTE WOOD, THE WRITER OF FIERCE, REAL WOMEN YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR", which could only be thought to be a novelty by someone who hasn't read much contemporary fiction. (And the patronising description of "fierce, real women" is reminiscent of the old joke about Hollywood's definition of "feminist" as "an attractive woman who is also feisty".) Obliging, British newspapers have assigned the book exclusively to female critics to review – 25.

3 *The Weekend* is, sure enough, about a group of three women, lifelong friends now in their seventies. Jude, Adele and Wendy are survivors, watching friends and husbands die and shuffling up the line towards the payout window themselves. Their friend Sylvie is the latest to go, and as a favour to her daughter who lives abroad they agree to meet up and clear out her house.

4 If strangers in confinement is the engine of great comedy and drama, then old friends might be a richer, more fruitfully complicated one. Having three main characters offers plenty of thinly buried history while giving enough space to define each woman properly. Jude is ascetic and sceptical of sentiment; Wendy is chaotic and has brought her deaf, lame, incontinent dog with her (an obvious analogue for senility and one of the few missteps in the book). Adele is an actor who fears herself to be trivial and frivolous and is retired by necessity, but with all her vanity intact.

5 Clearing out a house doesn't lend itself to dramatic action, but the book never seems static: it's fed instead by the three women's pasts and the way they work together like scissor blades, dangerous but mutually dependent. Jude controls the others by imposing generous gifts on them; Adele borrows money from Wendy; Wendy is moved that Sylvie kept an old postcard she sent – as she cheerfully chucks out everyone else's.

6 *The Weekend* is bracingly unsentimental about ageing and death. Adele "at times felt on the verge of discovering something very important about the age beyond youth and love. But she had not uncovered it yet". Jude observes, when witnessing a dead body, that the absence of muscle tone after death "made you



look younger, it was a fact". As a portrayal of ageing that's sympathetic but cynical, *The Weekend* brings to mind recent novels by Margaret Drabble or Elizabeth Strout – except that unlike those authors Wood, who is 55, is not writing from experience but using a little-known novelist's tool called 29, which was until recently believed to be obsolete in our age of "autofiction" and thinly disguised personal essays.

- 7 The story heads towards a bit of a reckoning, helped by careless words and a rare appearance by secondary characters (Adele meets every older actor's worst nightmare: a busy colleague), even if it hardly matches the blurb's promise of "a storm that threatens to sweep away their friendship for good". It's just a shame that only the most intrepid male reader will break through the book's marketing carapace and try it. Men are interested in women too, you know. Some, I'm told, even live with them.

Private Eye, 2020

Tekst 7 The Weekend

'But there's something depressing about how it's being sold and received.'
(alinea 1)

1p 24 In welke **twee** alinea's wordt duidelijk wat de schrijver van deze recensie niet bevalt aan de promotie van dit boek?

Noteer de nummers van beide alinea's.

1p 25 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 2?

- A all reinforcing the notion that this is a "women's book" and not one for the chaps
- B another example of how women have managed to take over the literary scene
- C thereby taking women's stories seriously and recognizing them as meaningful
- D thus belying the fact that lads and lasses don't see eye to eye about what is interesting fiction

2p 26 Geef aan of de volgende beweringen over de drie hoofdpersonen van het boek *The Weekend* overeenkomen met de inhoud van alinea 3 en 4.

Noteer 'wel' of 'niet' achter elk nummer op het antwoordblad.

- 1 Ze hebben samen voor Sylvie gezorgd toen zij ziek werd.
- 2 Ze brengen samen tijd door in het huis van Sylvie en dat is de basis voor het plot van het verhaal.
- 3 Ze zijn de laatste jaren nogal uit elkaar gegroeid vanwege hun verschillende persoonlijkheden.
- 4 Ze durven geen van allen openlijk toe te geven dat ze zich aan de anderen ergeren.

1p 27 What becomes clear about the three main characters from paragraph 5?

- A They each have their own reasons for keeping their distance.
- B They rely on each other even though their interactions can be tense.
- C They share painful memories that they have to come to terms with.
- D They succeed at bonding but fail to finish the task they came to do.

'*The Weekend* is bracingly unsentimental about ageing and death.'
(alinea 6)

1p 28 Welke zin **eerder in de tekst** bevat beeldspraak die aangeeft dat de hoofdpersonen van dit boek waarschijnlijk niet lang meer te leven hebben?

Citeer de eerste twee woorden van deze zin.

- 1p 29 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 6?
- A flashforward
 - B imagination
 - C irony
 - D metaphor
 - E perspective
- 1p 30 What is the critic's final verdict on *The Weekend*, judging from paragraph 7?
- A It has clearly been written with a female audience in mind.
 - B It is not as spectacular as is claimed, but still a good read.
 - C It offers a fresh insight into growing old, but lacks action.
 - D It will appeal only to men who embrace their feminine side.
- 1p 31 In welke zin in de tekst wordt **voor het eerst** duidelijk dat de schrijver van deze recensie het boek de moeite waard vindt?
Citeer de eerste twee woorden van deze zin.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift.