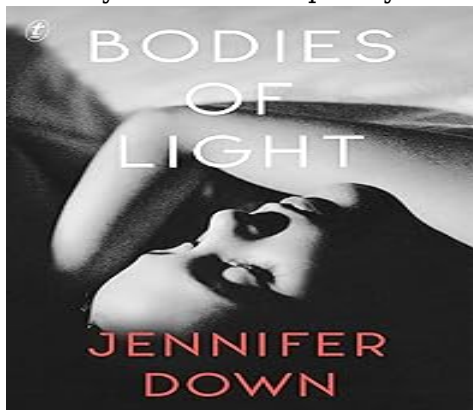


Bodies of Light By Jennifer Down What happens when buried stories are dragged into the light? This epic novel from the two-time Sydney Morning Herald Young Novelist of the Year is a masterwork of tragedy and heartbreak—the story of a life in full. Down writes really well presenting a vivid visceral but admirably restrained account of Maggie’s childhood in a succession of care facilities and foster homes often subjected to sexual physical and emotional abuse. Although Maggie manages to get into university it’s clear that her upbringing hasn’t prepared her culturally or emotionally to cope in the ways other more conventional students take for granted not helped by their reactions to her past which singles her out and isolates her. And for me there’s a sense that the book loses momentum and a clear direction I definitely felt these later episodes would benefit from being trimmed to make them tighter and give them more dramatic force. Bodies of Light WINNER OF THE MILES FRANKLIN LITERARY AWARD 2022 I've heard good things about this Miles Franklin long-listed novel so I had to read it - it's my first Jennifer Down novel. Bodies of Light is narrated in the first person by our heroine Maggie who hasn't had the best start in life - her mum died of an overdose and her father ended up in jail. Having worked myself with abused children in a home being married once upon a time to an abuse survivor walking on the Routeburn Track where I met my present wife 36 years ago living in Burlington Vermont where I spent four years while at Uni. Bodies of Light Down’s central question here is how much pain abuse and trauma can one person endure? And perhaps also how do hurt people hurt people themselves most of all? Questions posed by some of my most favourite books of the past 10 years: A Little Life Did You Ever Have a Family? Idaho and Imagine me Gone. Down uses the arrival of a Facebook message to propel the narrative back to Maggie’s childhood where we see her abused by people she should in theory have been able to trust and a system that completely fails to protect her. Bodies of Light



This book had the feel of being a multi-generational family saga though in reality we are following one woman throughout her life and she doesn't have much family (biological at least) to speak of. Though the content was difficult Jennifer Down writes beautifully and controls her lens with such precision - zooming in on the minutiae of a moment and then pulling away to only click the shutter on moments we need to see skipping swathes of time in the process. I cared deeply for our main character and cherished the few nourishing relationships she was able to cultivate throughout her difficult life - Down has managed to make this story feel lived and real - though she covers so many events and themes the novel never felt contrived it's as if we were just bearing witness to a life. The discussion of personal history and the difficulties of existing without a past was incredibly interesting and reminded me in essence of Boy Parts by Eliza Clarke - the idea that so much can have happened to you but without documentation it's like it never happened and the way that our presence in other peoples' memories solidifies our existence. Bodies of Light The following reviews have been shared by Text Publishing - publisher of Bodies of Light: 'A heartbreaking story that confronts you with an honest and compelling narrative and a flawed complex female protagonist who endures more than you think possible.' Victoria Hannan 'Bodies of Light is Jennifer Down’s third book and her best yet...A brilliant sharply observed and deeply affecting epic that secures Down’s status as one of the best writers in Australia today.' Australian Book Review 'Down is reframing altogether the way that difficult life events can be written about and can be rendered artistically

without becoming manipulative or sensationalised...An incredibly propulsive book...I gobbled it up. Bodies of Light is so full of beauty and hope not least because Down is an incredibly accomplished writer who manages to plunge the reader into time and place with astonishing depth and assuredness... The care that Down takes to give us trauma that feels genuine—though sometimes uncomfortably so—means that Bodies of Light remains a grounded and satisfying read. By striving for authenticity and for hopefulness in its depiction of Maggie's chequered existence Down's novel avoids the opera of trauma for titillation instead serving what feels like fidelity understanding and dignity. But Bodies of Light is streets ahead of her earlier work bringing the sophistication and craft of her short stories together with her keen insight into the ways we all yearn for connection and the things that keep us apart...Heartbreaking as it may be this novel is so rich with the details both visceral and true of Josie's life that it will be deeply felt by everyone who reads it. 'Stephen Romei Saturday Paper'Bodies of Light is an assured second novel from the mind of a writer who has taken the time to really think through what she wants to express in a novel and how she wants the reader to feel as they go through it. 'RNZ Nine to Noon'A truly beautiful modern Australian novel—one that grabs hold of you the second you enter it and absolutely will not let you go... Jennifer Down is clearly one of Australia's best young novelists... An epic and transformative novel the journey through which changes you as the reader and also your understandings of the world. [Down] takes such intense trauma and pain that her character suffers and turns it into a lovely magnificence...It was a privilege to have read this book; someone please wipe my mind so I can do it all over again. The book contains themes that are often depicted in a simplistic gratuitous way but Down presents them with tenderness and grace and as someone living with the ongoing effects of trauma I found the experience of reading this extremely validating and moving. ' Kate Evans RN Bookshelf'An ambitious novel...that sees Down demonstrate her imaginative range and take risks...The result is a daring and compelling work suffused with pathos and an impressive degree of empathic vulnerability. '2022 Stella Prize judges' report'In Bodies of Light Jennifer Down crafts a story of almost impossible regeneration from the ashes of unbearable pain and loss...With ethical precision Down insists that we do not look away from the destructive consequences of life on the fringes that we do not render invisible those who come through miraculously despite decades spent in the shadows of institutionalised neglect socially sanctioned loneliness unforgivable poverty and the attendant abuse that accompanies these conditions...Bodies of Light is a novel of affirmation resilience and survival told through an astonishing voice that reinvents itself from age six to sixty. 'Honi Soit'Bodies of Light is a virtuoso performance from Jennifer Down showing a remarkable level of research imagination and art...Lyrical staggeringly rich in detail moving and ambitious Bodies of Light establishes Jennifer Down as one of Australia's most important writers. 'Spectator 'The Miles Franklin judges got it right this year—this is a masterwork...Jennifer Down is a writer with profound insight skill and compassion and I can't even imagine how she'll top this extraordinary novel. 'New York Times Bodies of Light By far my most anticipated book of 2021 somehow I managed to turn away from any mention of Bodies of Light in an attempt to "go in blind" and succeeded. As I read this I realised how desensitized to these kinds of stories I am: I hear them at work every day and have accepted that I play a role in them too (the best I can hope for is to be a cameo appearance of a slightly less shit social worker). Would probably be eye opening to readers who aren't otherwise exposed to these stories though - I'm not sure why Down is drawn to the community services in this way but I'm pleased she is because she handles these stories with such care. The prose is lyrical and beautiful but a bit much for my personal taste - sometimes people just cut up apples they don't turn them into crescent moons - and again it was hard to believe our deeply traumatized narrator would be pulling out these phrases no matter how many classic novels she read in the library while dodging the police. What was most interesting was Down's exploration of what it's like to live without shared memories or a past - something I have never considered in regards to children going through the foster care system and something I am grateful to have been made aware of. There was enough hope and love in this story to prevent it from being too confronting and I found myself really cherishing the relationships Maggie built with gentle understanding and kind hearted people, Her

work has appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald the Saturday Paper the Lifted Brow and Overland: Her first novel *Our Magic Hour* will be published in 2016, 'Aokigahara' won the 2014 ABR Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Award. So by the grace of a photograph that had inexplicably gone viral Tony had found me, I had no way of knowing whether he was nuts or not; whether he might go to the cops: Maybe that sounds paranoid but I don't think it's so ridiculous, People have gone to prison for much lesser things than accusations of child-killing, A history she's reluctant to revisit: dark memories and unspoken trauma bruised thighs and warning knocks on bedroom walls unfathomable loss.

Sublimely wrought in devastating detail *Bodies of Light* confirms Jennifer Down as one of the writers defining her generation. *Bodies of Light* Jennifer Down's award-winning novel follows the life of Maggie Sullivan, Now in her forties Maggie's reinvented herself far from her home in Australia: But a chance encounter with someone from her past leads her to reflect on her life, It's one that's been marked by trauma and loss which she's somehow come to terms with but only after a long and difficult personal journey, She's also very careful not to rehash those annoyingly fake triumphant narratives in which education solves everything. Down's novel's grounded in research and first-person accounts from women who experienced the Australian care system which helps with the sense of authenticity underlying this. But partway through this suddenly shifts from coming-of-age tale into crime novel after a series of tragic events lead to accusations of murder and Maggie ends up on the run, Although the sections that follow - as Maggie struggles to remake herself eventually ending up in America - are well-crafted and often lyrical they can feel a little stretched out, So although there was a great deal that I really liked about this and it was far from the indulgent misery fest I'd feared it didn't always quite come together for me. Thanks to Edelweiss and publisher Text Publishing for an ARC Rating: 3 to 3, 5 *Bodies of Light* A compelling novel that dipped a little in the final third, As a mental health social worker I found this to be a very accurate portrayal of trauma responses: I know it has been referred to as 'trauma porn' but I find that description quite reductive given the amount of people who have experienced trauma. This novel should contain trigger warnings - child sexual abuse baby deaths drug-taking etc: So she starts her young life in foster care and eventually group homes. After drifting a bit Maggie finds a decent man and settles down young: I've become quite iffy about books about trauma - I call them trauma/misery porn: While this novel contains many traumatic moments the delicate writing its brutal realism and structure manage to keep this novel out of the misery porn category: A special mention goes to Casey Whitoo - I loved her voice and narration, *Bodies of Light* I cannot possibly do this book justice in a review just a few words about how it affected me, Easily one of the most powerful books I have ever read yet I would not recommend it to anyone I know, Child sexual abuse drug abuse cot death anyone wanting to avoid anything like this stay away. Like *A Fine Balance* every good thing that happens in Maggie's life will be soon followed by something horrible again and again, But it was the narrative of Maggie's life and the various people she came across on the way in three countries over 40+ years that were extraordinary, The writing is of the highest quality the story uncompromising. Consider this added to that list (probably the highest compliment I can offer a book). It's too much for a child to bear but Maggie somehow grows into adulthood. We see joy love and connection amongst the pain and trauma, The structure means that from the outset Down positions the reader with a question mark about the death of Maggie's baby, But we are bound to Maggie and I found myself uncomfortably wanting her to escape punishment whether she had anything to do with her babies' deaths or not, And that's all because Down is such a damn fine writer. This book is in interesting conversation with *Stranger Care* by Sarah Sentilles a memoir of her experience fostering baby Coco. Maggie and Coco are bound by the same flawed systems systems that failed and endangered them: Down has taken risks with each successive book she has written and this was a huge leap, That she pulled it off so spectacularly shows what a huge talent she is: If it's not clear - I think this is an excellent book, Gripping tender and thought provoking *Bodies of Light* leaves you wanting more: 'Byron Shire Echo' An epic Bildungsroman that honours the dignity of crafting a life in the wake of childhood trauma: Down's compassion for her character her refusal to look away from intolerable suffering is a lesson for us all. 'Books+Publishing' A remarkably empathic book...a life that the reader cannot deny:

'Declan Fry Guardian' A story of a woman's remarkable resilience the possibility of human kindness and the necessity of hope...Intelligently tenderly restrained. 'Patrick Carey RN Bookshelf' There is no other release in 2021 that I would recommend more passionately to almost every reader: 'Matilda Dixon-Smith Meanjin' It should come as no surprise that Jennifer Down has delivered another gem, 'Bec Kavanagh Readings Monthly' A truly stunning novel...with such rich emotional depth, 'Kill Your Darlings' This is an absolute staggering heart in your mouth read, While often brutal—the main character Maggie is confronting the trauma wrought from being a ward of the state for all of her childhood—the writing is shot through with light: I don't think I've read anything that so viscerally writes the body on the page, Calling into question notions of identity invisibility sexuality trauma and belonging Maggie's relationship with her own body and the bodies of others is devastating and sublime. 'Molly Murn Matilda Bookshop' An ambitious novel that explores the psychological fallout of a life that has gone wrong from the start. It is laden with emotions and gorgeous images and is unafraid of sentimentality, Reading this book is like getting sucked up into a blanket and when you emerge out of the cocoon the world around you looks a bit different: Or maybe you look at it differently with a bit more care I think. 'Madeleine Gray Sydney Review of Books' Extraordinary...Tender and spiky evocative and engrossing this gorgeous novel will break your heart and linger in your brain: 'Jo Case InDaily' [Down] takes her skills to new heights with the stunning Bodies of Light...It's a major achievement and is exactly my kind of Great Australian Novel: 'Alison Huber Readings Monthly' Overwhelmingly affecting and empathic at times surprisingly hopeful this is a remarkable read and one of our favourite books of the year: 'WellRead' Staggering in its scope encompassing half a century of life lived by its magnetic and mystifying central character, Down balances [the] darkness with small moments of beauty rendering Maggie's complex harrowing life with grace humanity and hope, A dignified documentation bearing witness to a life both quiet and immense Bodies of Light is Down's strongest work yet. 'Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen SMH/Age' Exquisitely written and extraordinarily tender. '2SER Final Draft' The most moving book I've read over the past few years, This is a wonderful sad and hugely empathetic book and I'm so glad I read it. 'Ellen Cregan Kill Your Darlings' A story of one person's life and at the same time a reflection of the numerous lives we all lead: She has created characters that feel so real I realised I was delaying the final chapter because I didn't want to say goodbye. 'Deidre Fidge Kill Your Darlings' Remarkable brutal...[A] detailed carefully observed tenderness-and-rage study of childhood on the edge. 'ABC' [A] beautifully controlled account of a life devastated by systemic failure. '2022 Barbara Jefferis Award judges comments' Suffused with moments of great beauty...Unforgettable: 'Nicole Abadee Good Weekend' Outstanding...Bodies of Light requires attention and patience unfolding at its own pace and ending up exactly where it should be, I didn't know anything about the book except that it was supposedly beautiful and heartbreaking: It's been a few days and I am still not sure how I really feel about it: The first hundred or so pages are a pretty realistic account of a young person Maggie growing up in the out of home care system, I also inhale trauma memoirs almost weekly ("to switch off") and was very conscious of this being fiction. After that Down asks the reader to suspend belief - something I struggle with in life and as a reader: I thought and even hoped that we were going to get into Gone Girl-esque thriller territory but that didn't happen. Hard to discuss this without giving it all away but the whole time I was thinking really? So much happens. Years pass in pages or at times paragraphs and yet there is always more, Down is telling truths without being believable a dynamic which challenged me. In terms of the writing: I broke into a sweat at every sighting of the painfully twee "teevee" which unfortunately appeared on about every third page: Down is so good at writing with a strong sense of place and her descriptions of Melbourne were particularly well drawn. A friend told me this novel is meant to tell a realistic experience of the foster care system in Australia which I really hope isn't true. I found this book similar to A Little Life due to the constant disbelief at how much suffering and trauma one person can endure in a single life time, But this makes you deeply attached to Maggie and her story especially the relationships she develops, Similar to how you feel for Willem and Harold in A Little Life - complete adoration and tenderness toward these characters who have made an unbearable life

bearable. Bodies of Light Books like this are why I read fiction, This is a singular devastatingly beautiful novel about trauma and seeking peace on your own terms, Jennifer Down immerses readers fully in Maggie's enigmatic but indelible life (/lives) and in the process reveals deeply embedded truths about our own selves, 24 hours after finishing Bodies of Light I'm still sitting with Maggie and with the lump in my throat[1]

Jennifer Down is a writer and editor from Melbourne. Or: he'd found Maggie. A quiet small-town existence. An unexpected Facebook message jolting her back to the past. She became a new person a long time ago. Much of the setting was familiar to me as a Melbournian. Work like this provides validation. Horrible things happen to her at the hands of men. They have a house and jobs and soon they become parents. Tragedy strikes. Again and again. Some people never get a break. I'm glad I went into this blindly. One GR reviewer called it 'trauma porn'. 'Mesmerising uncompromising and extraordinary.' as another reviewer said. I agree with the latter not the former. This is Maggie's life story. Enough trigger warnings to break the alarm. There were so many things that resonated with me though. I could hardly put this one down. A justified winner of the 2022 Miles Franklin Award. The kindnesses she does receive offer brief respite. And of course her pain and trauma come with her. But this is not a brutal punishing book to read. Such clever narrative tension from a master storyteller. I dreamt of Maggie I agonised about her I fretted. But I always admire the leap regardless. It's a beautiful thing to behold. I'll 100% be picking up Down's previous writing. 'Yves Rees ABR Books of the Year 2021' Fierce and compelling. A novel with immense dignity and heart.' Carrie Tiffany 'Mesmerising uncompromising and extraordinary. A whole life is in these pages.' Robbie Arnott 'Brutal and beautiful—I couldn't stop reading it. Jennifer Down is a brilliant writer.' '3RRR Glasshouse' 'Mesmerising brutal and unforgettable.' Laura Brading SMH 'A sweeping intensely immersive novel. I could not put this down. Down is one of Australia's most promising young writers.' James Blackwell Overland 'A tremendous book.' 2022 Miles Franklin judges' comments 'Epic exquisite. Down writes her heroine's story with great empathy and love. Down's narrative is layered and sweeping.' Elizabeth McCarthy Triple R 'Distinctive unflinching. All in all a mixed bag for me. Bodies of Light Incredibly harrowing read. Bodies of Light.