

Pam Macintyre – Australian Review of Books. March 2000.

MAX

Suicide is ‘not a kind thing to do...when your friend killed himself, the meaning of it all just fell through your hands like mist between your fingers’. Max’s best friend Lou is dead, by choice, at 17 and Max is lost and confused at his act and at the loss of friendship. How he tries to make sense of this is the territory traversed by this book. Max finds himself on an increasingly self-destructive trail of confrontation with the police and taking dangerous risks kayaking. His graffiti forays offer a kind of metaphysical consolation but even the significance of what he writes is elusive. Dave, his loving father, struggles to understand and support him; an understanding school principal cuts him some slack and two friends, the beautiful Mai and the hermit Nick, allows him space for confession and catharsis of sorts. But when he tests his own mortality, there is little they can do. He is on his own.

While the central impetus for this book is suicide, what it explores is the meaning of friendship, and how a young person’s sense of self and stability may be gently and gradually healed in the wake of such a disturbing act. Immediately readable, lyrical and allusive, the novel is free of any didacticism as Max works through and around his feelings to a still place where Lou is present and welcome.