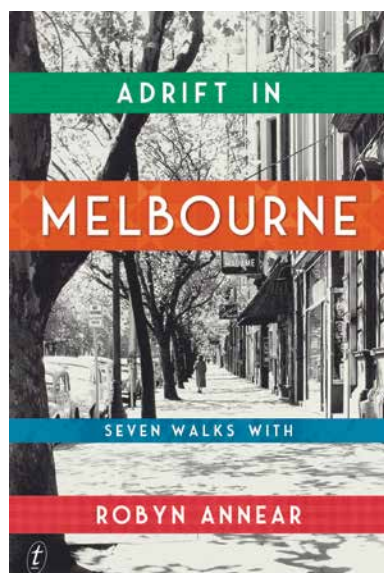


# Kritikos

agora reviews

Available online at [agora.htav.asn.au/kritikos](http://agora.htav.asn.au/kritikos)

Books available for review are listed online at [agora.htav.asn.au/books](http://agora.htav.asn.au/books)



## Adrift In Melbourne: Seven Walks with Robyn Annear

By Robyn Annear

Text Publishing

November 2021

288 pages, hardback

ISBN: 9781922330970

9781922330970

RRP: \$34.99

Reviewed by Cat Jones,  
Strathmore Secondary College

When I was completing my Masters degree, our supervisor took us on several walks around the inner suburbs of Melbourne to discover hidden parts of these streets that may not have caught our eye. The aim was for us to not just look at the shop fronts, or the gardens, but to stop, look up and be lost in the moment when standing before a building or a pair of buildings—Melbourne hides many stories beyond their façades. Therefore, it was with great interest that I dove into *Adrift in Melbourne* as it gave me a chance to ‘look up’ again.

Anyone who has travelled through Melbourne would know that in its busiest moments it challenges an individual’s ability to ‘drift’. The city, now returning to whatever ‘normal’ is after the COVID lockdowns, is teeming with life as people traverse its streets, eager to get to a café, their workplace, or get home. But do we really know the stories behind the buildings and the geographical spaces? This is the aim of Annear’s book—to tell these little gems of stories and remind us of the bigger, more well-known aspects of Melbourne as a metropolis.

What I admire about Annear’s writing is its quirkiness. This is a book written for everyone, and she is unapologetically enamoured with the city. In the early pages she writes that ‘vanished does not mean gone’, with the aim to show stories that are hidden as a result of development. It could be a hard thing to achieve, as this city is built on the colonisation by the British and (as with all cities) there are stories that are lost to the echoes of time.

But Annear is an accomplished historian who is able to write with such clarity and engagement. The

book is set out in the seven sections mentioned in the title, covering part of Melbourne’s grid and a little bit more. This allows Annear to give the depth of narrative that is promised—she covers a range of viewpoints that highlights the diversity, successes and tragedies of Melbourne’s history. It encourages the reader to pause in their walks to stop and ‘breathe in’ the lives that had been here before, such as Tom Mooney (publican and creator of the Chop Cellar), Quang Mow Shang (tea merchant and lottery shop owner), Ada Gunn (proprietor of the female-only Lounger’s Club) or Winberri (a young Taungrurong man who stood up to troops).

This is a book that will engage the lifelong Melbourne resident or the traveller to this city. It encourages the reader to walk the streets as they learn about the brothels, the workers’ rights, the shopping and drinking history, and the theatre life. But Annear also encourages the armchair reader, and suggests ways to visualise the sections of the streets that she is describing.

I’d suggest not trying to plough through this book quickly from cover to cover, as this is a book that needs and deserves time. Take the suggested route, and see the sections one-by-one.

The most important lesson from Annear’s book is that we should all be tourists in our own city. Those who were educated in this state learn some parts of Melbourne’s development, but even then there are so many hidden gems that the curriculum and class time do not allow us to delve into. Put on your walking shoes, grab this book and a camera, and get out into the city. You won’t regret it.