

My Book of the Month – *Jack*, by Marilynne Robinson

Kylie Day

I am currently reading *Jack*, the new novel by Marilynne Robinson in her justly acclaimed Gilead series. Each book centres on a different person in the circle of the Reverend John Ames, a white Congregationalist pastor in the small fictional town of Gilead, Iowa. So far we have heard from the perspective of Rev John Ames (in *Gilead*), his best friend Rev Boughton, the local Presbyterian minister (in *Home*), Ames' young wife Lila (in *Lila*) and now we come back to *Jack*, the prodigal son of Rev Boughton. From the opening pages, it is clear that race is going to be a key issue. Living in the segregated city of St Louis, Missouri, Jack is falling in love with an African-American woman, the child of a preacher.

I would recommend anything written by Marilynne Robinson, her fiction and her non-fiction, all of which unashamedly explores questions of faith. She has a great mind and, in my view, she is one of the best modern Christian thinkers and writers. *Gilead* and *Housekeeping* are two of my all-time favourite novels. People on the fringe have a central role in her fiction, as they do in Christianity, and I can't think of *Gilead* and *Housekeeping* without remembering how deeply moving I found them.

There are a number of podcast interviews with Marilynne Robinson that would be worth pairing with reading her books. She was interviewed at length by Barack Obama in 2015 and in recent weeks on the launch of *Jack*, by Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury. Both conversations are in two parts and all are worth listening to.