

'One of the best Australian novels I've read in years'

EMILY BITTO

READING NOTES

ANDREW PIPPOS

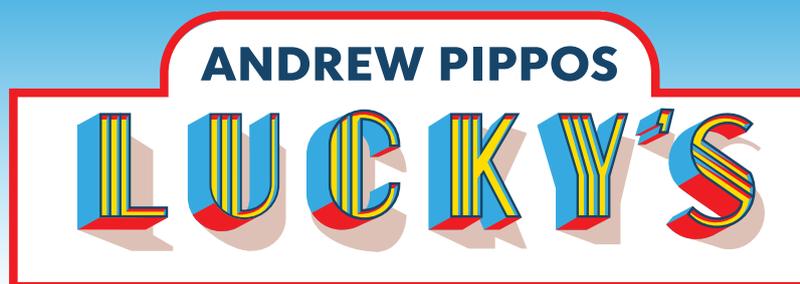
LUCKY'S

A MAGICAL SAGA OF LOVE, FAMILY AND SECOND CHANCES



'An
unforgettable
epic'
ALICE PUNG

'Gorgeous...
I didn't want
it to stop'
RONNIE SCOTT



Blurb

Lucky's is a story of family.

It is also about a man called Lucky.

His restaurant chain.

A fire that changed everything.

A *New Yorker* article which might save a career.

The mystery of a missing father.

An impostor who got the girl.

An unthinkable tragedy.

A roll of the dice.

And a story of love—lost, sought and won again (at last).

Author bio

In planning for his debut novel, *Lucky's*, Andrew Pippos did not need to look far for inspiration. This richly layered, sweeping saga documents the rise and fall of a family restaurant business over six decades.

Growing up, Andrew was a regular visitor to his family's cafe in regional Australia. The Pippos's *Cafe De-Luxe* operated in the remote New South Wales town of Brewarrina for more than eighty years. Andrew's early experiences at the *Cafe De-Luxe* laid the foundation of his work as a writer. His relatives—who emigrated from the island of Ithaca, home of the hero Odysseus—would regale him with their favourite stories from Greek mythology, and over the years, his love of legends evolved into a love of literature, which led Andrew to tell stories of his own.

The compelling role of the Greek-Australian cafe within modern Australian identity is increasingly documented in popular culture and history books alike. While sadly few exist now, for much of the second half of the twentieth century these cafes could be found on urban shopping streets and in rural country towns. They represented a new Australian zeitgeist and symbolised every-day multiculturalism. The Greek-Australian cafe milieu gave Andrew his earliest sense of community.

A former journalist, Andrew has a doctorate in Creative Writing and tutors at the University of Technology, Sydney. He lives in Sydney's inner west.

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Plot Summary

In London 2002, Emily Main is about to embark on a trip to Sydney, Australia in order to write a story commissioned by the *New Yorker*. With her professional and personal life in disarray, the article could be Emily's second chance.

The article is about a chain of successful diner-style restaurants in Australia, 'Lucky's', and the mass shooting, known as 'the Third of April', that occurred in 1994 at the last remaining Lucky's cafe, in Sydney's inner west. At the centre of the story is the eponymous cafe owner, Vasilis 'Lucky' Mallios, a 77-year-old Greek-American ex-WWII Army mess steward who bears a likeness to American band leader Benny Goodman.

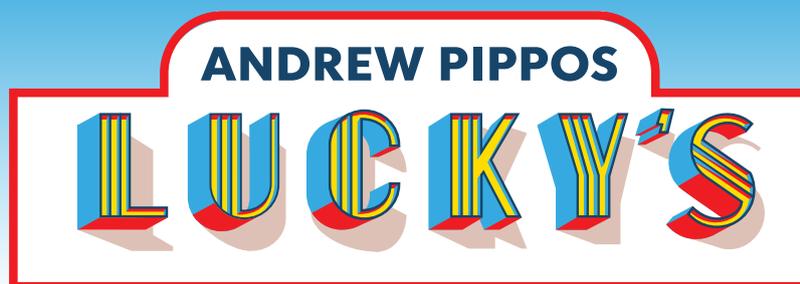
In 1971, for Emily's seventh birthday, her estranged but beloved father, Ian Asquith, gives her a painting of a restaurant called 'Lucky's'. Later that day Emily witnesses her father's suicide. Lucky and his story are much more than a job opportunity for Emily; she believes he holds the key that may unlock the mystery of her father's life, and death.

Through various flashback chapters Lucky's life unfolds. Lucky meets his wife Valia Asproyerakas in 1945 while he's stationed in Sydney; they're soon married and Lucky resettles in Australia with Valia's family—her father Achilles and younger sister Penelope—and works at the family-owned and run cafe, Cafe Achillion. Tensions rise within the family as Achilles' temperamental and belligerent behaviour escalates.

After a successful plan to drive Achilles out of the cafe and into hiding, Lucky and Valia run the cafe with great success. However, tragedy strikes one night when a fire engulfs the cafe and Penelope is killed. Weeks later Lucky is contacted by Ian Asquith, an acquaintance he encountered the day he first met Valia when he impersonated Benny Goodman. Ian is returning to England and gives Lucky a cheque for a large sum. It's this money that Lucky will use to start his successful restaurant franchise. The real reason for Ian Asquith's generosity—and the link to Penelope's death—is revealed to Lucky and Valia years later.

The years pass which see the rise and fall of Lucky the restaurateur and Lucky the husband. In the present day, Lucky, who lives alone, is attempting to source money to fund his endeavour to reopen a restaurant. With every bank refusing to give Lucky a loan he auditions for the television gameshow *Wheel of Fortune*. Emily conducts interviews with Lucky and also various people associated with the Third of April shooting, including Valia's daughter by her second marriage, Sophia, and Sophia's son Jamie. During her interviews with Lucky Emily asks him about her father but Lucky consistently denies knowing him. Emily is convinced he is lying.

With Lucky's *Wheel of Fortune* hopes dashed he finally tells Emily that he did in fact know her father and the money used to start his restaurant business came from Ian, though he does not reveal the real reason for Ian's goodwill.



Emily's article never gets published; in the future she will move to Sydney and write a book about the Third of April and its aftermath. Lucky and Emily do a favour for Sophia and Jamie that brings the four of them together. Lucky is home but no longer alone.

Themes

Stories and storytelling

'I care about stories. My whole career has been devoted to storytelling in one way or another.' (Page 143)

1. Storytelling and stories are a vital part of *Lucky's*—the book consists of multiple interlocking stories. What are the different levels of embedded narrative—a story within a story—told in the novel?
2. From the very first page we are told that Lucky wants to 'fix his own story—to be specific, how it ended'. Do you think Lucky is successful in 'fixing' how his story ends? Why, or why not?

Emily said she herself had witnessed a traumatic event as a child and it made her want to write well about violence and grief and trauma, to narrativise an event with honesty. (Page 134)

There must be a surge of words waiting in Joanna Matfield. (Page 135)

3. To what extent would you consider the story as a whole and the various stories within as an exercise or evidence of storytelling as a form of therapy? Which characters, main or secondary, are examples?
4. There are numerous mythological and literary references scattered throughout *Lucky's*. What role does mythology and classical literature play in the novel?

Lies and imposters

A sudden flash of mortification in Asquith, before he realised the imposter could be useful. The fake 'Goodman' showed him what was possible: he demonstrated the lengths to which you might go. His fraud suggested Asquith should go further with the Bion project rather than, as he'd been thinking lately, destroying the notebook and manuscript and trying to fare better at his consulate job. (Pages 152-153)

5. The novel highlights two acts of deception and the different outcomes—what are the parallels and differences between these acts of fraud? From what desires do they stem? How are they facilitated?

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Here, too, was Emily's secret life: a strand of kinship between them. Asquith was a fraud, and Emily felt like an imposter herself. (Page 164)

6. Emily also perceives herself as a fraud: why do you think this is? Is she justified in thinking this about herself?

His performance, as Lucky would remember it, possessed the glory of a lie that was nearly as meaningful as the truth. (Page 68)

7. What is the role of lying in *Lucky's*, and how does it vary from character to character?

What good would the truth do, after all this time? (Page 346)

8. Why does Lucky withhold information from Emily? In the final chapter, why does he tell her that particular story? Should he have told her the full truth, do you think? Why, or why not?

Migration, racism and multiculturalism

Lucky, who did not have a new job, suspected by now that his unsuccessful search for restaurant and hotel work in the past three weeks might have something to do with the fact he was American, or because he was ethnically Greek—or probably both. (Page 172)

Like many of Lucky's franchisees, Stavros referred to the boss as 'the American'. They pronounced him foreign, not-Greek, part of a diaspora distinct from theirs. (Page 245)

9. Lucky experiences racism from both outside and within his own ethnic community. What role does racism play in the novel?

Q. If America is so great, why aren't you living there?

A. My wife was born in Sydney. This is her home.

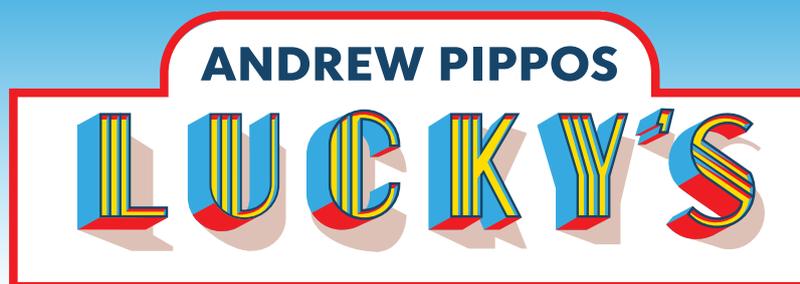
Q. Why do migrants come to this country?

A. Migrants come for a new life. They're changed by their new home and in turn they alter that country. (Page 180)

10. How are certain characters in the novel (Achilles, Lucky, and Emily) transformed by migration, and how in turn do they affect their new world?

It got to be oppressive the way some Greeks expected others to hold on to culture and language without error, like a treasure, two generations, three generations deep in a new country. The pride in depth of ethnicity. The shame in its lack. (Page 238)

11. What is Pippos trying to convey about the migrant experience in this passage?



The idea of ethnic purity was a diaspora fantasy. Everyone in this room was a mixture of influences, a new type of person. They accepted their impurity or they didn't.
(Page 239)

12. Post-WWII Australia is a multicultural melting pot: to what extent does place and time affect the action within the novel? Could the events have easily taken place in contemporary Australia?

'And we kept the two or three Greek dishes Lucky put on the menu. Back then those cafes were known for not serving Greek food.' (Page 269)

13. An important milieu in the novel is what historians of immigration now call the Greek-Australian cafe. These restaurants, which resembled diners, were once ubiquitous in Australian cities and small towns, but they are now obsolete. Why are they obsolete? Why did they not serve Greek food?

Tragedy, trauma and family

His life was a tragedy, she knew that. (Page 164)

'Total disaster!' said Marjorie. 'Oh my, this truly is a Greek tragedy.' (Page 342)

14. All the characters are connected by some form of trauma. For Lucky and most of the other characters this trauma is ostensibly the Third of April massacre and for Emily it is witnessing her father's suicide. What are the other traumas that run through the novel? Do you think any of these traumas are reconciled? If so, how?

15. Of all the storylines, which do you think is the greatest tragedy? Please discuss.

Achilles Asproyerakas left the room then returned with his olive-wood club and he brought the cudgel down across her arms, breaking bone and fracturing the wooden desktop with a splintery shattering crack. The moment he heard Penny's cries—the worst sound Achilles ever heard—he was no longer angry with his daughter. (Page 121)

16. The novel places more emphasis on the consequences of violence rather than using violence as a dramatic endpoint. How do the characters confront or contextualise the violent events in their lives?

'The thing was a burden. I can help her with that. I'll take care of it.' (Page 325)

17. The themes of responsibility and accountability run throughout the novel. Lucky continues to look after Valia's family—Achilles, Sophia and Jamie—even through he's not blood-related or technically family. How do these themes manifest among the other characters within the novel?

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‘That money was a poison in the business. I live with it, but that load is all mine. It shouldn’t be yours. It should be a secret.’ (Page 330)

18. Guilt and regret play significant roles in the actions of many characters. Which characters show guilt and regret and how do they act on these? What affects do they have on the narrative action?
19. *Lucky’s* is a narrative about family, which gives particular focus to the role of the father. Discuss the father figures within the novel. And in turn discuss the mother figures within the narrative.
20. How is parenthood thwarted and later rediscovered in the lives of Lucky and Emily?

Luck and second chances

21. What role does luck play in the novel?

Marjorie offered a few words about the capriciousness of the Wheel of Fortune—and yet she pronounced this volatility the same thing that made the game exciting. (Page 289)

22. What parallels can be drawn between *Wheel of Fortune* and life, and how Lucky responds to how each plays out?
23. The novel is full of second chances; discuss some examples. How do Lucky, Emily, Achilles, Ian, and Sophia deal with the successes and failures in their lives?

Characters

Ian Asquith

That he’d now ruined his civil service career and turned his life into the consequence of common and ineludible disappointments of early adulthood—dissatisfaction with his teachers, frustration with his talent, with the outcome of his education—which were all hurts he should have relinquished but couldn’t, well, this made him feel ever more pathetic. (Page 185)

24. Why does Ian Asquith take his own life?
25. In terms of character and storyline, what parallels can be drawn between Ian Asquith and Henry Matfield?
26. Ian is a fairly pathetic figure. Do you sympathise with him?

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Emily Main

Her father's suicide left seven-year-old Emily with an impression: that she wasn't enough for him. That she wasn't enough to keep him alive. Why would Ian kill himself when he had Emily as a daughter? Maybe she'd said or done something that she couldn't recall and couldn't identify as coldness or misbehaviour given how complicated the adult world was, given her inability to understand why people did the weird things they did. (Pages 57-58)

27. In what ways does Asquith influence the course of Emily's life?

She was relying on Lucky, and he was still screwing things up. She had relied on her husband, and he fucked up. She needed Liam to be her friend, but he couldn't be that person. (Page 271)

No, Emily was growing tired of this question, of looking outside herself for a sense of herself. (Page 302)

28. How, in the course of the novel, is Emily liberated from the person she used to be? How does she change? What does her future look like?

29. What do you think the purpose of Emily and Liam's relationship is to her character arc?

Vasilis 'Lucky' Mallios

30. Peter Popescu describes Lucky as 'Don Quixote' (page 55)—is this an apt description? How would you describe Lucky? What drives him? Do you like him?

31. Which significant events in Lucky's life are beyond his control?

32. What do Lucky's gambling addiction and love of *Wheel of Fortune* tell us about him as a character?

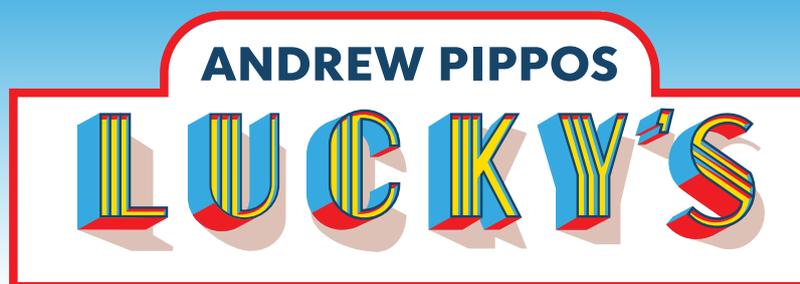
33. In terms of character and storyline, what are the similarities and differences between Lucky and Ian Asquith?

Achilles Asproyerakas

The entrance to the Café Achillion was one boundary of what might be called Achilles' world, outside of which he felt vulnerable and alien. (Page 46)

34. What effects do the pressures of assimilation have on Achilles?

35. What are your thoughts around the irony created by the juxtaposition of Achilles' olive-wood club and the symbolic olive leaf branch? What does this tell us about Achilles?



Achilles couldn't leave his daughters because he believed they belonged to him; he thought men owned women, that families were possessions created by transactions. (Page 44)

The regulars called him 'Mad Achilles', though never to his face, never within earshot. To some customers, Achilles functioned as a bogeyman, a child-frightener, the devil's substitute in the suburb of Bardwell Park, Sydney. (Page 37)

36. As a reader were you able to understand or empathise with Achilles? Why, or why not?

Writing Style

Lucky sat tucked at his kitchen table, newspaper spread across the surface, stripping rigani from the stalks. The herbs had hung inside a cupboard for a week—not long enough to properly dry—but he couldn't wait; this old ritual was necessary. (Page 1)

37. The novel begins with a short chapter in which Lucky places dried herbs into a jar for later use. But what else is going on in this chapter? What do we know about Lucky from this brief scene?

38. The novel is told from various perspectives—predominantly Emily and Lucky's. Do you think the novel could be told as effectively from only one point of view? Why, or why not?

39. Describe the line of causation in the novel. How are the events related? Why does Pippos order the novel in a non-linear way?

40. A few chapters before the end of the novel we are told that Emily's *New Yorker* article 'would never be published, nor filed nor finished' (page 313). Why do you think Pippos chose this point in the novel to reveal this? What affect did this have on your reading of the rest of the novel, and the novel as a whole?

41. *Lucky's* is a sprawling story that spans several decades. Pippos dramatises certain events in the lives of his characters, and he summarises or refers to other significant moments, but there are some important things he leaves out altogether. What major events does Pippos leave out of *Lucky's*? Why?

42. What is the significance of what is about to happen in the final scene of the novel?