

Not another sensitive novel about Aussies in time of war, I thought when I first saw this novel – all mateship and suffering women at home. But I was pleasantly surprised. *Silent Parts* is a wry and genial novel with some very interesting things to say about masculinity, families and belonging.

Harry Lambert is in his forties when he leaves his country bakery for the army in 1917. In France he thinks he’s safe, as a camp baker behind the lines, until the order comes to get his kit together and head for the front. Panicking – or coming to his senses – he escapes and hides on a farm with an elderly peasant woman. The relationship that develops is not what one might expect, and eventually Harry redeems himself – in his own eyes at least – without having to fight.

The narrative is split between Harry’s story, told in the third person, his friend Colombe’s monologue, and the efforts of a young relative fifty years later to piece together his story for a family reunion. It doesn’t all hang together perfectly, but in its quiet way *Silent Parts* is one of the most enjoyable novels I’ve read for a while.