
Reviewed by Gillian Dooley for Writers Radio, Radio Adelaide, recorded …

*Dreamland* is Sydney author Tom Gilling’s third novel. The first two were *The Sooterkin* and *Miles McGinty*, both historical novels with elements of fantasy. *Dreamland*, on the other hand, is a gritty urban thriller with most of the usual elements in place: most, but not all.

Nick Carmody is a journalist hanging on tenuously to a dead-end job as a sub-editor on a Sydney daily. He boards with a friend, since a long-term relationship has just broken up. He has no property, no children, nothing to keep him tied down. So far, so formulaic. An old school friend, Danny, the wayward celebrity son of the wealthy and perhaps unscrupulous Harry Grogan, summons Nick to his fashionable nightclub on New Year’s Eve. Nick finds Danny drugged to the gills and unable to tell him whatever it was he had been going to tell him. Later that night Danny is caught on a speed camera. Since this is by no means a first offence and would mean gaol, Nick allows Harry Grogan to talk him into taking the fall for the speeding ticket, for a consideration.

Of course nothing is that simple. What Nick doesn’t know is that the car has been involved in a hit and run accident and, having claimed he was driving the car, he is now prime suspect for manslaughter. He decides he needs to disappear, and when the opportunity to become someone new presents itself, it seems the obvious thing to do.

*Dreamland* is readable and not devoid of intellectual subtlety. Themes of identity,
chance, and justice arise. Not all the mysteries are solved and ends are not neatly tied up.

Nevertheless, it never really transcends its thriller genre: few of the characters live as individuals and the plot holds few real surprises among its dramatic twists. Gilling may have been trying for something more than a standard thriller, but he has ended up with something less.