



Shallows

Tim Winton

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Shallows is set in a small whaling town in Western Australia, where land-based whaling has been a tradition for over 150 years. When Queenie Cookson decides to join an antiwhaling protest group, she defies her husband, her ancestry, and her community. Winner of the prestigious Miles Franklin Award in Australia, this eloquent and moving novel speaks with immediacy and passion of the conflict between the values of a closeknit, traditional society and the evolving mores of the wider world.

Shallows Details

Date : Published October 1st 1993 by Graywolf Press (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9781555971939

Author : Tim Winton

Format : Paperback 240 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Australia, Contemporary, Novels

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From Reader Review Shallows for online ebook

Noelene says

Didn't hold my interest.

Fiona Hocking says

I had to read this for school. Everyone (including me) hated it - and put me off reading Winton for years. Luckily I tried Dirt Music - and he won me over in a big way, and I've loved everything he's written since.

Wondering whether I should give this another try. Was it just not pitched for a 17 year old Melbourne suburban girl?

Eric says

Winton's a wonderful writer and chronicler of all things Australian. Here he takes on whales, the whaling culture, the anti-whaling culture, the burdens of family (and history) and per usual, the mystery that is the relationship between men and women. Not bad for 235 pages that could easily have been bloated to double that. I guess someone had to write a short novel about whaling.

Unlike many of his compatriots, Winton writes strong and compelling female characters. Queenie Coupar Cookson in another one. She sees right through her past, her present and the false allure of the radical, potential future, and eventually comes to peace with it all. The final image, Queenie, hubby Cleve and a group of beaching whales, is a powerful and moving one. Good stuff.

Tenli says

Move over Moby. Shallows is the story of a whaling town in southwestern Australia and the pull of history on its citizens, including the cetaceans.

Michelle says

He is good - that Tim Winton fellow. I hadn't heard of this book and neither had the friends I asked. Set in Angelus/Albany - whaling industry/protesters - 3 different periods of history.

He is a bit of a master. Quite a powerful book. Think I might have to read it again to take it all in. The whaling industry has long ceased in Albany (& they've figured out you can make money out of tourism) - but there is still the Japanese whaling - so this is still a very relevant book for these times. Well worth a read.

Big Pete says

Possibly the best of Winton's pre-*Cloudstreet* novels. The plot of *in the winter dark* is stronger, and the prose is at his most distilled, but *Shallows* is strong on all fronts, and the prose is nothing short of a delight, often lyrical and sprawling yet at the same time tightly focused. It is to Winton's credit that this is counted as a major minor work and yet compared favourably to *Moby-Dick*.

There are sequences of imagery nothing short of magnificent - especially when it comes to the sea, where Winton's understanding and fascination of the deeps delivers some of the most evocative portraits of the sea I have ever read.

The characters are strong, and really spring to life - as does the whole town of Angelus. It's interesting how Winton creates a truly atmospheric setting in a novel that is only middling in length.

He is, quite likely, Australia's finest novelist.

Verdict: Pure, vintage Winton.

Tom Flood says

This is the book that got me writing my own novel. I thought, he's younger than me, he's surfed round Albany, and he's already written 2 national award winners. I can have a go. A long time down the track and Winton has 22 books and is arguably Australia's most awarded writer. I have one, but this is still the book that got me going.

An Augustan-style tale based around the whaling protests in Albany in the 70s, that were the flashpoint that started the fire that stopped whaling in Australia, paralleled with an emblematic convict yarn of hard settlement, this is still the best Winton book I've read. I moved on after the first 5 ('That Eye, The Sky') and never went back, though I was tempted by reports of 'The Riders' and 'Dirt Music'. There's been some silly remarks on this novel, particularly in The Washington Post, but it still loomed large in my imagination when I came to edit 'The Last Whale' some 25 years later, Chris Pash's non-fiction account of the same anti-whaling protests. A terrific effort.

Ilyhana Kennedy says

The conclusion of this novel left me with a sense of hopelessness. In fact, the novel felt like it has a pervading sense of gloom throughout. The many characters are intensely morose.

Yes, it's a serious subject that deserves intense consideration, but without the usual Winton humour it has a feeling of drab flatness, no pathway to redemption, just resignation...and perhaps rightly so, since we are still defending the whales from human exploitation.

The narrative is steeped in the historical and I found it difficult to hold the narrative together, something of a saga condensed.

And yes, it is faithful to how things were in 1978.

The little cameo paragraphs are beautiful. And the usual Winton immersion in the natural environment is ever present in this work.

Jay says

My first exposure to Tim Winton was with his post Cloudstreet works: The Rider, Dirt Music, Breath. After those three novels, I read Cloudstreet, the work that has become an Australian institution. I then decided to read his pre Cloudstreet novels (An Open Swimmer, Shallows, That Eye That Sky, In the Winter Dark), anticipating a less mature production. However, to my surprise, Winton's voice in those first four works was surprisingly strong.

Of the four, Shallows seems closer in style and tone to his later works. If, indeed, he seems somewhat less assured in the other three of his first novels, with Shallows, the descriptions of place are breathtaking, the dialogue, pitch perfect and the themes—death, loss, family, redemption—are played out with great reflective force.

One new revelation hit me and that is Winton's comedic vein--a gentle nod to a magic realism that re-emerges in "That Eye, the Sky" and "Cloudstreet". His characters are often overwhelmingly somber: they struggle with their pasts and are not always optimistic about their futures. They are common people leading uncommon common lives. Shallows ends on a vividly tragic note, leaving the reader with an image that jolts. But amid the somber and the jolting, images like that of Des Pustling losing his teeth from bloodless gums or of Daniel Coupar traveling from his home to Angelus on a tractor are light-hearted and playful. That playfulness is repeated in his other works.

The plot does move slowly and some reviewers have found that movement a distraction. But Winton's novels focus on the development of characters, entwining them in the Australian landscape and in the quirks of their families and of the other characters. The movement is in lives and not in actions. Winton's novels are savored rather than gobbled.

Paul says

I've read four other books by this author and enjoyed them greatly. This book was a struggle to get through. I get why it won such critical praise its sparse, at times poetic, and tackles important issues of the time it was written, but for me it was very slow going. None of the characters were all that interesting, and even from the very beginning I kept wondering is this a part two of another book. The fleshing out of the characters- what little was provided happened in drips and drabs, and again they just weren't that interesting. I still like the author but for me his more current books are just more interesting.

Samantha Bodie says

I decided to give this book 3 stars because, while I didn't particularly enjoy it, I think it still addresses some important and interesting issues that are still relevant today, such as environmental/animal activism and the questioning of tradition.

This is the first Tim Winton book I have read, and I was disappointed that I didn't enjoy it, given the frequency with which some of his other titles appear on lists of the best Australian literature, and also because I was drawn in by the ominous one-word title. I didn't feel connected with the story or characters. Throughout, it felt as though I really was an outsider, or simply watching the story play out without really

having any true understanding or inclusion in the character's lives. This disconnection was yet another source of disappointment for me, as I do feel that the issues covered in the story are very relevant to myself and to the world today. For example, the fishing and whaling industries are still - or more - damaging now, and there is still a conflict between tradition (humans have always eaten and used sea creatures and should continue to do so) and ethics (the fact that we continue to over-fish in the name of tradition and money despite knowing the negative impacts it is having on the environment and species). Being someone that cares about the environment a lot, I really wanted to feel some sort of emotional connection with the characters in 'Shallows', but on the contrary felt rather indifferent throughout. The story failed to get my heart racing, even though in my head, I wanted to find out what happened next, and my hopes for a positive outcome were left unfulfilled.

Despite the way I feel about this book, I suspect that Winton may have wanted the readers to feel this way. The fact that I felt like a complete outsider with no understanding of the characters is exactly the kind of reception that the activists are given when they protest against whaling in Angelus; told that they have no understanding of the importance of the whaling industry in that town, and to 'go home... and let the workers alone'. This is a conflict of interests which reflects how I approached the book; I wanted to find many characters sympathetic to the cause I would support, but was left disappointed. In addition, I think Winton may have wanted readers to feel unemotional throughout because this reflects that many people do feel indifferent about environmental issues and it is very difficult to change people's minds, especially when the economy is so tightly linked to the industries that do the damage.

Overall, I can't say I enjoyed reading this book. However, it is still worth reading both for its relevance to today's issues and for Winton's literary skill in making the reader feel a particular way, and maybe even to question their own beliefs.

Caitlin says

I've recently been revisiting the earlier work of Australian authors - mainly to see the progression of their writing (and to convince myself with my own writing how much better it can all get.)

Tim Winton used to write short, intense books where every single sentence is poetry - my favourite Winton is "In the Winter Dark" which is from a similar period to this one.

I was immediately a little sad when this story began because I couldn't help thinking of this story in the context of his most recent book "Eerie" - hearing the love for the coast and those who work it in this story brought out the disillusioned writer who created the world of the burned-out activist hiding from nature decades later.

I listened to this on audio because I have a new little person in my life who falls asleep in the car and this is a great opportunity to get some more reading done. Late last year I re-read "Cloudstreet" as an audio book and it made the experience even better. This time it was a little strange hearing it from a female narrator - for some reason I always think of Winton's voice as a very male one, even narrating female characters.

In this case the narrator was good - she had to do a variety of different accents and characters - although I think some of the characters would have been better with the "voices" I would have provided.

While it's not my favourite Winton book, it's still well worth visiting and revisiting because his writing is still amazing, even when it's not at his best.

Julia says

I don't know why I keep coming back to Tim Winton, when I've struggled and not enjoyed his style before. For some reason I thought the movie "The Shallows" was an adaptation of this novel and I wanted to see the movie. The movie now I've seen it, was fantastic, the novel not anything to do with the movie was very ordinary and failed to keep me interested.

Rob says

"Shallows" is a novel that I find difficult to categorise. The blurb suggests that it is about conservationists trying to stop the whaling industry. Certainly the novel touches on this but I find myself thinking that this is not central to the story.

Set in the mythical Western Australian town of Angelus (which seems to me to be not dissimilar to the real town of Albany), "Shallows" tells the story of Queenie and Cleve Cookson, a young married couple seemingly adrift from their ancestry and each other.

It paints a savage picture of small town politics and social behaviour, especially behaviour towards aboriginals. One member of the local tribe shows so much promise as an Australian Rules footballer that he is scouted by a city club. Some white locals are so incensed that they beat him to death. There is nothing in the novel that suggests anyone is arrested or tried for this murder.

Throughout the novel, the behaviour of whales surfaces (no pun intended). I feel that the author compares whale behaviour to that of humans, and humans do not come out of the comparison well. However the behaviour of whales leads to an ironic but tragic ending to the novel.

In many ways, this is a dark story. Winton draws his characters very well, but many in "Shallows" are very unlikable ... venal, greedy, racist, misogynistic. Even the characters who are sympathetically drawn are flawed. The novel leaves many questions about these characters open to the reader, even questions of who perishes and who survives.

The story is very well written and very readable. It's not, however, a story for those who like definite heroes or happy endings.

Lyndee says

Not my favourite tim Winton book, but a good read nonetheless
