



# Taboo

*Kim Scott*

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**Taboo** Kim Scott

**From the two-times winner of the Miles Franklin Award**

From Kim Scott, two-times winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award, comes a work charged with ambition and poetry, in equal parts brutal, mysterious and idealistic, about a young woman cast into a drama that has been playing for over two hundred years ...

**Taboo** takes place in the present day, in the rural South-West of Western Australia, and tells the story of a group of Noongar people who revisit, for the first time in many decades, a taboo place: the site of a massacre that followed the assassination, by these Noongar's descendants, of a white man who had stolen a black woman. They come at the invitation of Dan Horton, the elderly owner of the farm on which the massacres unfolded. He hopes that by hosting the group he will satisfy his wife's dying wishes and cleanse some moral stain from the ground on which he and his family have lived for generations.

But the sins of the past will not be so easily expunged.

We walk with the ragtag group through this taboo country and note in them glimmers of re-connection with language, lore, country. We learn alongside them how countless generations of Noongar may have lived in ideal rapport with the land. This is a novel of survival and renewal, as much as destruction; and, ultimately, of hope as much as despair.

LONGLISTED FOR THE MILES FRANKLIN LITERARY AWARD 2018

LONGLISTED FOR THE ABIA LITERARY FICTION BOOK OF THE YEAR 2018

LONGLISTED FOR THE INDIE BOOK AWARDS FICTION 2018

SHORTLISTED FOR THE VICTORIAN PREMIER'S LITERARY AWARD FOR FICTION 2018

SHORTLISTED FOR THE COLIN RODERICK AWARD 2018

## PRAISE FOR TABOO

"If *Benang* was the great novel of the assimilation system, and *That Deadman Dance* redefined the frontier novel in Australian writing, **Taboo** makes a strong case to be the novel that will help clarify - in the way that only literature can - what reconciliation might mean" *Australian Book Review*

"Scott's book is stunning - haunted and powerful ... Verdict: Must Read" *Herald Sun*

"Remarkable" Stephen Romei, *Weekend Australian*

"Stunning prose" *Saturday Paper*

"This is a complex, thoughtful, and exceptionally generous offering by a master storyteller at the top of his game" *The Guardian*

"Undaunted, and daring as ever Scott goes back to his ancestral Noongar country in Western Australia's Great Southern region; back in time as well to killings (or a massacre, the point is contested) of whites and

Aborigines there in 1880. . . *Taboo* never becomes a revenge story, whether for distant or recent wrongs . . . The politics of *Taboo* - not to presume or simplify too much - are quietist, rather than radical. Ambitious, unsentimental [and] morally challenging" *Sydney Morning Herald*

"Scott is one of the most thoughtful, exciting and powerful storytellers of this continent today, with great courage and formidable narrative prowess- and *Taboo* is his most daring novel yet" *Sydney Review of Books*

## Taboo Details

Date : Published July 25th 2017 by Picador

ISBN : 9781925483741

Author : Kim Scott

Format : Paperback 287 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Australia, Contemporary

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## From Reader Review Taboo for online ebook

### D.M. Cameron says

Wonderful insight to the Indigenous perspective in Australia. I loved the humour and gritty reality of it. Scott tells it like it is...but I also enjoyed the use of magical realism. The scene with Maureen the Aboriginal Support Officer was a classic! I think I need to read everything by Kim Scott now.

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### Kim says

I feel quite affected by this. Leaves you with a glow at the end like many a great novel does but there is so much more to it. It's a novel that should be disseminated far and wide. I'm surprised it didn't win the Miles Franklin Prize in 2018 even though it did win a number of other prizes. Looking forward to going back and reading Kim Scott's other novels that have been difficult to start in the past. He is a master at his craft.

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### ns510 says

What a read; brutal, bleak, but also brilliant.

Kim Scott is an indigenous Australian writer and the story he has written is about the Noongar Aboriginal people of Western Australia. Years ago, they were massacred by white settlers on their ancestral lands, and this place has now become taboo to them. Years later, the descendants come together with hopes of making amends, and for the First People to reconnect with their ancestral lands, bringing their music and language to the area. Sadly, this was based off true historical events.

On a closer level, we get to know Tilly and her family. She was fostered by a white couple as a young child, and has now returned to her Noongar family to reconnect with the old ways. She has experienced abuse at the hands of white people, and it is sad to read about the cycle of abuse and addiction within the family, which can be traced back to being in part due to enduring ramifications of colonisation and loss of cultural identity.

The story begins as it ends, and there is a sense of things coming full circle a number of times in this story. It is powerful and feels hopeful; I suppose this is a way of literature forging the path towards decolonisation and finding a way forward.

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### Tundra says

The fragmented writing (train of thought and sentence structure) made it difficult to follow what was happening in this book. To some extent I can see purpose in this technique as it is representing a fragmented story of disconnection from place and people, drug taking and tenuous reconnecting but it just went a little too far for me to keep a grip on the story and really immerse myself.

The themes are important and I liked the approach of the various characters trying to find a way forward and

heal. Clearly it is not an easy task to define events of the past, or what reconciliation should look like, in a way that is universally accepted.

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## **Kimbofo says**

Kim Scott is a two-time winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award and his latest novel, *Taboo*, has been shortlisted for this year's prize.

A descendant of the Noongar people of Western Australia, he is an indigenous writer whose work tends to focus on aboriginal identity and the sometimes strained relations between black and white Australians.

*Taboo* is no exception. Set in Noongar country, it examines the thorny issue of reconciliation: after so much bloody and violent history, how can white Australians and indigenous Australians make their peace?

This dilemma is neatly summed up in the book's opening paragraph:

Our hometown was a massacre place. People called it taboo. They said it is haunted and you will get sick if you go there. Others just bragged: we shot you and poisoned the waterholes so you never come back.

Told in the third person, but largely through the eyes of a teenage girl, Tilly, the book focuses on plans to open a Peace Park in the Western Australian (fictional) town of Kepalup as a form of reconciliation. Just outside the town lies a farm, owned by widower Dan Horton, where Dan's ancestors murdered Tilly's in the late 19th century. (By a stroke of coincidence — and there are many in this novel, it has to be said — Tilly was fostered by the Hortons when she was a young child.)

Dan, a devout Christian, wants to pursue his late wife's dream to invite the Noongar onto the farm, to "reconcile themselves to what happened here". He is more dismissive, thinking it was a long time ago and "there was no real evidence of any more than a few Aborigines being killed".

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

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## **Lauren Deville says**

The premise of the story is compelling and what kept me reading to the end. However, the writing is overly descriptive (yes even for me) and detracts from the story itself. The interweaving of history with Doug and Tilly's connection is interesting, but underdeveloped. It reads as almost fetishistic in parts rather than a demonstration of oppression being ultimately conquered. I can understand that we need to get a sense of Tilly's experiences and how they help in turning her into such a powerful character in the end, but there is not enough punishment for the men in this book to feel a sense of resolution... The crescendo just didn't just satisfy - I closed the book feeling disappointed.

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## Lisa says

Almost the first thing Kim Scott talked about, when I had the good fortune to meet and have more than a brief chat with him at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards night in 2011, was language...

Australians are getting comfortable with the meaning of the word 'language' in Australian Aboriginal English: like 'country', it is spoken without an article or a descriptive adjective. 'Talking in language' means speaking the indigenous language of a particular place and 'being on country' means being on the land on which they belong. I like this adaptation of the English that I speak (which is neither British nor Australian English, making me one of many here who have a hybrid language of our very own) because it means (amongst other things) both the language and a language and the country and a country. In a land like ours where there have always been multiple languages across multiple countries inhabited by multiple nations, the use of these words in this way is a reminder that for upwards of 60,000 years, the languages spoken by the Noongar or the Wiradjuri or the Bunerong did not need to be differentiated from a dominant, mainstream, default language, nor from the multiple languages other than English, which have been imported via European settlement and have flourished in greater variety since postwar migration. 'Language' and 'country' have an historic and cultural significance when used in this way.

On that night in 2011, the year that Scott's novel *That Deadman Dance* won every award you can think of including his second Miles Franklin Award, Scott talked to me not about his book but about his involvement in the project to revive the language of the Noongar peoples from the southwest corner of Western Australia. I went home thinking about language in a different way (and I bought two of the bilingual children's picture books that Scott had mentioned, and read them with the kids at school). Huge progress has been made in the revival of the Noongar language, (and I do urge you to check out this website to learn more about it) but Scott, in the Afterword to *Taboo* – noting that Noongar has been upgraded from 'extinct' to 'living' in a linguistics catalogue – still describes it as fragile, spoken at home by only 369 people in 2011, the year of our conversation. He says it is stronger than that, but still endangered.

So it is not surprising that language is central to the preoccupations of this novel. Languages matter. In the Afterword in which he talks about *Taboo* as a narrative of identity, Scott references an Irish author called Tim Robinson who says of Ireland and its indigenous language:

'In talk about land and language, there is always a whiff of a third element, blood. The three have historically made up a deathly stew.' (Tim Robinson, quoted by Scott on p284)

The 'deathly stew' in *Taboo* takes place in a world away from the redemptive possibilities of *That Deadman Dance*.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2017/08/08/t...>

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## **Roy says**

Read this for bookclub. The writing is poetic, the story engaging and the setting and central issues/themes so relevant to Australia today. I can see this novel becoming a text some schools will use for their students.

Intriguing and thought provoking discussion from this story.

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## **Michael Livingston says**

A sad, funny and eventually hopeful story about a group of Noongar people returning to their lands a century or so after a massacre. Scott is preoccupied with language and particularly with efforts to revive the Noongar language - the cultural connections forged by language and practices help to heal a community deeply damaged by colonisation and its after-effects (especially drugs and alcohol). The writing style took a while to work its way into my brain, but once I devoted some decent chunks of time to it, I found Taboo hugely worthwhile.

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## **Anna Baillie-Karas says**

Kim Scott writes with the assurance of someone who's in no rush; it's pared back, allowing for gaps in what is said, and the characters follow a winding path, stopping to observe the trees, an eagle, tell stories. At times this felt contrived, but it's a vital history, told without judgment.

It resists being a fast-paced read and instead gives honest characters (like Tilly, a flawed teen & resilient survivor) and an ancient culture. #ownvoices #Australia

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## **Dasha M says**

Important and powerful.

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## **Ace says**

There is something urgent and dreamy in the way that Scott writes. He entwines the emotional lives of his characters with their natural surroundings in telling the tale of a past atrocity and the lives that have emerged from that.

As a community gathers together for rehabilitation, reconciliation and literally to learn how to connect back to their roots, their stories and their traditions, the mystery of the Taboo is revealed. We move back and forth through time and learn about how characters have dealt with life since the Taboo, how they dealt with the hand they were given and what hope the future holds.

The book deals with some very dark issues and in particular the present life of the main protagonist Tilly and

her search for identity in a pretty drug addled state of mind. There is also a very strong sense of community, family and love, a recognition of belonging and an urge to protect.

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### **Sharon Lee says**

To read this story is to enter a different reality.

It is a weaving of today's struggle for recognition and social fragmentation; with old ways and language. It is a confronting & honest account of the terrible impact of alcohol and drugs on society. It was a bit confusing at times but in a way this reflected the inner conflict of some of the characters. There is such a strong sense of the spirits being ever present in the characters' lives. I think Tilly is a symbol of hope for her community. I suspect this could be a controversial novel as it alludes to many shameful subjects - The things we bury in history; The ignorance of white fellas; The disrespect and abuse of women; substance abuse; incarceration; property ownership... some subtly and others less so.

To enjoy this book you have to surrender to the hubbub of the story. Give it a go.

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### **Nicky says**

2.5\*

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### **Anne Fenn says**

I read this while visiting central Australia. It's set in Scott's local area in Western Australia but it seems many of the issues for Indigenous Australians are similar. Main character Tilly, a troubled young girl, reconnects with her family. We see more clearly how kinship works so powerfully to give meaning to her life. Written in beautiful prose, some sharp, sometimes dreamlike, you are immersed in the minds and spirits of many different people. Sensational writing, I hope it gets Scott up for a third Miles Franklin award.

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