

Truth

Peter Temple

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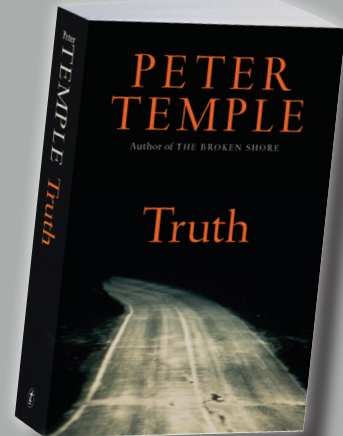
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Fiction



Praise for *Truth*

'[Temple] is the man who has transfigured the crime novel and made it the pretext for an art that repudiates genre.' Peter Craven, *Weekend Australian*

'*Truth* succeeds as...one of the best pieces of modern Australian fiction this decade, if not for many decades.' *Courier Mail*

'*Truth* is a novel of rare power and much of that potency lies in its silences. The blank spaces occupy almost as much of its pages as the print. The dialogue conveys only that which is necessary, sometimes not even that. The bareness of the bones reveals the soul. Propelled forward by the momentum of the story, we cling to fragments of veracity from which it is engineered.' Shane Maloney, *Australian Literary Review*

About Peter Temple

Peter Temple is the author of nine crime novels, five of which have won the Ned Kelly Award, Australia's major prize for crime fiction. He is also a winner of the Colin Roderick Award for Australian writing and has worked as a journalist and editor for newspapers and magazines in several countries. Born in South Africa, he now lives in Victoria, Australia.

The prequel to *Truth*, *The Broken Shore*, was awarded the world's most prestigious crime-writing prize, the Duncan Lawrie Dagger 2007; ABIA General Fiction Book of the Year 2006; Ned Kelly Award Best Crime Novel 2006; The Colin Roderick Award; and the H.T. Priestley Medal 2006; and was longlisted for the 2006 Miles Franklin Award.

A reader's introduction to *Truth*

At the close of a long day, Inspector Stephen Villani stands in the bathroom of a luxury apartment high above the city of Melbourne. In the glass bath, a young woman lies dead, a panic button within reach.

Villani's life is his work. It is his identity, his calling, his touchstone. But now, over a few sweltering summer days, as fires burn across the state and his superior and

colleagues scheme and jostle, he finds all the certainties of his life are crumbling.

Truth is a novel about a man, a family, a city. It is about violence, murder, love, corruption, honour and deceit.

And it is about truth.

Truth is a companion piece of sorts, to Temple's *The Broken Shore*. The protagonist here is Detective Inspector Stephen Villani, friend and former colleague of *The Broken Shore*'s hero Joe Cashin.

Set predominantly in Melbourne, the ongoing theme is that there is something rotten in the state of Victoria, and in Villani's life. It begins with Villani driving between two shocking cases, and ends in devastating bushfire. In between things get complex, with political and police corruption, family disintegration on many levels, linked murders, work hierarchy, political changeover and personal issues for Villani to deal with.

Questions for discussion

1. *Truth* focuses predominantly on male relationships. The relationship between Stephen and Bob Villani looms particularly large. Is Stephen a chip off the old block? Did your opinion change by the end of the novel? How has Stephen been shaped by Bob? Did Bob's absences prove to be equally influential?
2. *Truth* opens with a scene on the West Gate Bridge; two blokes on their way from something ghastly, on their way to something else ghastly. Villani and Birkerts, discussing the past. Discuss the relationship between these colleagues in the book. How does it differ from Villani's relationship with Dance and Vickery?
3. In an interview with Temple in the *Age*, Jason Steger quoted Walter Mosley on the nature of hardboiled crime fiction, 'People in a hardboiled world have had to improvise from the moment they were born. The writer may have a notion of what is right and make a world where the ending, if not exactly happy, is at least satisfying.' Does *Truth* fall

into the hardboiled genre? Discuss, in relation to the key characters in the novel.

4. When Villani first sees the dead girl in the bathtub, he thinks of his daughter Lizzie. This image comes to him repeatedly throughout the book. How does this affect the reader? Is it a premonition? What point is Temple trying to make?
5. When interviewing Kohler about his connection with prostitutes, Villani realises that 'Dove was not a mistake. He was a smart aleck but he was not a mistake.' p. 221. Discuss how Villani's perceptions of Dove change through the book. How does Dove prove himself?
6. Temple's prose is like none other. His use of staccato-short sentences and direct dialogue bring the characters alive (the 'bloke-speak' made especially effective by what is omitted), but his prose can also be highly evocative and beautiful. Discuss which aspects of the novel you found particularly effective and affecting. Which passages were most illuminating? Which pieces of dialogue most memorable?
7. The British crime writer John Harvey says: 'In common with many of the best crime writers, he often uses the mechanics of the crime novel to strip away layers of hypocrisy. He has a knack of pinning down the day-to-day nature of people's lives and laying bare their weaknesses and obsessions.' What are Villani's weaknesses and obsessions? How do they play out in the events of *Truth*?
8. Villani clings to, if only just, a saying of his close friend and old colleague Cashin, and his old boss, Singleton. 'When the pity leaves you, son, it's time to go. That's when you've stopped being fully human.' What does this mean? Has the pity left Villani? Who has it left?
9. At the centre of *Truth* lies a deep interest in the dynamics of male friendship, and the relationship between men in families. The burning state provides an opportunity for things in Bob's family to come to a head. Discuss the messy relationships between the brothers and father in this family and the events leading up to the fire at Bob's property.
10. How do the bushfires act as a backdrop to the events in the novel? What effect do they have on the characters and you as a reader? The forest that Bob and Stephen planted is spared from the fires. What significance does it have to both men? How does this piece of bush act as a counterpoint to Stephen's urban existence? How did it help to forge the relationship between father and son?
11. Discuss the women in Villani's life: Daughters Corin and Lizzie, wife Laurie, lover Anna Markham. How does guilt play into these? Which are strongest? Are any of these relationships salvageable? And what about Villani's relationship with Rose Quirk? How did it evolve? What did each reap from the friendship?
12. How has Villani's work affected his family life: his role as a husband and father of three? Is it a case of like father like son? How does he manage the stark contrast between the worlds of home and work? Is he responsible in some way for Lizzie's death?
13. Discuss the title of the book. What point do you think Temple is making about the nature of truth? How does the horse ('the first horse Bob raced, the best horse he ever had, the lovely little grey called Truth') play into this? And what of the bleak political landscape Temple paints? What of the corruption, conspiracies and shifting allegiances? Is this also some sort of truth?
14. Do you think Villani was ever swayed by Max Hendry's job offer of operations chief for Stilicho? Was he surprised by Max's role in the Prosilio murder?
15. The book ends with Villani discovering that Dance had extorted 30K from Greg Quirk. What questions does this raise? Does this change things between Villani and Dance?
16. Temple intends to make his plots as complicated as possible for his readers—"I hate things being spelled out." Can you untangle the events in *Truth*?