



## The Cove

*Ron Rash*

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## **The Cove** Ron Rash

This lyrical, heart-rending tale, as mesmerizing as its award-winning predecessor *Serena*, shows once again this masterful novelist at the height of his powers.

Deep in the rugged Appalachians of North Carolina lies the cove, a dark, forbidding place where spirits and fetches wander, and even the light fears to travel. Or so the townsfolk of Mars Hill believe - just as they know that Laurel Shelton, the lonely young woman who lives within its shadows, is a witch. Alone except for her brother, Hank, newly returned from the trenches of France, she aches for her life to begin.

Then it happens - a stranger appears, carrying nothing but a beautiful silver flute and a note explaining that his name is Walter, he is mute, and is bound for New York. Laurel finds him in the woods, nearly stung to death by yellow jackets, and nurses him back to health. As the days pass, Walter slips easily into life in the cove and into Laurel's heart, bringing her the only real happiness she has ever known.

But Walter harbors a secret that could destroy everything - and danger is closer than they know. Though the war in Europe is near its end, patriotic fervor flourishes thanks to the likes of Chauncey Feith, an ambitious young army recruiter who stokes fear and outrage throughout the county. In a time of uncertainty, when fear and ignorance reign, Laurel and Walter will discover that love may not be enough to protect them.

This lyrical, heart-rending tale, as mesmerizing as its award-winning predecessor *Serena*, shows once again this masterful novelist at the height of his powers.

## **The Cove Details**

Date : Published April 10th 2012 by Ecco (first published February 22nd 2012)

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## From Reader Review The Cove for online ebook

### Florence (Lefty) MacIntosh says

Recently infatuated with southern lit I just had to give Ron Rash a try. With racism, poverty & superstition & the inclusion of an ill fated love affair, slot this one as 'contemporary southern gothic.' Yes, it's melancholy and slow paced at the start but so superbly written that it's a joy to read.

Set at the end of WW1 and told through Laurel's eyes, a simple tale of a birth-marked woman shunned by the locals as a witch –of her lonely life with only her brother Hank, a wounded WW1 veteran for company. (view spoiler) Following the sound of a flute "*It wasn't so much a soaring sound but something on the song's surface, like a water strider crossing a creek pool*" leads her to a wounded man – and it begins.

As for Laurel, look elsewhere if your preference is for passionate heroines, what she does have is an appealing resiliency, an understated strength. What develops is quietly muted – a love that deepens as slowly & gently as the river that runs through The Cove. With its raw beauty & pervading isolation, it's The Cove itself that's the heart of this novel "*Nothing but shadow land, there wasn't a gloamier place in the whole Blue Ridge.*" That and the Appalachian people, brought to life by Rash's use of simple dialect. "*Not being able to talk, that's got to be burdensome too. I'd think it could make you feel a lavish of aloneness. After my daddy died and Hank was over in France, I was here by myself and it was a hard row to hoe.*"

**Cons:** While most of the characters are well fleshed out the villainous Chancey Feith is a one dimensional caricature, bit of a bore. As far as plot goes it's not particularly fresh, and it is a bit predictable.

All is forgiven by the elegance of the writing, **an atmospheric southern tragedy beautifully rendered - 4 ½ stars.**

If you're interested not a spoiler, just southern gothic defined: (view spoiler)

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### Laura says

This book really got to me when I read it, and it has quietly haunted me ever since. I find myself thinking of the characters some times, and still bothered by the ugly truths of prejudice and human nature that the author captured so powerfully. I think it's the subtle, quiet power of the book which makes it so effective, and the evocative portrait of the South. I have a real love/hate relationship with the region I was born in, and Rash captures it perfectly: wildness, beauty, spirit...but all twisted up and tainted by hatred, superstition, and loss.

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### switterbug (Betsey) says

Ron Rash has a sublime sense of place, atmospheric detail and colloquial manners. The Appalachian landscapes in his novels are vivid, rugged. Colors, smells, and sounds take on a sentient quality, and there's a brutal, timeless delicacy to his terrains. Moment to moment, you move from the crest of creation to the threat of destruction. His stories convey themselves through the power of domain. His latest is a testament to the most fertile aspects of his craft, which shimmer through an otherwise flawed and listless story.

A short, mysterious prologue introduces us to a forbidding, rural North Carolina cove in 1957, and is followed by the main story, which takes place toward the end of WW I on the same rough and haunted turf. Laurel Shelton, an ostracized young woman, believed to be a hexed witch that causes harm and doom to others, lives with her brother, Hank, a disabled soldier recently returned from battle. Hank is engaged to marry a woman whose father needs to be convinced that Hank isn't also possessed. Into their solitary

existence comes a mute flautist, Walter, who changes the course of their lives.

The alchemic beauty of the story is largely communed through Rash's formidable powers of description. The cove area, where Laurel and Hank Shelton live, has a supernatural aura. It is evident that the cove's mystical power will impel events along a trenchant course of turmoil and danger. The tension mounts early, with subtle and bold implications of the cove's spectral qualities and the Shelton's cursed history, which are woven inextricably together.

However, there are structural and character-related problems that make this story fall short of the author's intentions. It is difficult to relate them all without giving spoilers, so I will confine them to a few examples. First, the characters are static stereotypes that don't developed beyond what you see on introduction. They are either good and heroic or bad and polluted, and you know on contact. A few, like Walter, have hidden natures that are revealed gradually, but they don't truly evolve.

Secondary characters--Hank's friends, for instance, are stock set pieces. Slidell (Hank's closest friend) and his moonshine distilling behaviors are derivative and prosaic. If you want to be captivated by moonshine madness, read *Finn*, which places you vividly into the depths of this culture. I got tired of scenes of sittin' on the porch drinking moonshine, or laying about drinking moonshine, or recovering from the effects of moonshine. It added nothing to the significance of story, and seemed more like filler. Moreover, Slidell had minimal dimension beyond the buddy sidekick.

The villain, recruitment officer Chancey Feith, was a thin membrane of a figure. His presence was a platform for Rash to telegraph the theme of ignorant discrimination and flag-waving patriotism. He was a formula jingoist character that we knew to despise, who had no depth beyond pettiness and nationalism (with an obvious wink to today's imperialism). He was a flat, predictable entity designed to manipulate the story in a deterministic direction.

The plot is simple, and for all the meandering that Rash precipitated, it could have been reduced to a short story format. The structure was wobbly; for instance, he built up an imaginary dream world for Laurel to imbibe, where she insisted on knowing and recreating a historical place (that was central to the plot), leading the reader on a launched journey that demanded some kind of realization or corollary. However, Rash just dumped it with a reductive denouement.

As a matter of fact, several mobilized events and ideas were bluntly dispatched in this manner. He rushed the important events, especially as the climax drew nearer. Directions drifted and dropped and the story was sidetracked with spurious shifts, as Rash let the grains of some incipient ideas vanish with an inchoate shrug. It appeared as if he was trying to write two stories, and then eliminated one without properly trimming and removing surplus. Some of the context just shuffled into discarded notions. The myth of the cove was ultimately a tepid trickle, as its meaning wasn't revelatory or fulfilling.

At the end of the day, this is a mixed bag. The book is worth reading simply for the sense of place and time, providing an intimate feeling of color and history through geography and atmosphere. Rash is an author with a subtle and transcendent gift for transporting the reader to the Appalachian wilderness. However, once you get there, you're stuck in a stagnant, lackluster zone.

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## ?Karen says

Ever since reading *Serena* a couple years ago (rushing to get it done before the movie that never materialized), I've looked forward to more Ron Rash. *The Cove* lacks the very sick disturbing main

characters found in *Serena*, but it did offer us Chauncey, a mighty good example of an egomaniac on the verge of doing something truly awful to prove his manliness to the townspeople. The main story of the siblings Laurel and Hank taking in a mute vagrant gradually developed into a mesmerizing tale. The hatred for all Germans in America during and following World War I always fascinates me and makes me wonder how my grandparents survived it. Looking forward to more by this author.

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### **Colleen says**

The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

What light XXX's eyes held faded, not dying away like an ember but receding like a train headed elsewhere. XXX couldn't shake the feeling that wherever the light was going it was taking part of him with it.

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### **Diane Barnes says**

No, this was not *Serena*, thank goodness, because I was not ready to descend into that maelstrom of evil again. Instead, we learn that ignorance and bigotry can be just as harmful, maybe more so. This was an entirely different tale, giving us the beauty of the landscape and the honesty and emotions of damaged characters coming to love one another while standing against a community that chooses to ostracize rather than accept. I loved it, and will choose to think of it as a fairy tale that ended badly for so many, but with some redemption as well.

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### **J.L. Sutton says**

I was recently introduced to the work of Ron Rash and plan to read more! In *The Cove*, Rash explores small town North Carolina during WWI with wonderful (sometimes haunting) detail and penetrating insight. There are a couple things I found really interesting about his approach and will keep in mind when reading his other works. First, even though it is clearly fiction, Rash uses a little known historical incident (a German luxury liner full of musicians who have ended up in Appalachia) to set up his story. Second, while *The Cove* evokes the past, it still feels relevant. For me, the story was not just about the past; the characters and situations still resonate. Looking forward to reading more!

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### **Will Byrnes says**

UPDATED - 4/3/12 - see link at bottom

*The Cove*, a remote locale in North Carolina, is a cursed place, or so everyone seems to think. The story opens in the 1950s when a man from the TVA comes by, preparing the area for flooding as part of a dam project. That the elders he encounters think burying the cove under tons of water is a good idea offers a first indication of trouble. When the man, trying for a drink in a well near some abandoned buildings at the site, brings up murky water covering a skull, we have our ending point. How we get there is the tale.

Rash is a master at setting a mood, a rather dark one here, and he keeps the wires of tension zinging, so you

know something bad is gonna go down, but the green light of possibility keeps flapping by, keeping hope alive. That makes *The Cove*, incredibly rich with imagery and atmosphere, a page-turner of a different sort. This is clearly not an action adventure thriller where the fate of the planet is at stake, but Rash's ability to portray place and to offer characters that are so richly drawn, so engaging, is such that we keep flying through his tale in order to see whether their world can be saved, or is doomed by a faceless fate.

World War I is almost done. Twenty-something Laurel and her brother, Hank, have survived their parents and are trying to make a living on the troubled property the locals call "The Cove."

The air grew dank and dark and even darker as she passed through a stand of hemlocks. Toadstools and witch hazel sprouted on the trail edge, farther down nightshade and then baneberry whose poisonous fruit looked like doll's eyes.

Uh oh. Hank had served in WW I, but left a hand behind. Still, he is hale and hearty otherwise, works very hard on their farm and plans to marry. Laurel is doing her washing when she hears the song of a single parakeet. The cove may be the last habitat of this now-extinct bird. What is unusual about what Laurel hears is that parakeets do not appear individually, but only in flocks. She follows the sound and spies a bedraggled young man, calmly making remarkably avian music on his flute.

Birds figure prominently in Rash's beautiful tale. He offers us much information about the Carolina Parakeet, how they behave and how, at least in part, they have come to be as scarce as they are. Unwillingness to leave a fallen comrade behind enters into this, with obvious foreboding. The flutist, Walter, is inspired by the birds, in a possibly magical way, and sees that the cove has more to offer than darkness.

The next afternoon he came to a brook and followed it. By then he had begun to feel feverish. A music he'd never heard before rose from the stream. The notes had colors as well as sounds, bright threads woven into the water's flow. Some of that bright water splashed up on the bank. It was green and shimmering and he scooped it up into his palm and it became a feather.

Who Walter turns out to be is central to the story, but some might regard it as spoiler material to say too much here, so I am putting that at the bottom of this review for any who might wish to take a look. For now we can get by with the rather obvious intel that Boy with flute meets Girl with purple birthmark and limited prospects.

The why of her prospects is a major element. Seems the locals are a superstitious lot. They really do believe the cove is cursed and Laurel's prominent birthmark labels her in their eyes as personally cursed at least and maybe something much worse. Her intelligence does not matter much to such people. (Reminds me a lot of right-wing talk radio and Tea Party sorts) A group of local women go out of their way to shun Laurel.

An image from [Laurel's] childhood came to her. A hawk had grabbed a baby chick and then lost its grip. The biddy was hurt and bleeding and the other biddies began pecking it. Because that was what biddies did, she'd learned that day. They found one of their own sick or injured and took turns pecking it to death.

Epitomizing the dangerous ignorance of the arrogant unknowing is Chauncey, draft dodger of the venal, connected sort, (clearly he had other priorities during The Great War) eager to make political hay and more than happy to whip up some anti-German xenophobia in the service of that cause. He tries to get a local language professor fired for talking with Germans, while fantasizing about his own political future. Chauncey plays a central role when his dark deeds yield trouble beyond his control.

Hope and danger, light and dark, good and evil, sanity versus superstition. If Rash were a painter his canvasses would be in the Met. *The Cove* is so different from his masterpiece, *Serena*, yet displays the same

power, the same delicate skill. *Serena* told a large tale in big splashes of color, bright reds and blues. *The Cove* tells its story in small images, and a palette that stays mostly on the dark side with healthy dollops of green to signal the possibilities of life and love. *Serena* might take up an entire wall, while *The Cove* would fit in among several in a room. But you would find yourself coming back to look at it again and again, appreciating this, then noticing that. Ron Rash is one of our best writers and *The Cove* is top-notch work. Where *Serena* was large, *The Cove* is a much smaller canvas, but just as satisfying.

Personally I would put Rash himself in that other collection, the one in the American Museum of Natural History, in the Hall of Minerals and Gems.

Can music, hard work and life overcome darkness, venality and ignorance? The journey to *The Cove* is a trip worth taking, with a Shakespearean climax that will leave you quivering.

Now as for Walter. His character is based on an actual event from the war. A German cruise ship, The Vaterland, had the misfortune of being docked in Hoboken when war broke out. The German crew was stranded. When the USA declared war, long after, many German civilians who had been working on the Vaterland and the dozens of others from stranded German ships were interned, some in North Carolina. This is the camp from which Walter escapes, as detailed in chapter 3. And, obviously, as a German national in the USA during World War I, particularly as an escapee from an internment camp, he needed to lay low, being at rather high risk.

## UPDATES

April 1, 2012 - Janet Maslin's wonderful review in the NY Times

June 6, 2017 - I was alerted by GR friend Linda to the following from April 2017 - WCU's Ron Rash wins Guggenheim Fellowship - Rash deserves all the recognition there is, he is a national treasure.

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## karen says

### RON RASH!!

another quietly wonderful book from ron rash, about a couple of outcasts trying to grab a little happiness out of a life filled with loss and loneliness.

this one takes place in north carolina during WWI, in a remote and "gloomy" cove, where a brother and sister live isolated by superstition and circumstances. the sister, laurel, has a large purple birthmark believed by the entire outlying town to be a sign of witchcraft, and the cove where the two reside is believed to be haunted. after their parents died, the two of them lived alone until hank went to war, where he lost a hand (view spoiler), leaving laurel completely cut off from human contact and deeply lonely. there is only one man in town they can call a friend; the rest cross the street or spit when the two have to go to town for supplies. the heroism clinging to hank after his experience in the war has mitigated his situation somewhat, and people begin to treat him less shabbily, but laurel has no chance - she is doomed to solitude and loneliness, isolated in this presumably haunted cove.

until a mute and illiterate traveling flute-player loses his way in the cove, gets stung by a million bees, and is nursed back to health by laurel. as he recovers, and is able to help hank with the farm chores hank's single

hand is inadequate to perform alone, he and laurel form a bond.

and laurel gets her chance at happiness.

this being ron rash, the happiness is not guaranteed - there are going to be a lot of complications. i guessed the "twist" part just by reading what will be the flap copy, but i don't think that matters. this isn't about the reveal, (view spoiler), but about laurel's struggles to carve out a place for herself when she has been given so few options.

it is also about birds. birds who are being driven out of their habitat by farmers protecting their crops, birds pecking each other to death, birds who will not leave a fellow bird behind. so many different birds exemplifying so many different traits of our human characters. but rash pulls it off without it feeling treacly.

and the character of chauncey, our "bad guy," is terrific. it's strange that this is the character who seems the most richly drawn and the most nuanced, because he is awful and smarmy and self-aggrandizing and one of those misguided true believers who, if there energy were harnessed towards ANY USEFUL GOAL AT ALL, would be a hero. instead, he is a german-hating pre-nazi, down to the symmetry of his uniform and his desire to burn the german-language books in the library.

he's an awful character, but a wonderfully-written character. and definitely my favorite in this book.

all the previous "spoilers" in this review were just silly television giggles that i didn't want cheapening the main text of a review of a serious-toned book, but this following one is an actual spoiler about an incredibly small passage in the book, but one that made my heart physically ache with emotion.

(view spoiler) that scene broke my heart and i would have loved more moments like that throughout this fine, but not emotionally jarring, novel.

this one didn't kick my reader's ass the way *serena* did, but it is a very good, quiet piece of writing from an author more people should be reading.

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## Camie says

Laurel and her brother Hank who has just returned from the trenches in France live in a shady cove in the Appalachians. One day while in the woods Laurel who is treated as an outcast and proclaimed a witch by neighboring Mars Hill townsfolk, comes across Walter whom she has previously glimpsed playing a silver flute by the river, but who has now been stung by a swarm of bees and needs help. Walter is a stranger to the area, who carries a note in his pocket explaining that he is a mute musician journeying to New York City. While recovering at the Cove, it's inevitable that Laurel and Walter two outcasts form a bond, but there are secrets that threaten their future together.

Ron Rash writes lyrical books of the South that are darkly beautiful. I thought this one had a rather slow start, nevertheless by the end of it I must admit it didn't fail to surprise and enchant me.

Read for May - On The Southern Literary trail 4 stars

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## Lou says

This was a wonderful historical story and Ron Rash is a writer to add alongside great southern gothic styled

writers. Just as many have mentioned Ron Rash strikes up feelings of being present with great writers such as Steinbeck and Cormac McCarthy.

This story leaves a mark with characters that are lonely and modest, rich in kindness and deeply warm to others even though they face inequalities due to race, heritage and have been marked in a superstitious ways as cursed. A brother and a sister are two main characters that at times bring a tear in your eye for the happiest and the saddest of times they face in this WW1 period story.

The authors successfully places you in the atmosphere of that era and especially the Cove. The story flowed in an eloquent pace, hard times and romantic occasions really a throwback to the storytelling of Charles Dickens. This was my first reading from Ron Rash and won't be the last I felt in the hands of a great storyteller, at one point i was reminiscing on an equally great story Great Expectations as you do want great things to happen to Laurel Shelton and her guest that she becomes attached to. That guest is equally lost for words and cannot communicate by tongue but touched others hearts with tunes from a flute and gathers attention like the pied piper of Hamelin. Attention is what he does not need, as the man who struck up from nowhere and finds a lady to warm his heart soon faces harder times, and those around him go through their worst and happiest of times. A story to remember with an exceptional quality of writing historical, very romantic with a overshadowing melancholy presence from beginning to end.

Bravo!

Check out also myreview @ <http://more2read.com/review/the-cove-by-ron-rash/> and these videos there:

Gary Carden interviews Ron Rash (video): <http://more2read.com/gary-carden-interviews-ron-rash-video/>

Ron Rash reads from Serena <http://more2read.com/ron-rash-reads-from-serena/>

Ron Rash Interview by Stacey Cochran <http://more2read.com/ron-rash-author-video/>

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## Connie says

In the prologue, a TVA official was preparing for the cove to be flooded. A local man in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina told him, "You can't bury that cove deep enough for me....The cove was a place where only bad things happened."

Over thirty years earlier at the end of World War I, Laurel and her brother Hank, a veteran missing a hand, were living at the cove. With the shadow of a cliff looming over the cabin and dark woods, the cove is a dark, sinister place. The townspeople in the insular community are superstitious, and gossip that Laurel is cursed by her port wine birthmark. Many consider her to be a witch and shun the young woman. Laurel discovers a seriously ill, mute young man in the woods and brings Walter home to recover. He's a musician who communicates beauty and his feelings when he plays the flute. He's also a man with a secret.

Chauncey Feith, an army recruiter whose family ties kept him out of the trenches, is trying to make a name for himself. Convincing himself that he is acting with patriotic zeal, he harasses the elderly German language professor at the college, and the librarian who has German poetry books on the shelves. Unquestioned xenophobia is the driving force behind Chauncey's actions.

Ron Rash has written an atmospheric Southern Gothic tale filled with deep shadows and dangerous water. It's balanced with the lilting sounds of the flute and the green feathers of the Carolina parakeets. "The Cove"

is a beautifully written book that leaves one thinking that good and evil can be found in unexpected places during a war....and not just on the battlefield.

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## Amanda says

3 1/2 stars.

The small, isolated community of Mars Hill, North Carolina, continues to cling to the prejudices and Appalachian superstitions of another century in the wake of World War I. Its men have been to fight in foreign lands, encountered the awesome terror of modernized warfare, and yet still harbor a profound fear of a young woman who lives sadly and quietly in a place simply known as "The Cove." Laurel Shelton's life, thanks to the people of Mars Hill, has not been an easy one. Marked by the port-wine stain on her shoulder and by the misfortune of living on land that is believed to be the home of some nebulous evil, Laurel is labeled a witch and ostracized from the community--banned from the school, humiliated by the local boys, and shunned by the proprietors of local businesses. It doesn't help that The Cove seems to consume everything with which it comes into contact; Laurel's parents both die under unfortunate and unexpected circumstances, the blighted chestnut trees begin to die off, and there are fewer Carolina parakeets with every passing year.

When her brother and protector, Hank, leaves for war, Laurel is left alone to fend for herself on the farm and it seems as though happiness will forever remain out of her reach. But Hank returns, having lost a hand to the war, and it seems as though things might finally get better. Hank is getting married, the farm responds to his hard work, and a stranger in the woods may offer Laurel an escape from The Cove's clutches.

Ultimately, *The Cove* is about the danger of instinctively hating that which we don't understand. Ignorance and intolerance make Laurel an outcast and The Cove itself becomes the physical manifestation of the community's rejection of her for the crime of being "different." Just as the darkness of The Cove absorbs and destroys the beauty of its inhabitants, the human capacity for hatred destroys the most fragile and beautiful among us. To watch as Laurel slowly becomes hopeful that life will hold something better than she's been allowed to expect--to come to believe that she *deserves* to be allowed this hope--is painfully heart-wrenching. However, there are no happily ever afters here. Just as the cliff looms ominously over The Cove, the foreboding that something will crush this nascent hope pervades the narrative.

Rash's writing is lyrical and simple in the best possible sense; there's no poetic posturing or pretentiousness. To capture such bruised lives in straightforward, lovely language imbues his characters with a genuine and honest dignity.

Two factors prevented me from giving it a 4 star. The first is that I kept measuring this book against Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*. While Rash does a fine job of capturing the atmosphere of the place, he lacks the lush detail of Frazier's work that truly brought the land alive for me as a reader. Frazier's portrayal of two damaged characters, Ada and Inman, is also more nuanced and three dimensional. While Rash's portrayal of Laurel and Chauncey Feith (the villain of the tale, which is made clear from the introduction of this selfish, pompous bastard) is inspired, many of his other characters are little more than well-written stereotypes. The second is that the denouement seems too abrupt in its execution and, while brutal and violent, the emotional punch is lessened by how swiftly events are brought to a close.

Despite these factors, *The Cove* is a much finer piece of writing than much of what is out there and I look forward to reading Rash's *Serena*.

Cross posted at This Insignificant Cinder and at Shelf Inflicted

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### **Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says**

Readers who prefer atmosphere over action will savor the first 150 pages of *The Cove*. It took me days to get through that first 150 pages, then I blew through the final 100 pages all in one day. It's quite a contrast in pacing and tone, and it gets surprisingly suspenseful near the end. So have a little patience and your payoff will come.

After a prologue in which a human skull is found in the cove's well in the 1950s, Ron Rash treats us to a leisurely buildup in which the skull is all but forgotten. He takes us back to the rural North Carolina of 1918, with all its superstitions and prejudices and traditions intact.

Rash's skill in re-creating the atmosphere of the era is formidable. We meet Laurel Shelton, a young woman who has been ostracized all her life because of her port-wine birthmark. Her brother Hank has lost a hand fighting in World War I. They live an isolated life in the cove, a dark and hollow spot where others fear to tread. Until Laurel brings home Walter, a mute flute player who awakens in Laurel the hope that she is lovable despite her physical imperfection. Tensions are high in the neighboring town of Mars Hill, with fear of the "Huns" among us making people jittery. Things take an alarming turn and the story winds down in an unexpected, and yes, tragic, way. It *is* Ron Rash, after all.

3.5 stars, rounding up to 4 on the strength of the last 100 pages.  
Review copy provided by the publisher.

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### **Tiffany Reisz says**

Liked it. Didn't love it. Some very good writing but felt a little lightweight considering the heavy subject matter. And the ending was unsatisfying though I understand what he was doing. Probably should have been a deeper, richer, longer story with this plot and these characters.

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### **J.K. Grice says**

A beautiful story by Ron Rash. What a phenomenal writer he is...

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### **Dana says**

3.75 stars

Although this story takes place during WWI in NC, it reflects the prejudices that still exists today - all over the world.

I felt the novel stated off slowly and ended too quickly, but the story will remain with me and the writing was beautiful.

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## Melodie says

I love Southern literature. By turns it can be nostalgic, sweet,romantic, brooding, dark.But for me,southern literature always has it's complicated political and social history at it's core. The Cove is no different.

The setting is North Carolina just before the close of WWI. A young woman, shunned by the locals as a witch befriends a drifter she happens upon in the cove she calls home. As the friendship develops, you can see how this cannot possibly end well, but you are rooting for a happy conclusion.

The characters range from the stereotypical,some who would be truly comedic if they weren't so pathetic, to the enlightened and accepting. Laurel could easily have been portrayed as a passionate and fiery soul.Instead we find a young woman beat down and seemingly accepting of her lot in life. But the hope hasn't quite been extinguished.

And the author truly has a gift for extraordinary description. I could smell the cove as well as I could see it in my mind's eye. To live the story with the characters is always the mark of a 5 star book. Excellent!

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## Sandra says

There is Lauren, the wicked witch (or so the town thinks) with her brother Hank living in the cove. Disaster has struck the family several times and now they are ready to work hard and have a better future.

This is dark and gloomy, with bits of hope shining through. Rash' mastery with descriptions, he manages to completely immerse the reader in the environment of the cove. You hear the gurgling of the water and feel the sunlight on your face when you look up as the birds take off and make the leaves rustle. But since this takes places near the end of World War I, tension can be felt, expecially in town settings.

For all the beautiful prose we get from Rash, you can't go wrong with any of his books (so far).

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## Shaun says

First review of 2014...wohoo!

I like to think that I have eclectic reading tastes, meaning that while I have preferences when it comes to my reading choices, I find I like lots of different styles, genres, and stories for lots of different reasons.

But this ... *The Cove*, this is the kind of book that hits my literary G-spot. Okay, I know: a little crude, too much information, whatever--but true.

You see, I love Southern Gothic fiction--Flannery O'Connor, one of my heroines; Erskine Caldwell, a genius--so it's no surprise that I would enjoy Ron Rash's work.

And I did. I loved it. What's not to love? Subdued story and action; poetic prose; vivid descriptions; complex, flawed characters; and a tragic ending the reader hates to love and loves to hate.(view spoiler)

And if that weren't enough, it's under 300 pages (the perfect length for a book as far as I'm concerned.)

This is the story of two siblings, misfits of a sort as far as the rest of their world is concerned, as they attempt to find some happiness, told against the backdrop of World War I and the South.

Bottom line: 5 sparkly, glittery, lovely little stars. I was lucky enough to check this out from the library the day before a big storm snowed us in. Definitely icing (or at least ice) on the cake.

Would recommend this to fans of Southern Gothic fiction.

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