



The Breaking Wave

Nevil Shute

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Requiem for a Wren (U.S. title *The Breaking Wave*) is one of Nevil Shute's most poignant and psychologically suspenseful novels, set in the years just after World War II.

Sidelined by a wartime injury, fighter pilot Alan Duncan reluctantly returns to his parents' remote sheep station in Australia to take the place of his brother Bill, who died a hero in the war. But his homecoming is marred by the suicide of his parents' parlormaid, of whom they were very fond.

Alan soon realizes that the dead young woman is not the person she pretended to be. Upon discovering that she had served in the Royal Navy and participated along with his brother in the secret build-up to the Normandy invasion, Alan sets out to piece together the tragic events and the lonely burden of guilt that unravelled one woman's life.

In the process of finding the answer to the mystery, he realizes how much he had in common with this woman he never knew and how a war can go on killing people long after it's all over.

The Breaking Wave Details

Date : Published August 24th 2010 by Vintage (first published 1955)

ISBN : 9780307474025

Author : Nevil Shute

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Australia, War, Classics, World War II

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From Reader Review The Breaking Wave for online ebook

Martina Buřková says

This was my first book from Shute, but browsing the reviews I saw he is quite popular. My first impression of this novel was that it's a crime story. Though it is not, it's a war book and I've read quite some of those, but this is the first one where leading character fighting in war is a woman. The story is simple about two brothers, Australians, who are very fond of each other. *Requiem for a Wren* starts from the end of story, when Alan is after long years coming back to Coombargana in Australia to visit his old parents and stay forever. The night before their parlourmaid committed a suicide which was a great shock to all people on the farm. Younger brother Bill is in love with the leading navy wren Janet Prentice, they are just getting to know each other. Her work is to clean the guns, but she also shoots. One day she is meeting Alan Duncan the older brother, pilot and she is impressed by him. Successful young pilot, very modest and quiet. Soon after that Bill dies while deactivating mines in water and Janet's father too. Janet is able to keep his dog though. She is quite devastated, though not decided to leave wrennery just yet as the war is about to end. One day a plane is flying over their ship and she shoots it down, but at the end the plane and people in it are Czechs, Poles who wanted to join their side. This much adds to her depressions and soon after that Bill's dog dies. She tries few times to take her life, her mother's and father's deaths are the last ones. She thinks she deserves this for the seven dead people in the plane, she killed. Though her doctor is of different opinion and recommends her to go to Australia, to meet Bill's family and she does and is very happy at the farm. She realizes she wants Alan to fall in love with her just to be able to stay on the place she started to feel at home and therefore she takes her life.

This is quite a good novel consider the war scenes, though I was bored in some parts of it.

Cateline says

Requiem For A Wren by Nevil Shute

Shute reveals the end at the beginning, but only part of it, the devastating part. A young woman's suicide that seemingly has no rhyme or reason starts the returning home Aussie pilot on a journey through his past. The attention to detail is fantastic and the reader learns much about the nitty gritty of maintaining the gunnery parts of British WWII ships. I had no idea that there was such a thing as Ordnance Wrens in the War. They were an integral part of the War Effort and they suffered as much of what we know now as PTSD as any of the soldiers that saw action.

All of this plays into Shute's story and is worked beautifully into a story of love, war, regret and family. While the author pulls no punches, he does not dramatize, he tells it like it was, laying bare the hearts of the characters. Even knowing of the eventual end of the pivotal character does not take away from the dramatic tension Shute creates throughout the story. He brings us to slow realizations in a wonderfully artistic manner, dawn breaking finally revealing the true depth of each character.

Highly Recommended.

Aliya Whiteley says

A wonderful depiction of what it's like to live through a time of great danger and excitement, and to find meaning for yourself in that experience. But then that time ends, and life goes on, and it is so very difficult to be unimportant, and not very good at anything in particular. Shute somehow balances this and keeps interest throughout in our lead character, whether she's excelling herself or hiding away, unable to face the world any more. She never seems less than real. I cried for her.

Zora says

The convoluted narrative structure didn't do the tale any favors here, and it often made no logical sense. (How could the narrator have known the Wren never spoke of X or had a sleepless night, when none of his informants or the diary told him so?) In a sense, it's a tale of a female British WW II combatant suffering from PTSD...and of the men who loved her. But as with Pied Piper, Shutes seems to be hanging on to a Victorian novel structure, with a framing narrative device that isn't necessary. It does stretch a novella worth of story into a novel, but does nothing for this reader. The characters are terrific. But....

I have a stack of five more Shutes from my underfunded library, where nothing is ever thrown away, but if any more use a framing device, I'll give those a pass.

Brenda says

This is such a good book. Nevil Shute has never disappointed me.

Rohit Sharma says

This is my second Nevil Shute book and twice in a row, I have fallen in love with his superb love stories and totally awesome strong women. Also, it became one of those very few books which I finished in flat 48 hours, talking about gripping stories, this was one of the best based around second world war and its repercussions on a family. Also the story of two brothers took me back in time couple of years and made me miss my own little brother who will go to any extent just to make one evening I spend with him more beautiful. On my way to a family emergency, I called my brother and told him that I may drop by for a night to our home-town. He threw out everything off the refrigerator, much to the shock and amazement of our sister in law and filled it up totally with Beer :). My friend who drove with me as we had to come back non-stop, my brother, and our immediate neighbor (now my father in law), we all got drunk that night, walked around the block in drunken state, had our dinner somewhere and no idea who woke up where next morning, as we had to push out very early in the morning. The friend who joined me on this adventure now coincidentally an Australian Citizen, where this story takes place and hence the memory. Hope I get to meet them again in this life time and we all get drunk yet again to have a beautiful evening, a memory of a life time.

Going by the title and its amazingly beautiful cover, two lovers kissing with Guns and a Naval ship in the background was totally unexpected but beautiful story. Also, before I forget, let me tell you that this is I guess second book in a long long time which actually made me super emotional and tears actually rolled down my eyes with a huge lump in my throat almost the size of a basketball :). Terrific story of two brothers from outskirts of Australia, the town of Coombargana (which I will never be able to forget now) where they own thousands of a acres of land and sheep farms. One of them a pilot in air force where as the other

becomes a marine. Their paths cross during the war near Normandy, where the one who meets the love of his life during the course of war, loses his life and other loses both his legs. The strong girl who serves in war as a wren in-charge of ordinance, is the the character to watch out for. Imagine all that happens in the very first chapter and the story goes in flashback when one of the brother returns back home for good after so many years and realizes that his parents life is in ruins. They have their own struggles and a dead housemaid to take care of, who commits suicide on the day he returns, what is the cross connection? Read the book to find out.

As I said this was my second Nevil Shute book and what amazed me again is that in both the books, his women characters are super strong and totally amazing. You've got to read this book to know what she does in Army and how. Imagine a broad shouldered girl with a square face who claims she isn't much of a beauty but what she does with Guns is something everybody watches with their eyes popping out. One unfortunate mistake in the course of the war for which she is never blamed by anyone changes her life for good. Where that episode leads her and how it all ruins her life to no repair is the story is all about. Heart-breaking yet a emotional roller coaster ride of the three amazing characters and their friends and family is totally out of this world experience. Nevil Shute's stories are totally smooth and his narrative is just so gripping yet simple that I found the book to be totally unputdownable as my heart kept asking me to go forward and solve the riddle. Plus I wanted to race to the end to know how it all ends. As I said it was one of the most emotional stories that I ever read, it is very tough to point out the moments it made me super emotional. The entire journey of one brother to find his dead brother's lover touched me deep inside, every-time his search fails, my heart cried out. Also the girls struggle after her loss and after so many deaths, the point where she finally loses something which makes her cry for the first time was the moment my tears just rolled out, unable to control the barrage. Wow, that was just wow moment and I feel totally out of words to explain why and what I felt at that moment. If you read the book, you will certainly know and agree with me on that.

Have you read The Breaking Wave? do let me know how you find it and if you haven't read it, you've got to read it and you just can't miss it at any cost, trust me on that. Also, do let me know if you have a favorite Nevil Shute book, I am surely looking forward to more of his works.

Kavan says

Nevil Shute is a rare breed of writer. His books are full of danger, romance and other dynamics. But the principal theme in all his work is dignity amid and often accompanied by death. In *On the Beach* Shute depicted a group of Australians awaiting radiation fall out and subsequent death with strength and forbearance. *A Town Called Alice* showed a group of Australians living and dying amid the Pacific theater of WWII. *The Breaking Waves* mines familiar terrain. It follows a group of people through WWII and the subsequent decade or so afterward. Shute's thesis in this book is that war can go on killing and affecting people long after the final battle. Also, Shute argues that peace is often impossible because people who fight wars in their youth become nostalgic for the war, without realizing it's their youth they actually miss, and thus will support future wars rather than peace for a chance to return to that excitement. Nothing they realize will ever touch them the way the war did, and they long to return to that feeling all their days. If this sounds heavy for a novel, rest assured Shute is a master at plotting and keeps events moving.

Shute's saga involves the wartime exploits and subsequent search of former RAF pilot Alan Duncan for a Wren that was involved with his brother in WWII. Through his search Alan revisits his brother's wartime death, meets some of the Wren's friends, and offers some insight into his own war injury and complicated recovery. Shute was an engineer and a RAF pilot, and his experiences provides a nuts and bolts approach to wartime work, duties involving both risk and boredom amid day to day living. So many novels explore the excitement and danger of war but provide little insight into what that work actually involves. Shute's novel

goes into great deal of the work of the Wrens, scuba divers and pilots in the war.

However, novels like this rise or fall on their characters. Shute does a great job exploring how each of the surviving characters processes the war and the long years after the war. Some of the characters adapt and move on as best they can. Some don't move on and Shute explores their agony with respect. Alan is a decent and good man, but he has flaws and the novel traces how he resolves his past mistakes by actually learning from the experience of his brother and the Wren.

My one quibble is that I felt the ending was a bit hasty. I wanted to see how Alan's parents and Viola deal with the ramifications of Alan's discoveries. However, that does not really distract from a strongly, emotional masterpiece.

Stephen says

interesting read based around the time of the D Day landings and relationships between 2 brothers and a WREN who later appears in Australia after the war and the events around DDay and her life until that fateful day as researched by the remaining brother.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Nostalgic needs nabbed Nevil by the novelistic 'nads and gnawed them to nubbins.

The only reason I read this all the way to the end was because I wanted to know how Janet Prentice ended up at Coombargana. I'm giving it two stars rather than one because Shute demonstrates very well how people who have served in a great war are at loose ends when the war is over. They find themselves wishing for another war so their lives can once again have meaning and camaraderie. Can't say I'd recommend the book, though. Dreadfully dull, and that's coming from someone who usually enjoys WWII novels.

Sally says

Nevil Shute has such an interesting way of writing and once again in this book I felt that I was discovering how the character thought and felt as he muddled his way through life. The story is fascinating in its description of life before and after the WW2 in England and how those involved in the forces were left puzzled and directionless in this new world of peace. Nevil also describes the difficulty people had in finding those who had once been close in a narrative that is a bit like a tv crime drama - what will happen next? One thing I truly love about his writing is his understanding of Australia and its people. I love this quote - 'It takes a long time for an Australian to accept the fact that the wide, bustling, sophisticated world of the northern hemisphere cannot compare with his own land in certain ways; I was nearly forty years old, and I was only now realizing that by any standard of the wider world my own home was most beautiful.' Australians are great travellers but Nevil has us pegged.

Ahmed says

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Ralph Sayle says

Great book.

I was touring in England a couple of decades ago and visited Bucklers Hard. Their small museum had a feature about Neville Shute's Requiem for a Wren but I had no idea what the display was about.

A day or so later I was in Plymouth and walked into a used bookshop near Sutton Harbour. First book I spotted was Requiem for a Wren! I was fated to buy the book.

Glorious read and the first "war book" that spoke of the postwar stresses... not PTSD but "war is over! what shall I do now" stress. I've heard a second hand tale from one children of a war veteran (RAF Group Captain) who said "the war years were the best years of my life" and then he added "never tell that to your mother".

I suppose the best modern term to describe these war veterans is "adrenalin junkies". The war is over and everything is now an anticlimax. They queued to get into the Korean War and were turned down. What can they do and what don't they end up doing?

Great book, great read and gives a perspective you never hear about these days.

Megan Baxter says

Sometimes I think I am just not that good at reading some kinds of mainstream fiction. I am too easily aggravated. That's far too broad of a statement, I am aware. It's not like I only read science fiction, or even that science fiction is devoid of characters or plots that piss me the hell off. Still, I have even less patience for those elements when they come wrapped in mundanity.

Note: The rest of this review has been withheld due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision here.

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Negar says

Like some infernal monster, still venomous in death, a war can go on killing people for a long time after it's all over.

This quote pretty much sums up this book for me. Requiem for a wren is a brilliant story. I took it up one afternoon and couldn't put it down till it was finished.

Having not read anything by Nevil Shute before, it first looked like a sort of detective story to me, "The mystery of the dead parlour-maid " or something. But of course the blurb said something else. It's a sad and very realistic story of WWII. Shute brilliantly depicts the psychology of the individuals involved in war and follows them after the war. individuals who defined their existence and the purpose of their lives through their taking part in the action and then the listlessness they experience after it's all over.

Meryl says

The thing that keeps me coming back to Shute--and has made him one of my favorites--is his wonderful leading female characters. They're all different enough to make them worth reading, but still similar--smart, sensible, sturdy...in short, plucky. From Moira Davidson facing the end of the world (On the Beach) to Jean Paget on a Malaysian death march (A Town Like Alice) they're the kind of girls that can get through anything, and they do it in the way that I would hope that I would, were I in their shoes.

This is the story of what happens when one of those wonderful girls finally breaks....

It's also about chasing your youth. As with many of Shute's books, this story was largely set during WWII. And although that was a horrible time for many people, of course, as one of the characters in this book points out, it had to have been at least somewhat exciting in places too....And how do you go back to real life after that?

Haytham Mohamed says

Another great novel by Shute. The only thing I didn't like was the ending, you got the feeling that you knew this was coming the whole time but hoped it happened in a more convenient way than it did. Chapter 10 felt like it was written in a bit of a hurry! But nonetheless, an excellent & emotional book to read!

Robin_R says

My review is on my book blog: <https://afondnessforreading.wordpress...>

Manny says

I'm trying to guess how many books I've read which in one way or another are about the Second World War. I've read a couple just in the last month, Wilcox's *Japan's Secret War* and Linebarger's *Psychological Warfare* . As usual, I was gripped by two contradictory emotions: horror and fascination. I think most people have a similar reaction. The war was monstrous and appalling, but it was also the most exciting, extraordinary period in human history. New techniques, new ideas, new ways of thinking were invented and turned into weapons within a couple of years; sometimes a couple of months. Nothing was impossible, and everyone knew what the purpose of life was. It was to win the war.

These thoughts are not, of course, new, and they've been expressed many times. I don't think though that I've ever seen them expressed in quite such a pure form as in this obscure novel. The heroine has served as a WREN in the war, and now it's over there's only one thing she wants: to get back in uniform and do it again. It's a very tragic and thought-provoking story. What does it say about us? I don't think Shute knew either: my feeling is that he was just describing something he'd seen himself, in slightly fictionalised form, because it disturbed him so much and he had to get it out of his system. It's worth reading.

Peter says

Re-reading is something I avoid, along with watching movies or TV shows a second time. Life's too short for repeats...well, in most cases. This is such a poignant, human novel that it almost demands re-reading. Shute's writing is exactly my cup of tea. There's always a cracking story and the life - and death - of Leading Wren Janet Prentice is a heart-breaker. With D-Day and the aftermath of WW2 as a back-drop Shute's in his real comfort zone. If you think the descriptions of the build-up to the Invasion have a powerful realism, you won't be surprised to know that Shute was there at the time as a naval Lt. Commander and that his day job was designing some of the secret and weird new weapons used on June 6th. Yet this is not a war book, certainly not a chronicle of battle. Shute has crafted an emotional story as pertinent today as at any time. Sometimes attitudes which were current in the 40s and 50s jar a bit. ("...her action drawings were unusually good for a woman" he says of one character). But the tragedy of missed opportunity which engulfs the two main characters is an eternal tale.

David Gilchrist says

One of this authors more outstanding works, very sad, but a really good read.
