

## TROPPO

MADELAINE DICKIE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Black magic, big waves and mad Aussie expats.*

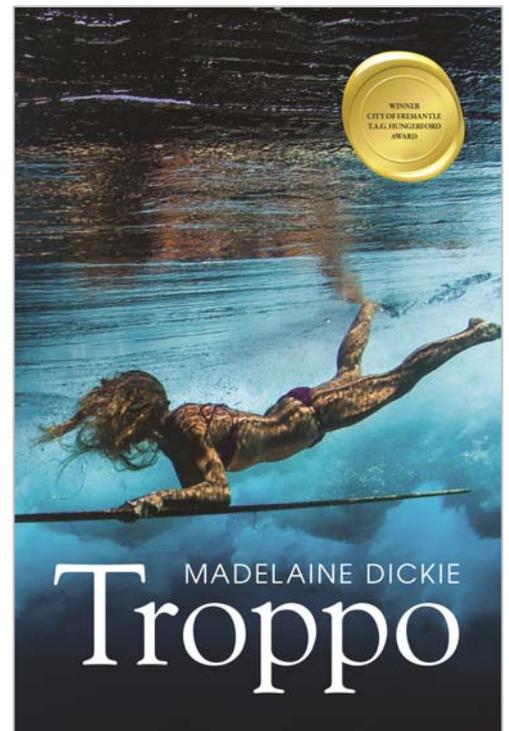
In Indonesia, Penny is drifting, partying, hanging out – a thousand miles away from claustrophobic Perth and her career-minded boyfriend. But things take a dangerous turn when she goes to work at Shane's Sumatran Oasis. Caught up in the hostility directed at Shane, and flirting and surfing with the hell-man Matt, Penny soon finds herself swept into a world where two very different cultures must collide.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madelaine Dickie studied Creative Arts and Journalism at the University of Wollongong. In 2011 she received a Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Award to move to West Java, Indonesia, and complete her first novel. As part of this award, she worked with mentors at Universitas Padjadjaran and Universitas Islam Bandung. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications including *GriffithREVIEW* (2013), the American journal *Creative Nonfiction* (2012) and *Hecate* (2010). Her radio stories have been broadcast on Radio National and she also writes and rides for the surfboard company Treehouse Landscapes and Handshapes.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Tropo* is set in November 2004, two years after the Bali bombings, a year after the bombing outside the JW Marriott Hotel, and two months after the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta (interview with Madelaine Dickie) – a time when Jemaah Islamiyah was making its presence felt, and fundamental Islam in Indonesia was on the rise. It was a time when innocent people (both locals and bules) were being hurt and killed in the name of radical elements of Islam? In what ways do you think this depiction of fundamentalism 'of its time'? How have these conflicts evolved on a global scale since then?
2. How would you describe Australians' perceptions of Indonesia, and Indonesians' perception of Australians then and now? How do these elements play out in *Tropo*? Do you think that this relationship has changed in the last decade?
3. Do you recognise Australians in the depictions of Dickie's characters, including those of Matt, Shane and the expat community, as well as Penny herself? What do these characters tell us about Australians overseas (and in particular, Australians in Indonesia)?
4. Do you think that Penny's perception of herself is different from how other characters in the novel see her? In what way does the author enable us to receive these multiple viewpoints?
5. How would you describe Penny's relationship to Indonesia? What is it about Penny's adolescence that has forged her connections to the country?
6. Why do you think Dickie has included the epithet at the novel's beginning from John Kinsella: *Some of us willingly live on fault lines*? What are the fault lines that are revealed in the novel itself?
7. How does the character of Penny change over the course of the novel? In what ways do her own personality and tendencies contribute to what she experiences?
8. *What kind of man is Shane?* Penny muses. *Is it possible to separate out the man from the rumours? What I do wonder is if Shane, volatile and charismatic, intelligent and crass, will be a kind of catalyst for something – something bigger that's already happening in Batu Batur, in Sumatra, in Indonesia.* (p. 187) What is the impact of having a man like Shane in this – or any – community? How might one think of him in



relation to the effect he has on those around him? How might a reader reconcile the character of Shane with his active antagonism against the elements of fundamentalism and conservatism in Indonesian society?

9. Does the revenge sought against Shane have anything to do with fundamentalism or Islam, or might it be seen through the filter of the application of natural justice? Why is it that Dickie has chosen the expats as the ones who seek to use black magic against Shane?
10. 'Me personally? I think mosque, church, temple, this is Indonesia, ya? Many people, many religions, why not?' (p. 181) What do you think are some of the biggest challenges for multicultural societies such as those found in Indonesia and Australia?
11. *Is this what it takes, to soften indoctrination in the hearts of radicals, to remember our shared humanity?* (p. 258) Why do you think it can take a tragedy for people to set aside their differences?
12. The Boxing Day tsunami (cataclysmic in Indonesian terms) forms a kind of postscript to the action in this novel. Why do you think the author has chosen to handle it this way?

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

***Tropo is a book that explores the relationship of Australians to Indonesia and Indonesians. Was this one of your motivations in writing the novel?***

I've spent a lot of time travelling and living in Indonesia and wanted to articulate the allure, the charm, what it is that keeps pulling me, and so many other Australians, back to Indonesia. I also wanted to write something mythic about surfing in Indonesia. I wanted to write about the hell men who surf heaving reefs alone, about waxing your board with the first call to prayer from the mosque, about the grizzled old surfers, who, with a certain amount of beer, might talk in low voices about black magic. They might tell you that one night, in a lonely seaside losmen, they were strangled awake by something not seen, only felt. Mythic, of a time that's swiftly disappearing, or has disappeared.

***Why did you choose to set Tropo at the end of 2004? Do you think that the Australian–Indonesian relationship has changed in the last decade?***

*Tropo* is set two years after the Bali bombings, a year after the bombing outside the JW Marriott Hotel, and two months after the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta. This context is important for *Tropo*, as some of the themes explored are the rise of fundamental Islam and the coexistence of Islam and traditional beliefs. At the time of writing, as a student of journalism, I was also aware of the two dimensional depictions of Islam in the media, and wanted to create rounded characters and discussions based on some of the stickier topics I liked to discuss with my Muslim friends. Has the relationship changed? Of course, things are always in a state of flux. However, our news media is now less concerned with Jemaah Islamiyah, and more concerned with the rise of Islamic State, which no one had heard of ten years ago. So the shape of fundamental Islam has also changed.

***Did writing Tropo help you to define your own relationship with this country, and in what way?***

I hoped that by writing *Tropo* I'd be able to extract Indonesia from my heart, from under my skin. Wouldn't feel so obsessively drawn back. It hasn't worked. Every time I land in Bali, take that first breath of humid, incense-soft air, I break into goose bumps. Every time I travel somewhere else, I find myself comparing the place to Indo. Dominican Republic? Surf's way more fickle than in Indo. Panama? Food's nowhere as good as in Indo. Namibia? The people are so aloof—nothing like the Indos!

***Is it fair to say that some elements of Tropo are autobiographical? In what way did this book stem from your own experiences as a traveller and surfer?***

Some of the anecdotes are almost true, certainly stemming from my own experiences as a traveller and surfer. In Sumatra, I heard of a body boarder from the Canary Islands who scraped her nipples off surfing a

slab; this happens in my book to the Kiwi. The texture of *Tropo* is also very true, the intoxicating smell of kretek cigarettes, the nights bleary on Bintang beer, and the way the call to prayer from the mosques drift down through mountain valleys. This said, the characters are entirely fictional, and were you to search for Batu Batur along the coastline of mainland Sumatra, you wouldn't find it.

### ***Dare I ask whether Shane is based on a real individual?***

Shane's a composite of several mongrel expats I met in Tonga, Vanuatu, Mozambique and Indonesia. He also has a few characteristics and stories stolen from people I like very much!

### ***What impact has winning the City of Fremantle T.A.G. Hungerford Award had on your writing career?***

Now that I've got a book published, I can tell people, without shame: I'm a writer.

### ***What is next for Madelaine Dickie?***

I've just moved to Wyndham, in the far north of Western Australia. I'm living in an open-air house and the view from my writing desk is of a mudflat. The Cambridge Gulf and Balangarra country stretches beyond the mangroves. The mozzies are bad, and in March this year, the temperature hit forty degrees Celsius by 11am every day. There's also not much happening in Wyndham – the abattoir has shut down, the croc farm has shut down, and the pub has just shut down. Still, it's so austere beautiful, and I get a wild thrill thinking about the potential stories here ... So far it's been a great place to work on my next book!

## **GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK**

ada apa?	what's the matter?
ada orang gila	there is a crazy person
ada perempuan di atas	there's a woman up there
ada susu	is there milk?
aduh	oh no!
alis mata	eyebrows
ambil itu	take it
angin	wind
anjing	dog
apa lagi?	what else?
arak	any of various spirits distilled in certain Arab and Asian countries from toddy, rice, molasses, or other materials
ayo	let's go
ayo pulang	let's go home
bajingan	bastard
bak mandi	a tub used to hold water for bathing
bakso	bowl of meatball soup
banyak duit	lots of money
bapak, pak	father (honorific term)
becak	pedicab
bebas	free
begini ya	it's like this
begitulah saja	that's just how it is
bencong	ladyboy
berapa	how many / how much
bihun goreng	fried vermicelli noodles
bisa	you can
bisa saya bantu?	can I help you?
bodoh	stupid, idiot

## GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK CONTINUED

bodoh banget	really stupid
boleh makan dulu?	can we eat first?
boleh minta	may I have
bu	honorific term for a married female
buat semua?	for everyone?
bukan	no, not
bukalah pintu ini	open this door
bule	foreigner, particularly Caucasian
Cahyati mau pulang kampung	Cahyati wants to go home to the village
cepat!	fast!
dan	and
dangdut	a genre of Indonesian music
dari mana?	where are you from?
dimana	where
dingin	cold
dokar	horse-drawn cart
dua kopi hitam	two black coffees
dua ribu	two thousand
duduk	sit
dukun	shaman
enak	tasty
'gak [nggak] begitu	not really, not like that
'gitu	really, like that; short for <i>begitu</i>
hantu	ghosts
hati-hati	caution, be careful
ibu	mother
ilmu	science
iya	yes
jadi siapa?	so who ?
jalan-jalan	stroll
jam karet	rubber time
jangan nakal	don't be naughty
kain ikat	cloth belt
kain songket	a kind of woven fabric, silk or cotton
kaki lima	food cart
kan	right?
kamar mandi	bathroom
kan?	right?
kasih ke saya	give it to me (slang)
keagamaan apa?	what is your religion?
kebaya	blouse
keluar	get outside
ke mana	where?
kecantikan	beauty
kenapa?	why?
kenapa kamu disini?	why are you here?
kenapa kesana?	why there?
kerupuk	crackers
kok mahal?	why is it so expensive?
kok ribut sekali?	how come it's so noisy?
kopi hitam	black coffee
kretek	Indonesian clove cigarette
kris	short sword or dagger with wavy blade

## GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK CONTINUED

kamu oke	you okay?
kasihtahu aja, ya, kalau mau bantuan	let me know, yeah, if you want help
kenapa kamu nggak mau sarapan?	why you don't want breakfast?
lagi	again, more
laki-laki	boy, male
lebih baik	better
lewat sini	this way
lima menit lagi	five more minutes
losmen	budget accommodation
madrasah	college for Islamic instruction
maaf	sorry
maaf sekali	[I'm] so sorry
maaf ya	sorry, yeah
malam ini	tonight
mandi lagi	wash again!
masak!	no way!, really? (slang)
masih lama?	will it still be a while?
mau apa	what do you want?
mau ke mana?	where are you going?
mau kopi?	do you want coffee?
mau minum apa	what do you want to drink?
mau pisang goreng	do you want banana fritters?
mie goreng	fried noodles
nakal	naughty
nasi campur	a scoop of rice accompanied by small portions of meat/vegetables
nasi goreng	fried rice
nasi goreng ayam	chicken fried rice
nenek	grandmother
nggak	no (slang)
nggak apa	no worries
ojek	motorcycle taxi
oleh-oleh	souvenir
orang	person
orang gila	crazy person
orang lain	other people, outsider, not from here
pacarmu masih di kampung?	your boyfriend is still in the village?
pagi bu	morning, madam
pagi pagi benar	early in the morning
pak	sir
pasar	market
permisi	excuse me
pisang goreng	fried banana fritters
punya berapa saudara?	how many siblings do you have?
pusing	dizzy, headache
rokok	cigarette
rumah makan	restaurant
salak	snakefruit
sakit	sick
sayang	sweetheart, honey
selamat sore	good afternoon
sebentar	moment
sekarang, yuk	now, let's go
sendirian	alone
siang	good day

## GLOSSARY FOR THE BOOK CONTINUED

silahkan masuk	please come in
SMP, sekolah menengah pertama	junior secondary school
SMA, sekolah menengah atas	senior secondary school
sore	good afternoon
sudah	already, done
sudah bisa berbahasa Indonesia?	can you speak Indonesian?
sudah diminum	already drunk
sudah mandi?	have you had a wash?
sudah nyampai	[we're] here (slang)
sudah pintar	already clever
taat	obedient
teh dulu	tea first
tempe	fermented bean curd
tempat tidur terpisah	separate beds
tentu saja	of course
terlambat	late
wartel	manned phone booth; short for <i>warung telepon</i>
warung	small shop / stall
wayang golek	wooden stick puppets
yuk	let's go (slang)



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