'A glinting, big-hearted miracle of a book' Richard Glover

'A work of shimmering originality and energy, with extraordinary characters and a clever, thrilling plot ... unputdownable' Sydney Morning Herald

Darwin, 1942, and as Japanese bombs rain down, motherless Molly Hook, the gravedigger’s daughter, is looking to the skies and running for her life. Inside a duffel bag she carries a stone heart, alongside a map to lead her to Longcoat Bob, the deep-country sorcerer who she believes put a curse on her family. By her side are the most unlikely travelling companions: Greta, a razor-tongued actress, and Yukio, a fallen Japanese fighter pilot. The treasure lies before them, but close behind them trails the dark. And above them, always, are the shimmering skies.

A story about gifts that fall from the sky, curses we dig from the earth and the secrets we bury inside ourselves. All Our Shimmering Skies is an odyssey of true love and grave danger, of darkness and light, of bones and blue skies. It is a love letter to Australia and an ode to the art of looking up – a buoyant, beautiful and magical novel, abrim with warmth, wit and wonder.
Just between you and me, if I’m being completely truthful, I want to talk to my dead dad. We used to talk a lot in my dreams, especially around the time he died, about six years ago. I miss our dream talks. I don’t know why we stopped having them. Maybe because I stopped needing to have them. I want to talk to Dad so much right now because I want to ask him what he thinks about my first book, Boy Swallows Universe. Did he love it? Did he hate it? Does he feel like I do about it, that there was too much dark in all its light? He probably wouldn’t say much about it anyway. He was never too interested in things I wrote in the past. He was always too excited about what I was writing next.

Just between you and me, if I’m being completely truthful, I was terrified by what happened with Boy Swallows Universe. I wrote something from the very bottom of the well inside my soul. I winch-pulled it up. It came out of my heart and my mouth and my eyes and my fingertips, this wild story from my real life and from the life I had always wanted to live, and it seemed to find you, dear reader. Or, more profoundly, you found it. There was a river running quick and silent beneath that crazy semi-and-then-some-autobiographical story and it was filled with every deep question I’ve ever looked up and asked the shimmering sky. Am I a good man? Why do good people do bad things? I know how to use the good stuff, but what the hell am I supposed to do with all this bad, dark stuff?

I thought about running a mile from Boy Swallows Universe. Run away from it, because there’s too much truth in it, too many ghost traumas that grew legs in the back of my mind and crawled across the floor of my subconscious and on to the page for the world to see. Fuck that for a joke. Run. Run away from the boy. Run that way, over there, where the grass is long and green and the sun is warm and the sky is only ever one colour. The sky never shimmers over there, never shimmers with complex light or complex dark, with promise or possibility or fear. It just stays that one safe colour over there.

But what if you stopped running away? And what if you turned back to where you started? And what if you ran quicker than ever before back toward all those questions you still want answered? Double down, Trent. Dig a little deeper, Trent. What if you just kept digging? Fuck it. What did you come here for? Why do you think you even sat down at this cheap Ikea desk in the first place? You didn’t come to write about the roses. You came to write about the fucking lightning. Life’s too big for small talk. Why are you here if not to find the answers to the questions you were always too afraid to ask?

Dig, Trent Dalton, dig.

It’s something the sky keeps telling the hero of my new book, All Our Shimmering Skies.

Dig, Molly Hook, dig. She’s so beautiful this kid, Molly, and she’s so filled with me and my two daughters who are roughly her age and my wife who has her mind and my sky who has her heart. Dig, Molly, dig. What that means is, keep searching. Keep going. The answer is there. The girl is on this remarkable quest, this unlikely adventure. The bombs of World War II have reached her home town,
Darwin, and she fears she might have called them. And now she’s powering through the magical and forbidding and frightening deep northern Australian wilderness because she has a treasure map, but her treasure is not really the cursed gold her grandfather once stole but it’s really the sorcerer, the magic man, who she hopes holds all her answers to her questions. Run, the sky tells her. Keep running. Run, Molly, run. Fight, Molly, fight. Dig, Molly, dig.

It’s a dark story at times because my personal sky is filled with darkness at times. It’s a love story all the way through because my sky is always filled with it. It’s a story of wonder because my sky is bursting with it. I know for a fact that yours is, too. We all have our personal skies. All our shimmering skies.

Just between you and me, if I’m being completely truthful, I think the sky in this book might be my dead dad. I think the sky in my real life might be my dead dad. And he hasn’t been talking to me in my dreams so I’ve decided to talk to him in my sky. That’s how wondrous that sky is. The sky can be anyone or anything you need it to be. The sky is a canvas. The sky is a blank white page. The sky is page one of your next book. My sky told me to write this particular book at this very particular and very strange time in my life. It whispered to me. It still whispers to me. Then it slaps me in the face and grips both my shoulders and it spits in my scared blue eyes when it screams at me, reminding me of why the hell I was put on this earth. Why the hell I run. Why the hell I write.

“Dig!” it screams. “Dig, Trent, dig!”

Reviews

‘Dalton is an author of 19th-century expansiveness, one with a sense that intelligence, talent for characterisation and sheer narrative brio can still be the whole cloth of the writer’s ambition ... it is storytelling manna, fallen straight from the Territorian skies.’ The Australian

‘As Australian as outback red dirt and as universal as the sky young Molly Hook’s journey takes place beneath, All Our Shimmering Skies is an open-hearted wonder, by turns heartbreaking and full of hope, no less than an instant classic’ Venero Armanno

‘Australia has a new literary hero. Molly Hook – part Cordelia, part Jo March, part Pippi Longstocking – pulls us into a story and a landscape that is mythic, beguiling and almost hallucinatory in its beauty. And instantly recognisable as our own’ Kristina Olsson
‘This is storytelling at its absolute purest, a truly courageous expression of longing, hope and love ... against unimaginable odds’ Asher Keddie

‘All Our Shimmering Skies is the follow-up to Boy Swallows Universe we could have never imagined, but the one Dalton was destined to gift us. It’s a story of heroes and villains, foxes and water buffalo, fighter planes and birds of prey, real magic and real love, epitaphs and aphorisms, lost treasure and lost life. It’s a love letter to the nation. It’s your favourite childhood adventure story dictated by Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman and William Shakespeare, with a score by Franz Liszt. It’s dead serious. It’s completely ridiculous. It’s all of these things and more’ Booktopia

‘The book is alight with joyous candour, extravagantly beautiful writing and a series of intriguing jungle-set pieces’ Adelaide Advertiser

About the Author

Trent Dalton is a staff writer for the Weekend Australian Magazine and a former assistant editor of The Courier Mail. He’s a two-time winner of a Walkley Award for Excellence in Journalism, a four-time winner of a Kennedy Award for Excellence in NSW Journalism and a four-time winner of the national News Awards Features Journalist of the Year. His debut novel, Boy Swallows Universe, published by HarperCollins in 2018, is a much-loved national bestseller with sales of over 500,000 copies in Australia, winner of multiple awards, and now published across thirty-four English language and translation territories.
Discussion Questions

1. The story is in essence a quest narrative – can you see the resemblances to The Wizard of Oz or The Odyssey?

2. Have there been times in your life when you have spoken to the sky?

3. What do you think is the real treasure that Molly escapes into the forest to find?

4. Why do you think Greta Maze chooses to join Molly on her quest?

5. What do you think happened to Molly’s mother, Violet Hook?

6. The central theme to the story is “own all you carry, carry all you own”. In what ways could this message apply to your life in 2020 and, moreover, the story of Australia?

7. What role does death and where we go when we die figure in the narrative?

8. Do you believe there is magic to be found in the living world? Not just fantasy, but in the things we normally explain through science?

9. Dalton has said the story is one big metaphor for his life growing up on the fringes of Brisbane in the early 1990s. Did you find thematic similarities between All Our Shimmering Skies and Dalton’s semi-autobiographical debut, Boy Swallows Universe?

10. What do you think happens to Molly and Greta beyond the end of this story?

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