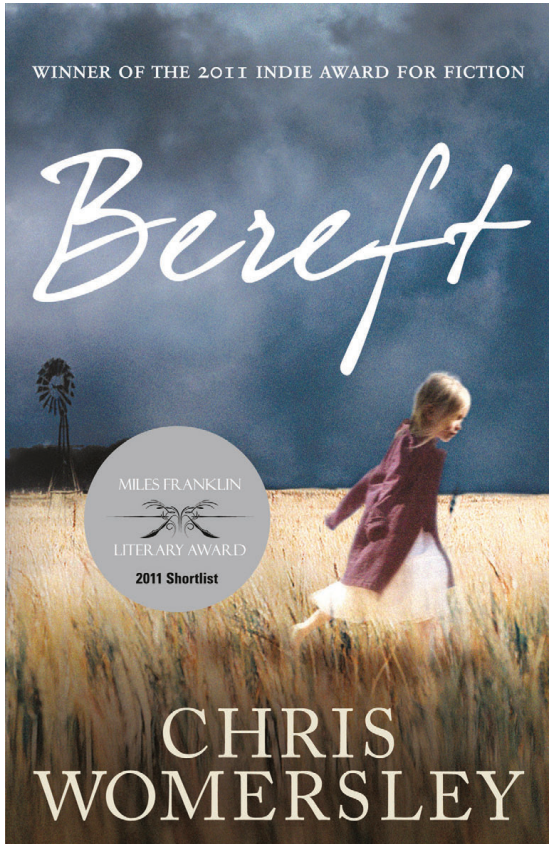


# Bereft

CHRIS WOMERSLEY



## BOOK DETAILS

Format: Paperback  
 ISBN: 9781921844027  
 RRP: \$24.95



## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Chris Womersley's fiction and reviews have appeared in *Granta*, *The Best Australian Stories* 2006, 2010 and 2011, *Griffith REVIEW*, *Meanjin* and *The Age*. His debut novel, *The Low Road*, won the Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction. His second novel, *Bereft*, won the Australian Book Industry Award for Literary Fiction and the Indie Award for Fiction, and was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, *The Age* fiction prize and the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal. Visit his website at [www.chriswomersley.com](http://www.chriswomersley.com).

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Do you think Sadie Fox really exists or is she a figment of Quinn Walker's imagination? Did your opinion of this change throughout the novel? At what points?
2. Quinn appears to experience hallucinations, possibly as a result of shell shock suffered during the war. How is Quinn's deteriorating mental state conveyed?
3. How does the author create a sense of unease at the beginning of the novel? Are there particular images or types of language that establish the mood and themes of *Bereft*?
4. At one point, Mary Walker says to Quinn: "*Would you think it possible to long someone into being?*" In what way is this relevant to the themes of the novel? What characters might have been longed, or imagined, into existence?
5. Mary Walker says: "*Stories are rarely only stories.*" What does she mean by this? What other stories have been wound into the narrative of *Bereft*? In what way are stories useful in life, or in the grieving process in particular?
6. Why might the religion of Spiritualism have enjoyed such popularity during World War One?
7. Who do you think wrote the letter that Quinn takes from the séance?
8. Do you believe in ghosts? If so, do you think it might be possible to communicate with them? Have you ever seen or otherwise encountered a spirit?
9. What events or characteristics combine to convince Quinn that Sadie is, in fact, the ghost of his sister Sarah Walker?

## REVIEWS

‘*Bereft* is a beautiful novel, which is a strange thing to say about a tale of so much loneliness, injustice and anguish. But somehow Chris Womersley peers deep into the suffering heart and sees beyond the pain that humans inflict on each other, to a place where dignity, loyalty and even affection might blossom. He writes with such compelling power it is barely possible to put the book down.’

— DEBRA ADELAIDE

‘*Bereft* is a bleak and brilliant performance that confirms [Womersley] as one of the unrepentantly daring and original talents in the landscape of Australian fiction ... Few recent novels, Australian or otherwise, have such eloquence, prompted by the despair of sufferers who do not shirk the task of seeking the right words. Few lead us so fearlessly to familiar locations made strange and terrifying or to others that seem conjured by old magic ... The last part of *Bereft* is frightening in a way that reminds one of why several reviewers of Womersley’s first novel made comparisons with Cormac McCarthy ... This is an outstanding work of Australian fiction. Read it next.’

— PETER PIERCE, *Sydney Morning Herald*

- I0. Does one need to have experienced loss to be able to sympathise with, and understand, Quinn’s grief? Did your personal experience affect how you related to Quinn?
- II. *Bereft* takes place in a small, rural Australian town in 1919. In what way is the setting of the novel important to the way the story unfolds?
- I2. Do you believe that Quinn is innocent of the rape and murder of his sister? Did your opinion of this change throughout the novel?
- I3. Is the ending of *Bereft* a happy one? Why or why not?
- I4. What do you think might become of Quinn Walker and Sadie Fox?



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