



Reviews of *COMPULSION* by Tania Kelly Roxborough, Scholastic, 179 pages

Tania Kelly Roxborough has done something in this book which is very hard to do and is often the reason why writers fail - she has not only written about teenagers but she has been in the mind of one. Tania Kelly became Simon (the main character) when she wrote this book.

Simon's father has had an affair, his mother has left home, and his best friend Kelly is annoying him, if only she knew how he really felt about her.

When it all becomes too much for Simon he gives into temptation and has just one drink, but when Simon finds that alcohol can ease and numb the pain he has more than just one drink. In fact Simon gets addicted at the age of sixteen.

This just makes his problems worse and Tania Kelly portrays this very well. She touches on the topic of hard drugs, but she does in a realistic way, not as something made to sound glamorous or like a movie.

All of the characters in the book are realistic and everything they do and happens to them is credible too eg. getting with a member of the opposite sex because of loneliness and because everyone else is doing it, or friendships breaking up and changing all the time. Because of these and other things Simon and other characters from the book have huge fights with family and friends. The language used in these fights and throughout the book is raw and realistic not superficial or fake.

It's hard being a teenager and even harder when there is drugs or over use of alcohol involved, so will Simon get through ? Will he ever be with Kelly in the way he wants ? Will his mum come home? Can he get over the death of his friend? Tania Kelly reveals all at the end of the book in a realistic, interesting and touching way.

(Reviewed by Laura Stephenson - Young Fiction - [NZ Writers' Website](http://www.nzwriters.org.nz/))

This book deals with teenage alcoholism in a non-patronising way. The author says, "My aim is simply to reflect and therefore enlighten teenagers and make them think about their drinking habits" It moves along quickly and should stimulate discussion amongst middle and upper school students.

<http://www.stpauls.vic.edu.au/winteread.htm>

Alcohol, booze, hooch, grog, piss, turps, poison, sauce, the bottle, tincture, wee dram, moonshine, poteen. The chances are that, despite what you call it, alcohol will figure either directly or indirectly in your life in a significant way and no more so than as a teenager.

Roxborough's new novel *Compulsion* looks at the world of teen protagonist Simon. Simon and his world are both changing and he is casting around for ways to deal with events. Things are radically different at home and his comfortable friendship with Kelly is becoming prickly as Simon attempts to cope with feelings for her that she does not appear to return. School seems nothing more than a waste of time.

"Simon carried around a weight of sadness but couldn't figure out where it came from or how he could get rid of it. His usual motivations for life had gone the way of the outgoing tide."

Into this turbulent time comes alcohol and Simon's first experience is unexpectedly pleasant and rewarding. "The wind had made his limbs warm and comfortable and Simon wasn't ready for the feeling to end." Unfortunately things soon began to spiral out of control as Simon's drinking takes over almost every aspect of his life - school, relationships and personal pride. "It was about three weeks later that Simon discovered that he wasn't the only one using his sipper bottle for liquid stronger water."

Compulsion paints an unrelenting and utterly realistic portrait of how and why the lure of drinking works. There are no easy 'get-outs' for Simon or the problems he has to deal with but there are signs of hope and reconciliation. I particularly like the way in which the developing relationship between Simon and Kelly is structured and made convincing for the reader.

There is nothing 'preachy' about *Compulsion*. It deals bluntly with the dangers of drinking and pulls no punches in showing appalling things which can result from over dependence on the 'crutch' of alcohol. *Compulsion* would be an excellent buy for senior students especially as, in an ironic piece of timing, the media is full of debate about lowering the drinking age in New Zealand. " Anne Winnall **AATEL e:mag** Oct 1999

"Simon is a teenager in turmoil. His dad's having an affair, he's lost interest in school and the girl he loves just wants to be friends.

Undrammatically Simon decides that alcohol blurs the edges and makes it easier to get through the day's niggles. But eventually the consequences are more dramatic. *Compulsion* manages to capture the 'normality' of Simon's actions and the demon he must face in the end. The author tackles the ought subject of teen alcohol abuse without sentimentality, without moralizing and without over dramatizing. While *Compulsion* has its message, it is not in danger of being relegated to the library shelves of self-help groups because the message does not take over. It stands well as a good read." AM Kell, **Bay of Plenty Times** June 1999