

Compulsion

Tania Kelly Roxborough

Synopsis

Compulsion is a story about Simon Hassell and his year of hell. It begins with his father leaving the family to go to another. Suddenly the world in which Simon always thought was just fine, has not been as it seems. Although he has excellent SC results, his normal studious habits seem futile.

“It all seems too much effort. School. You know, you put heaps of work into it and still come out the end with nothing.... Like you and Dad”.

His relationship with his best friend Kelly is not going in the direction he wants. Simon decides to make some changes to his life: he learns to surf; swaps Biology for Drama, begins to drink alcohol, and takes up with other girls.

Simon quickly sinks into a destructive pattern that even Kelly and his close friend Jesse can't seem to pull him out of. After a particularly stressful time, Simon begins drinking every day and finds comfort in the fog of alcohol.

“The booze kept him at least five paces away from the impact of life. As though a cotton wool cushion was wrapped around him: he felt no stress, no trouble, no concern over what went on in his life. It was the best place to be”.

In the latter part of the year, Simon's drama class begin to prepare for a performance of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. Simon wins the lead role of John Proctor and quickly discovers a connection with the character.

Not long after exams, Simon and Jesse take a trip down the island for a surfing weekend. On the way, they pick up a school buddy but never make their destination. A drunken truck driver smashes into them, killing their friend and seriously injuring Jesse. Simon only has minor injuries but the shock of seeing Jesse in a coma stirs him to promise to kick the booze. Unfortunately life does not run so smoothly so it is back to the bottle. A party goes wrong and Simon recognises he could end up very sick or dead, so he calls Kelly for help.

They go to the drug and alcohol help centre and it is there that he and Kelly see the full extent of Simon's drinking problem. He promises again to do dry – with Kelly's help.

Things are hard but okay as Simon faces up to the problems he realises he has been hiding from; mainly his deep sorrow and disappointment in life; that things don't always work out the way you want them to. He also recognises that he still loves the feeling he gets when he drinks and wishes he hated it more than he loves it.

Two days before the first performance of *The Crucible* and after a particularly bad day, Simon succumbs to the temptation of drink. Kelly comes back to a totally liquored Simon who injures her before passing out. It is only when he sees the marks on Kelly that he realises he hurt the person that he loves.

The final performance is outstanding and brings with it a number of revelations for Simon and Kelly. Simon understands a little more the complexities of relationships and learns more about his parents' marriage grasping an understanding of why his father is unfaithful.

He also knows that what he did to Kelly is motivation enough to stop drinking. Kelly realises that she was close to losing Simon and her feelings over the year have consolidated and she is in love with him. The story ends with hope for Simon, for he and Kelly and for Jesse.

COMPULSION

NOVEL STUDY

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

In pairs, discuss the following questions and draw your results in clear diagrams on a piece of paper for other to read.

1. What things are the keys to a happy life?
2. How can you ensure that you have these things?

Characterisation

1. Describe the characterisation of Kelly and Simon at
 - the start of the story
 - the middle of the story
 - the end of the story
2. What changes have occurred and what has caused these changes?
3. Describe the relationship between Simon and Kelly at
 - the start of the story
 - the middle of the story
 - the end of the story
4. Parallels with *The Crucible*: Read the play and then answer the following
 - a) In what ways is John Proctor like Simon? Robbie?
 - b) In what ways is Elizabeth like Angie? Kelly?
 - c) In what ways is Abigail like Cherie and Jade? The alcohol?
5. For each of the following characters, Jesse, Jade, Cherie, Robbie:
 - a) Write down their purpose in the story
 - b) Write down a significant statement they make
 - c) Describe what happens to them

THEMES – self control, addiction, when life disappoints, choices, relationships

1. Why does Simon react so strongly to the separation of his parents?
2. Why is he angry with Kelly?
3. Using a dictionary, find out the definition of the word '**compulsion**'.
4. Why do you think the author has chosen *Compulsion* as the title of this novel?
5. Choose another title for the story and say why you think it would be a good title.
6. At the beginning of the story Simon thinks that he is a responsible drinker. What does he understand at the end of the story?
7. Look closely at the poem at the end of the novel. Describe the main ideas in this poem.
8. What do you think it means to have **self control**?
9. On your own, write your answer. Then, share it with a partner. Together, discuss your definitions and write another one based on what you both think. Join with another pair and repeat the exercise. Share your definitions with the class.

10. On a large poster, display your group's definitions of what it means to have **self control**. You can use magazine pictures, words, symbols, illustrations, collage.

STYLE AND SETTING

1. Explain the purpose of each of the italic sections before some of the chapters.
What do they tell us about what is happening 'outside' the main flow of the story?
2. *Compulsion* is written in an interesting way because:
 - The third person narration is limited mainly to Simon's point of view.
 - Each chapter is short and ends at an important moment.
 - It is set in New Zealand and mentions places we might know.
 - It uses a contrast in characterisation.
 - It has some very descriptive passages.
 - It parallels the play *The Crucible* and some of its messages.

Choose **two** of the above and in about one paragraph, explain, giving details and examples from the story, how the statement is true for the novel.

MORE WRITING

1. Write *either* the **police report** on the accident *or* the party.
2. Write an **epilogue** for *Compulsion*. It should be no more than a page.
3. **Write a letter** to the author Tania Kelly Roxborough saying what you think of her novel. She can be contacted C/- Scholastic New Zealand Limited, Private Bag 94407, Greenmount, Auckland 1730, New Zealand or email roxboroughpt@extra.co.nz

TANIA KELLY ROXBOROUGH PUBLISHED WORKS

I have been a drama teacher for a number of years and there wasn't much out there for New Zealand students so I put together a drama handbook called *Performing with Purpose*.

My second book was a collection of *Fifteen Minute Shakespeare* 1998, which I'd also written while teaching drama.

If I Could Tell You is the prequel to *Compulsion*. Both books are centred around the characters Kelly and Simon. In this book, Kelly approaches her 16th birthday, and is dealing with the usual pressures; friends, school and especially sex. In her turmoil, she turns to her late mother's schoolgirls diaries.

What she finds there is not the comfort she is looking for, but horrific description of sexual abuse – Kelly's mother was abused by her grandfather.

Unaware of the depth of feeling that her lifelong friend, Simon, has for her, Kelly turns to the sexy, good-looking John Schroeder whose attitude to study is rather less intense than her own and who is keen to have sex with her.

This title was published by Harper Collins 1997.

Other works by Tania Kelly Roxborough include

Grit	1998
Runaway	1998
Three Funny Plays	1997

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The novel is written from the point of view of a sixteen-year-old boy and is not preachy. My aim is simply to reflect and therefore, hopefully, to enlighten teenagers and make them think about their drinking habits. It is a novel of hope but does not solve every problem.

The Crucible is used throughout the play to parallel Simon's emotional state.

Throwing himself into the part of John Proctor, Simon uses John's addiction/weakness for Abigail as a simile for his own addiction to booze and it is here that he is able to bring his character to life without the help of alcohol.

It is also during some intense times with the character, Elizabeth, that Simon gains an understanding of how his father did what he did. Not only does the story of John and Elizabeth affect him, but Simon's growing attraction for the mousy Angie, challenges his own 'righteousness'.

The story ends with Simon's final performance, Jesse coming awake, Kelly and Simon kissing and Simon facing his own weakness and accepting his father's.

Tania Kelly Roxborough

Tania Kelly Roxborough was born in Christchurch on 1 September 1965. When she was three and a half, her parents split up and she moved to Te Puke with her two sisters and her mother.

Her first school: “I have a very clear picture of two teachers there: one who was lovely and taught us all sorts of wonderful things and an old bag who strapped me for taking a pencil. I decided then that I was going to be a teacher and be like the nice one and definitely not like the old bag.

In 1972 her mother met another man, a farm-manager who had four sons and a housekeeper with four children as well. They all moved in together and for a number of year moved around Northland.

“Living with so many other kids was great: you were never short of playmates and because of the bigger kids we got to do really daring things like canoe down rivers swarming with eels, build massive cave-like huts in the haybarn and drive go-carts around the farms.”

After completing her sixth-form year, Tania worked as a she-hand and then travelled north again to see her family. A year later she was back in Christchurch working in a jewellery shop, cleaning for the government and doing waitressing to save money for university.

In 1985 Tania began her three-year’s study at Massey University in Palmerston North. She stayed most of the time in the hostel called *Ferguson Hall*.

“My time at university hold great memories for me: the friends I met there are still my friends and even though I don’t see some of them very often, we keep in touch.

Tania went to Auckland Teacher’s College in 1988 and began teaching English the following year. It was also where she met her husband, Phillip.

Tania has taught at a number of schools including Macleans College, Westlake Girls High School, Kristin School, Birkenhead College and now teaches full time at Orewa College just north of Auckland.

She has also acted in film and television, including two small roles on Shortland Street. She has two girls: Mackenna and Brianna and currently has three cats: Bonny, Mulder and Scully.