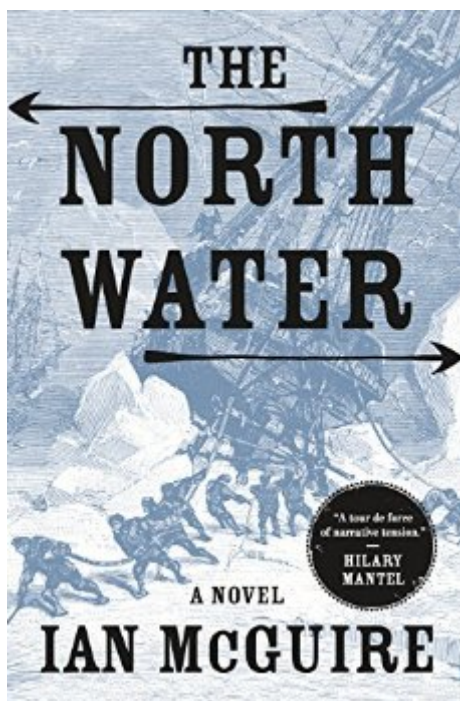


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The North Water: A Novel



Synopsis

Longlisted for the 2016 Man Booker Prize
A New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice "The North Water...is a great white shark of a book" – swift, terrifying, relentless and unstoppable.
"Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times" – Riveting and darkly brilliant | The North Water feels like the result of an encounter between Joseph Conrad and Cormac McCarthy in some run-down port as they offer each other a long, sour nod of recognition.
"Colm Toibin, The New York Times Book Review" [An] audacious work of historical suspense fiction...It's the poetic precision of McGuire's harsh vision of the past that makes his novel such a standout...absolutely transporting.
"Maureen Corrigan, NPR's Fresh Air" A nineteenth-century whaling ship sets sail for the Arctic with a killer aboard in this dark, sharp, and highly original tale that grips like a thriller. Behold the man: stinking, drunk, and brutal. Henry Drax is a harpooner on the Volunteer, a Yorkshire whaler bound for the rich hunting waters of the arctic circle. Also aboard for the first time is Patrick Sumner, an ex-army surgeon with a shattered reputation, no money, and no better option than to sail as the ship's medic on this violent, filthy, and ill-fated voyage. In India, during the Siege of Delhi, Sumner thought he had experienced the depths to which man can stoop. He had hoped to find temporary respite on the Volunteer, but rest proves impossible with Drax on board. The discovery of something evil in the hold rouses Sumner to action. And as the confrontation between the two men plays out amid the freezing darkness of an arctic winter, the fateful question arises: who will survive until spring? With savage, unstoppable momentum and the blackest wit, Ian McGuire's *The North Water* weaves a superlative story of humanity under the most extreme conditions.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I couldn't wait to read *The North Water* after reading the synopsis, which made it sound like a superlatively disturbing thriller bordering on horror. I was lucky enough to receive an Advance Review Copy through LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program, and my reading experience left me with the impression that the novel had only been slightly over-hyped. Despite my unrealistically high expectations, I found the book to be a uniquely compelling read, which kept my mind entirely absorbed from start to finish so that I finished it in one sitting. Author Ian McGuire distinguishes his story from the pack with distinctive stylistic choices as well as the inclusion of gruesome plot elements with the potential to shock and horrify the experienced thriller reader. I myself was not particularly shocked or horrified by these parts of the story. What kept me turning the pages was the sense of immediacy conveyed in the way the events were related. Two key features of McGuire's technique are his use of the present tense for exposition of the narrative and the inclusion of considerable dialogue. Although I would not call the effect cinematic, the novel would work well as a movie, I think. In any case, I highly recommend this novel to readers seeking a quality thrill. Page-turners of this caliber -- both in terms of style and content -- are few and far between in my experience. Thank you for reading my ideas; I hope they prove somehow useful to some of you.

I read the review in the Times and got what I expected in the reading: graphic and visceral violence, prejudice, bigotry, resident evil, immorality, amorality, extremely foul language. If none of this appeals to you, then do not purchase the book and then complain. This is mid-19th Century England; the novel focuses on whaling and killing them, as well as seals. The ship's crew is a scurvy bunch, but some of them have a sense of what is right and what is wrong. There are some decent interior monologues with a doctor/surgeon who has a sense of honor and justice; there is also an extremely evil character, not evil like Shakespeare's Iago, but more of Caligula personality, perhaps. This is a page-turner with a bit of Melville's character, Dansker, from *BILLY BUDD* and a few other seamen you may recognize. If foul language bothers you, but you're still going to risk it,

then be forewarned. The ship's captain is none too bright, and neither is the first mate, and unfortunately there is the lure of the kill which pulls all these men together.

It is 1857 and a whaling ship is about to leave for the Arctic. With Mr Baxter as the wily financier funding the expedition and an assembled crew which includes Captain Brownlee, perceived as an unlucky™ by the men, Dr Patrick Sumner, an Irish surgeon with secrets and, oh yes, a vicious murderer called Henry Drax. This is a dark and unsettling novel. The outline of the story may make it seem like a murder mystery, but this is far more literary fiction than a thriller. The writing is violent and unflinching from the beginning with insurance fraud, sodomy, abuse, survival in a desolate environment and some pretty gruesome scenes within the pages. The characters are what make the book work; with Sumner, the disgraced surgeon, as the most sympathetic. There are flashbacks of his time in the army during the Indian Mutiny and we learn of how he ended up taking part on board a whaling expedition. Henry Drax is a far less complicated character and it is his sheer nastiness that drives the story. His presence looms over the ship and casts a long shadow over a dark book indeed. Brooding, dark and violent, this novel will undoubtedly not appeal to everyone. However, if you are prepared to enter this dark, realistic account of a whaling ship with a killer on board, you will be unable to put it down. A book, and characters, which will stay with me for a long time. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

I've not read other books by Ian McGuire but I will now. It's hard to imagine how he could bring to life the Greenland whaling trade in the mid-eighteen hundreds, but it comes through powerfully here--the cold, the chase and kill, the venality of the officers and shipowners, the will to survive under horrifying conditions, the utter lack of humanity of the villain (can't say more without spoiling). I reached the ending and thought--what.. over so soon?! The scene with the bear hunt and the scene of an iceberg sliding along the ice formation destroying everything--I can't get them out of my head. I've tried to read Moby Dick and failed--it's my white whale of literature, so to speak. But maybe this book is just better in evoking whaling and the weirdness of the northland. Spellbinding.

This is the best blow by blow account of the day to day life on board a whale ship with all the dangers, filthy, dirty, a well exciting experiences. Also the single minded determination to survive and to recover and continue life with as much success and happiness as possible without surrendering to feelings of helplessness and despair which would be easy but which will lead to death.

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