

RESOURCE KIT

Longacre Press Young Adult Fiction

DARK

Penelope Todd

Sequel to the acclaimed novel *Watermark*.

For a moment the Joss of last summer flashed close, the sun-and-salt smell of his skin, the lupin-flower taste of his mouth.

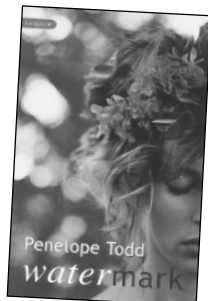
It's been a year since Zillah visited Roimata, the place on the wild West Coast which changed her life last summer. Now she's back, expecting to meet up with Joss and Hep, the brother and sister who both challenged and bewitched her those strange, magical and sometimes terrifying few days.

Yet this time, not only have Joss and Hep asked along another guest — who's like the bad fairy at the banquet — the changes Zillah sees in Joss are disturbing. It seems he's heading into a downward spiral: a breakdown he wants to handle in his own way...

Dark, an elegantly written, stand-alone sequel to the acclaimed novel *Watermark*.

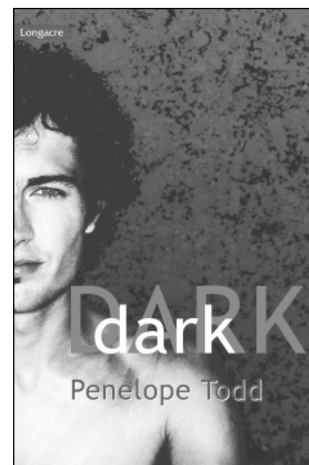
Also by Penelope Todd:

- *Three's a Crowd* (1999)
- *Peri* (2001)
- *Boy Next Door* (2002)
- *Watermark* (2003) a finalist in the 2004 NZ Post Book Awards



RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- **Outline**
- **Author Profile**
- **Study Notes:**
Creative/Critical Writing, Discussion Topics, Theatre/Drama, Formal Essay Topics, Visual Responses, Debate Topics, Research Subjects



Specifications:

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'... shows a deep respect for the intelligence of her young adult readership.'

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www.henz.co.nz

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OUTLINE:

Dark is the second novel in the 'Watermark' trilogy by Penelope Todd.

In the first novel, *Watermark* (finalist, NZ Post Book Awards 2004) 18-year-old city girl Zillah 'jumps track', abandons safe summer holiday plans, and accepts a mysterious invitation to take the train alone to Roimata on the wild West Coast. Here she meets a brother and sister, Joss and Hep, around whom a disturbing series of events cluster. On the Coast, Zillah is pitched against the elements, and pushed up against questions of life, death, and her own reason for being.

In *Dark*, the invitation to return to Roimata with Joss and Hep is renewed – and Zillah accepts, partly because of her nascent attraction to Joss in *Watermark*. This time, not only does Zillah have to help supervise another arrival: Flea, a spiky, sparky, self-

centred liability – but the changes she sees in Joss are frightening. After a year of low mood at varsity, Joss seems to be heading towards a serious breakdown which he wants to handle his own way – and his sister is unable to handle the final crisis.

Penelope Todd's work is acclaimed for its emotional acuity, stunning sense of physical setting and elegantly lyrical imagery. This aesthetic skill helps the writer to confront volatile subject matter (drugs, mental illness, sexual attraction) with an admirably delicate touch.

Dark is a courageous, ambitious novel which marks a significant turn in Todd's career. She takes on increasingly difficult psychological terrain, which shows not only a maturation of her own writing, but also a deep respect for the intelligence of her Young Adult readership.

AUTHOR PROFILE:

PENELOPE TODD grew up in Christchurch and her three children were born there. She's lived in Dunedin since they started high school. Two are now at university. Although she trained and practised for many years as a nurse, these days her work relates to writing. From home she writes fiction about teenagers, at a local publishing house (Longacre) she reads manuscripts, edits and proof-reads.

Penelope loves Dunedin's vibrant community and creative opportunities; having the sea, hills and wild-life within easy reach; her own home and garden where the family live, along with dog, cat, pet rat and a hive of bees. Also essential to her well-being are her friends, trips to the mountains, the library, movies, firesides and other really warm places.

In her writing, as in life, Penelope is fascinated by the inner process, in exploring how 'memory, dreams and desire' intersect with reality, how internal landscapes shift, and the influence of those shifts on the seen world and its relationships. Lots of this upheaval goes on in adolescence – and what doesn't get sorted then crops up again at mid-life. Which is probably why she feels at home writing about teenagers.



STUDY NOTES:

CREATIVE/CRITICAL WRITING

- Offer a few lines of interpretation of the extract from Rumi’s poetry quoted at the start of the novel.
- Write your own five-line, gnomic poem – in the style of Rumi – based on the wisdom you feel you’ve gained from reading the novel.
- **Dark** is the second novel in a trilogy. Write a summary of all the events that have happened in this novel as a prologue for the third. (Re-read the prologue on page 8 as a guide for the sort of style that might suit the sequel.)
- Re-read pages 29–30. Write your description of how you would be able to tell – just from watching – that someone you are close to had gone through some unspoken change.
- Trace each mention of the white heron/kotuku. Write a paragraph about how you interpret these references.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What were your first impressions of Flea from the initial chapter? Were they borne out by the rest of the novel?
- The characters in **Watermark** and **Dark** come to Roimata partly to escape their everyday routines and everyday selves, and to think about their sense of direction or what they want to do with their lives. Have you had holidays or trips away that have been like this for you? Have you managed to stick to any of the decisions or resolutions you might have made? Have you found out about aspects of your own personality that you previously didn’t know about?
- Has Flea learnt anything about herself by the end of the novel? Do you believe she has changed at all over the course of events?
- Why does Zillah resent Rex’s description of her as “the waiting kind”? (page 46)
- Zillah thinks Flea’s nature is “grabbing, mocking” and that she gets what she wants “at other people’s expense.” Does she have any redeeming features? Do we get any clues about Flea that might explain why she does exploit other people’s kindness?
- What discoveries has Zillah made about herself during her time at Roimata this year?
- Do you think there are alternative realities, or worlds beyond this one?
- What do you think about Hep and Joss deciding to keep Joss’s problems hidden from their parents?
- What do you think about Joss deciding not to seek further medical help about his distress and visions? If he has refused professional help, what are the ethics of his decision to lean on Hep and Zillah? I.e., is he right or wrong to do so? Is it too much to ask of his relationship with Zillah in particular, considering it’s still partly undefined?
- Is Hep cowardly; is she running away?
- What are the risks of deciding not to ask for professional help (e.g. from doctors and counsellors), in Joss’s situation? Should it be his right to choose not to? Should his family have any rights in this context?
- What makes Zillah decide to try the dope cookies? E.g., does Flea goad her, or is it Zillah’s own insecurity that drives her? Was her decision wise?
- What are the parallels between Zillah’s experience on dope, and Joss’s experiences as he heads towards a breakdown?

- Do you agree with Flea’s attitude towards thanking the woman who rescued her and Zillah from the river? (Chapters 9–10)
- Do you agree with Flea’s assessment of Zillah as a ‘control freak’?
- Do you feel positive about the outcome for Joss at the end of the novel? Do you feel his problems – be they psychological, spiritual, emotional or medical – have resolved?
- Do you feel the relationship between Zillah and Joss has a future? Would it be harmful for Zillah in any way if it did continue?
- Is it fair to say that by the end of the novel, Zillah has had to make a choice between love and independence? Explain your answer.

THEATRE/DRAMA

- Write a dramatic monologue from Flea’s point of view, retelling the experiences she’s had at Roimata. Perform it for the class.
- Turn one or two of the scenes of dialogue in the novel into a dramatic script. Perform it for the class.
- Role play Zillah getting into some kind of trouble, and either Joss or Flea being confronted with having to help her out.

FORMAL ESSAY TOPICS

1. What is the relationship between the West Coast landscape and the internal mindscapes of the characters in the novel?
2. We all have the potential for savagery; civilisation is just a thin veneer over our animal selves. Argue for or against this statement in relation to the events in *Dark*.
3. The world is but an illusion created by the mind. Discuss this statement in relation to *Dark*.
4. Discuss the relationship between responsibility and freedom as portrayed in the novel.

VISUAL RESPONSES

- Create your own version of a cover for *Dark*.
- In your preferred medium, create an art work that either captures one of the characters in the novel, or conveys the mood of a particular scene.

DEBATE TOPICS

Divide into positive and negative teams to debate the following:

1. Science is the light that drives off the darkness of our ignorance.
2. Madness does not exist outside our definitions of it.
3. Self-sacrifice is essential for a decent society.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Find out more about shamanism.

Find out more about the history of the treatment of people with a mental illness (a) in Western culture (b) in another world culture. What are the main differences? Are there advantages and disadvantages in each?

Find out about Jungian psychology, particularly Jung’s ideas about the shadow.