



Photo by David Field

Shark Of A Tale: Terence Jaensch **By Megan Spencer (c) 2013**

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“Sharks,” says poet, actor and monologist Terence Jaensch, “fascinate me”.

Right now, we’re about as far away from a beach as you can get, sipping strong black coffees in the sun, outside of a Castlemaine café.

“They’re just like poetry; they exist under the surface so you really have to look hard to find them,” he continues.

“We think sharks are just mindless predators, but in fact they’re very intelligent. Our instinct is to kill them as a way of dealing with them; fundamentally it’s about difference – and how we either deal with it, or don’t deal with it”.

Fittingly, we now make our way to Terry’s recently published book of poetry, ‘Shark’, a collection of superbly crafted and endlessly moving words, that ebb and flow like the salty waters in which the objects of his fascination dwell.

‘Shark’ fearlessly dives headlong into a deep pool of cultural and literary ‘otherness’. Occasionally showing its teeth, yet always swimming gracefully in the currents, it resurfaces with the sparkling beauty only a skilled writer can manage.

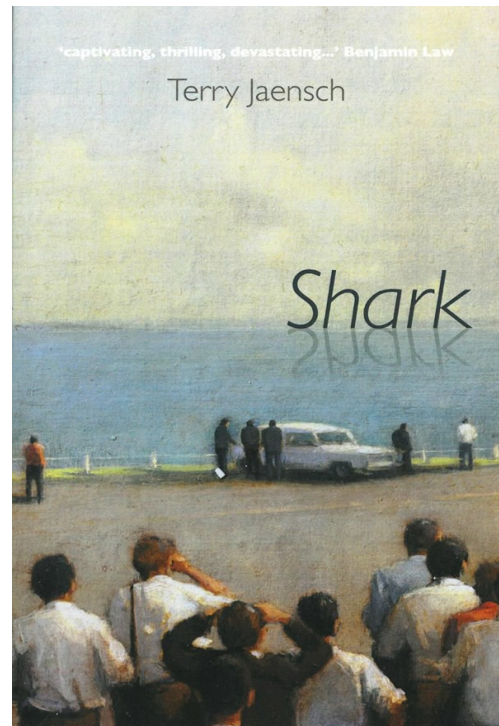
Based on Terry’s many life experiences - including living in an orphanage (Ballarat), coming to terms

with his estranged regional family, growing up gay in an 'Aussie' country town (Kerang) and many more - 'Shark' could be considered a compendium of sorts in 'difference'.

“On top of all that I’m a poet – one of the most marginalised of art forms, so yes, I guess I really tick every box for ‘otherness’, “ he laughs, reflecting on his life story.

You might think, given a childhood spent in said orphanage, group homes and searching to find his place – and voice - in the world, Terry might be a ‘difficult’ person who wears his pain on his sleeve. Not so. Terry’s confidence and sense of joy is disarming, as anyone who’s ever met him - or seen him perform at places such as Castlemaine State Festival - will attest. He is articulate, calm, and greatly talented.

Again laughing, he says, “People often say, 'you seem really well-adjusted...' They think I should be dead, or in jail!”



“It’s important I’m not a walking victim. Writing calms the sense of the impact it had on me, both in a negative and a positive way. For me it is about the fullness of the experience,” he says of his childhood.

“I’m conscious that sense of victimisation is very strong with many people who’ve had that experience. I completely understand and make no judgement. But I have to put forward the experience of how it was for me, as opposed to what I’ve been told *how* it should be – and *what* I should be – because of it,” he explains further.

“Some people come out of [an experience like that], where they weren’t cared for in a substantial way, and can only see the negative side of it. For me it was full of good things too... It is just something I lived through, and it’s mine to make something out of.”

Hence 'Shark'; written over a decade from his base in Castlemaine (“I write *slowly*,” he grins), the book contains 26 poems, many with the one-word titles of which Terry is fond.

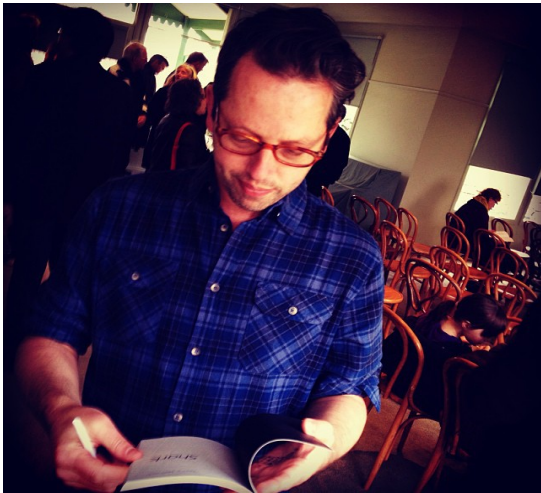
“Tim’ is a ‘word block’ about a childhood friend; their shared, embarrassed experience of diving into a country river in the burning sun, under the urging of Tim’s uptight parents. ‘Orphanage: Knitting’ is a four-partner with our young author discovering a burning love for knitting, only to fail with the added ignominy of nuns destroying his work, as penance for his exuberance.

And the killer (no pun intended), is indeed ‘Shark’, a doozy of a poem, playing out on a beach as a kind of father-and-son treatise, wrapped in a tussle, while the whole world watches...

Having written since he was thirteen, and “seriously” since the 90s, Terry says that most of his “poems are about love in one form or another – or the absence of.”

“Poetry is a kind of intimacy of ideas”, he says. “The craft tempers it just being you vomiting up your emotions – it should never be just that!”

“I used to think poetry needed to answer everything it put forward. Now, it’s just enough to raise the questions: the difficult ones, the easy ones, and the interesting ones”, which again Terry deftly accomplishes in ‘Shark’, ruminating on themes identity, childhood, memory and loss.



‘Home’ is another. Alienated by the flatness of Kerang, and after a stint in Daylesford, Terry is happy to make his, now, in Castlemaine, drawn to the “undulating” landscape and its artistic community.

Terence at 'Shark' book launch at Buda House, Castlemaine. Photo: Megan Spencer.

“I love the way artists are by and large ‘for each other’ in this town. And the council is for them too – an even bigger thing”, he says. “You don’t get that in the city. Here we are ‘known entities’, in a way you might not be, in a bigger place.”

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