



## Barracuda: A Novel

*Christos Tsiolkas*

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*He asked the water to lift him, to carry him, to avenge him. He made his muscles shape his fury, made every stroke declare his hate. And the water obeyed; the water would give him his revenge. No one could beat him, no one came close.*

His whole life Danny Kelly's only wanted one thing: to win Olympic gold. Everything he's ever done - every thought, every dream, every action - takes him closer to that moment of glory, of vindication, when the world will see him for what he is: the fastest, the strongest and the best. His life has been a preparation for that moment.

His parents struggle to send him to the most prestigious private school with the finest swimming program; Danny loathes it there and is bullied and shunned as an outsider, but his coach is the best and knows Danny is, too, better than all those rich boys, those pretenders. Danny's win-at-all-cost ferocity gradually wins favour with the coolest boys - he's Barracuda, he's the psycho, he's everything they want to be but don't have the guts to get there. He's going to show them all.

*He would be first, everything would be alright when he came first, all would be put back in place. When he thought of being the best, only then did he feel calm.*

A searing and provocative novel by the acclaimed author of the international bestseller *The Slap*, *Barracuda* is an unflinching look at modern Australia, at our hopes and dreams, our friendships, and our families.

Should we teach our children to win, or should we teach them to live? How do we make and remake our lives? Can we atone for our past? Can we overcome shame? And what does it mean to be a good person?

*Barracuda* is about living in Australia right now, about class and sport and politics and migration and education. It contains everything a person is: family and friendship and love and work, the identities we inhabit and discard, the means by which we fill the holes at our centre. It's brutal and tender and blazingly brilliant; everything we have come to expect from this fearless vivisector of our lives and world.

## Barracuda: A Novel Details

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## From Reader Review Barracuda: A Novel for online ebook

### Simon says

It's been a very long time since I read a book in one sitting, but I just couldn't stop reading this one! 5/5, I don't even know what to say here.

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### Mish says

In Barracuda, Christos Tsiolkas tells a tragic story of a 14year old boy, Danny Kelly; his hopes and dreams of becoming a 'golden boy, representing Australia in the Olympic games in the swimming competitions. Born into a working class family with Greek and Scottish parents, Danny earned a scholarship to a prestigious boys school for his strength in swimming. Danny was being bullied in his new school, but he's caught on early that the only way to earn respect is to adapt ruthless attitude and more importantly, he must succeed in the pool. In Danny's mind, failure is not an option - he is the 'Barracuda', the strongest, the fastest, the best – but when faced with failure, he can't deal with it, he becomes destructive.

The story is told in the three stages of Danny's life; from his earlier years when he was driven, dedicated and full of hope; to his middle years and his down fall, he's thoughts and behaviour at this time were brutal and sickening, he became paranoid and violent; it then switches to the present years, a man in his 30's, broken, deeply ashamed, and who is seeking redemption and a purpose in life. These stages were told out of sequence and there was a slight unknown to it. Danny had the perfect chance in life, he was surrounded a supportive family – who weren't pushy – and childhood friends whom liked Danny for who he is (not if you win or lose). Seeing these different stages earlier on, it had me thinking what could've possibly happened to a man, full of hopefulness to hit rock bottom so severely?

However, in saying that, the structure didn't suit me. With a book like this I would've liked to have grown WITH Danny through these stages, yet some how I felt like I was only seeing fragments of life, not the whole picture. I was terribly annoyed. In my opinion, Christos is an amazing storyteller and Barracuda (like The Slap) is a multilayer storyteller that does cover so many important issues/themes you can talk about and debate on; racism, parenting, homosexuality, class, sports and Australian culture and beliefs – and the list goes on - I could feel myself disconnecting with it and losing interest.

If you are a bit hesitant to read a Christos Tsiolkas book, because of what you've heard or experience with The Slap, Barracuda is certainly gentler. There is a softness, balance with the distinctive characters and eloquently described backdrop, places that were familiar to me (being Melbourne born and raised) and I could visually see the contrast – richness of Toorak and working class of Coburg/Reservoir.

I personally preferred The Slap, I think the characters and the plot were tightly developed and well written. Barracuda was okay for me - some remarkable and thought provoking moments came of it, and some not so good.

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## **John Bartlett says**

The thing about anything written by Tsiolkas is that it's difficult to rush to a quick and facile review. On the contrary I always need to think long and hard about what I have read. Of course I liked the writing very much and the overall story, exploring characters and issues of failure ring very true.

Some sections I thought were quite brilliant, where Tsiolkas portrays characters bumping up against each other uncomfortably.

One section where the young Danny visits the home of an upperclass family is wonderful to witness - dialogue funny and sharp.

Tsiolkas always treats his characters roughly but with compassion at the same time.

Despite the idea of Danny being a failure in wanting to be an Olympic swimmer, he's obviously a wonderful (but struggling) human being.

You can't help but love him.

Oh and Tsiolkas too for taking risks which pretty much all pay off.

In recent days I've heard lots of complaints about the 'language' used in 'Barracuda' - not very nice, some say!

Surely books have to reflect reality and people DO speak as Tsiolkas gives them to speak. Strong language is often an indication of deep emotion and in this case necessary to the story.

Maybe these opposers of strong language should get out more into the real world.

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## **Linda Rollins says**

A young boy gets a scholarship at an exclusive school, so that he can pursue his Olympic swimming dream. He believes he is the strongest and the best swimmer so when he loses just one race he gives up his dream, and swimming, completely. I think the story is supposed to be how he copes – or rather doesn't cope – with his circumstances.

This was a tough book to get through. Firstly, the story flits back and forth between, I think, around 3 or 4 time periods – it's all over the place. The main protagonist isn't particularly likeable, is self-absorbed and whining. He sees himself as a failure because he only sees the failures in his life; he is apparently unable to acknowledge his successes. I think perhaps he has untreated depression.

The book explores a lot of taboos, including language, sexuality, disability, racism, but does so in a grubby way. Unnecessary descriptions of bodily functions and fluids are provided in the grossest of detail. Language is strong and overall I think only adults with strong constitutions should attempt to read this book. It was an abrasive read, and I guess the author set out to shock.

The main themes are being Greek, living in Australia, being a gay man and swimming. I can relate to none of these things and because of the sordid way it was written it gave me no interest in the subject matter.

Although I haven't read The Slap, I had been led to believe it is an excellent book, so I'm afraid I was pretty disappointed with Barracuda.

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## **Brendan says**

Look, I loved it. After really struggling with a few books lately - just finding it hard to kick on through the middle, I simply devoured this thing on a couple of flights. I love his writing, always have. It is literary in how it moves and what is beneath it but at the same time it is brutal and honest and . It just is. This follow up to *The Slap*, which could easily be called *The Splash*, in that it is about swimming, is an epic journey of a kid called Danny Kelly who gets inserted into a fancy college due to his incredible talents in the pond. But despite his excellent coach and natural talent for winning, Danny rubs up against his more entitled peers which soon awakens a raw anger in him that may or may not lead to a sort of destruction, at the height of his reign. This book is about winning, about class, about anger, and about Australia. An Australia that hinges its identity on glory above all, but who has no real connection to life beneath its surface. Christos is Thorpedo of the craft now, he is a master, and having read all his novels I can say this is the 400 metre butterfly gold.

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## **Trevor says**

I absolutely loved this book. I cried, I smiled, was enraged, upset, shocked but overall enjoyed the story and the writing so much, that this must be the best book I have read this year.

The story of the fall and rise of Danny Kelly, a boy with the potential to become the fastest, strongest and quickest Olympic swimmer is so well told, it just sweeps you along. I didn't want it to end.

Danny story is one that most people should be able to relate to, as so much of it has happened to all of us – high's, low's, family drama's, death's, relationship breakups.

The writing is wonderful, and this must be Christos Tsiolkas's best book to date.

I loved it.

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## **Zarina says**

Review posted on my blog:

<http://www.pagetostagereviews.com/201...>

When I received *Barracuda* in the post and noticed the sticker on the front proudly advertising that it was written by the same author as *The Slap* my heart sank a little bit, as that is one of the worst books I've ever read. It's a novel that made me very, very angry and for all the wrong reasons too - even over two years later I still feel the annoyance bubbling up just thinking about it. For that reason I seriously contemplated not picking up this book, but then I figured that everybody deserves a second chance and I would give it at least a few chapters before dismissing it altogether.

I was very surprised then that I actually enjoyed the story of Danny Kelly, the titular character, at first. It properly focussed on him and didn't wander off into a pointless and unrealistic drug-fuelled and sex-driven territory as much as *The Slap* did. Another major positive was that this time around I didn't feel the desperate

need to slap sense (no pun intended) into every single one of the characters because they were such dreadful and unlikeable human beings.

Unfortunately my enjoyment of the book didn't last for very long for a variety of reasons. For one there was an important event allured to for the duration of the story (why Danny went to jail) but it wasn't until the very end that some light was shed on the situation, and even then it wasn't explained in full and required a lot of guess work from the reader, piecing together an offhand comment from one of the earlier chapters to a scene much further down the line that seemed like it was going to escalate. The unnecessary padding in between was distracting and made it all far more complex than it could have and should have been.

Furthermore there is a lot of going back and forth in time, and while sometimes a date was listed at the top of a new section this wasn't consistently used throughout which added gratuitous confusion to what was already a far too filled out novel for quite a basic story. In fact, on more than one occasion I was lost about where we were in Danny's life and what had already happened in his time line and what had yet to take place.

As for the overall themes within the novel, while I can appreciate the brutal honesty of the coming of age story which reflects on Australian society, rather than hitting the mark with an evocative piece of writing, Tsiolkas preaches his own disillusionment with people, and the world as a whole, making it all dwindle down into tiresome and pretentious repetition.

So while the novel had a promising start, it has in the end done nothing to change my view on the author and I fear it unlikely I will give his work yet another chance in the future.

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### **Ruth Stewart says**

This is a rich and multilayered book, On one level it is a very honest book about the sacrifices we are prepared to make and their consequences and it is also about a lot more than that.

Christos Tsiolkas creates characters who live and breathe, sweat and feel in complex ways. In this book he examines the nature of love; love for family, parents and siblings, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, love for friends and for lovers. The writing zips along, like a muscle bound jock on roller skates, fast furious and dangerous.

As always Tsiolkas digs around in the yin and yang of Australian cultural and class mix. Tsiolkas describes Melbourne as a city with great cultural richness in which the strings are pulled by an elite class to which an entry pass can only be inherited. There are dangerous rapids where these cultures intersect.

I started reading this book with some trepidation. I know the power of Tsiolkas' writing, I have been scarified by it before and was not sure that I was feeling strong enough to cope with that again, but I was given the book for Christmas and had some free time and picked it up. I was dragged into Danny Kelly's turbulent wake, barracking for barracuda, crying for him, worrying over him, knowing that there wasn't going to be a good time ahead. Tsiolkas warns us of that in the very beginning as an older Dan is witnessed trying to get on with his life. But I survived this book and feel the better for taking it on. Good on you Christos Tsiolkas, you have created a novel for modern Australia!

For other tender hearted souls out there, read this book, like a hard work out, it is absolutely worth the pain!

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## Ben Langdon says

This isn't *The Slap*, but it's certainly an equally emblematic novel for our times. *Barracuda* tells the story of Danny Kelly - it is focused so brightly on him as a teenager - rather than the ensemble cast of *The Slap*. However, Tsiolkas' writing is such a slow-burning, irrepressible thing that the focus on one character actually makes this book better, more impressive, than the previous one.

It's not all an easy read, though. I struggled in the beginning to care about Danny, but that's the point, I think. He is obsessed with being the strongest, the fastest, the best, that his selfishness alienates him from the reader. However, the story is told in a fractured time slip which allows us into the different periods of Danny/Dan's journey so we can see his selfish narcissism, his spiral, his breaking, his slowly shifting move towards self repair.

It's certainly driven by a sense of isolation, a gap between fathers and sons; but as with *The Slap*, there is the strong, undercurrent message of getting better through adversity.

It hurts. It's shitty. Yes, but even when everything's going to Hell, there are glimpses of redemption, opportunities for a change in direction.

Forgetting Kelly for a minute, the supporting cast of characters are also compelling. Danny's brother and sister are so clear, so real to me that I can't help but sympathise. And his parents are also easily and readily recognisable. The private school world which Danny is handed over to is less welcoming. Again, that's the point. Even at its most accepting, the people Danny meets will never really think he belongs in their world - although Tsiolkas is quick to criticise even the Taylor's clutching for status - The Portsea house is actually more likely to be in Sorrento (just don't mention that at dinner).

Loved the ending.

Bit of a tear jerker, but that's probably because Tsiolkas knows how to write tragedies.

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## Michael Livingston says

I'm glad Christos Tsiolkas exists - he's a writer who sets out to tackle big themes: class, race, competition and sexuality. *The Slap* was very successful at wrestling with these big topics while drawing a set of fascinating (if largely horrible) characters. *Barracuda* tries the same thing with a slightly narrower focus, centering on Danny Kelly a young, working class swimmer whose talent transports him into a privileged world (fancy high school, elite sports squads) and whose failures (both sporting and social) tear him apart. It's a bold effort, with moments of real brilliance, but the key moment where Danny's fate turns is unconvincing and his spiral downwards from there very hard to believe. You can see the point Tsiolkas is trying to make about the dangers of obsessive ambition and the impact of class and race on self-belief and resilience, but it all seems a bit over the top and unlikely, undermining much of what follows.

Still, there's lots to enjoy here - it's immensely readable (I knocked it off all 500 pages in a day, which is some indication) and it's refreshing to feel as though big questions about life in Australia are being

addressed. Definitely worth a look.

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### Catherine says

I savoured this book from the first page. I had been captivated by *The Slap*, and once heard Christos Tsiolkas speak, so I had been looking forward to reading this new novel. I was delighted to receive it as a pre-release review giveaway via Goodreads. Tsiolkas is frank about the way he writes, and was the first author I had met who spoke about writing and discarding chapters and perspectives. Knowing how carefully his books are structured means I knew to expect a non-linear story-telling style, and *Barracuda* does not disappoint. On one level, parts of the novel are ostensibly unfamiliar, and yet the book is absorbing, consuming and beautifully challenging. I loved the way Tsiolkas moved his style of narration for each chapter to help the reader establish quickly what time we're in – moving from the first to third person as the protagonist ages. I felt by the 3rd or 4th chapter that the book and the writing had a beautiful cadence that fitted perfectly as a metaphor for swimming.

“The novel has so shaken him that he’d had to gasp for air, as if he had swum an ocean.”

I was entranced and couldn’t resist finishing it within a few days.

“He read to the point of exhaustion, and with the arrival of the soft light of dawn he was still deliberating on the challenge the question posed for him. He couldn’t think how anyone but himself could be the hero of his own life, but he knew that he wasn’t a hero.”

The book beautifully displays the incredible narcissism of youth: Danny Kelly the teen is painfully self-conscious and self-absorbed, but this is beautifully metered by his awareness and sensitivity in later parts of the book.

“But he and Luke needed more time, they had to draw maps for each other, to mark the borders of their experiences, to show the roads, they had travelled, to shade in the frontiers they had reached, and to plot their cities of work and love and desire. A terrible sadness overwhelmed him, at how far they had travelled from one another, how much time it would take to sort and reconcile their shared past to their individual presents. He wished there was time to explore the kingdom his friend had created.”

The use of repetition is entrancing, and a subtle motif throughout. And the blatant metaphor of breathing is not overworked, and seems fitting.

“He wished he could tell her about discovering words and how words could become song, something he had never understood at school.”

This is the first book in a long time that has left me feeling breathless, and made me want to dive straight back in.

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### Glenn Sumi says

Christos Tsiolkas’s brilliant *Barracuda* will make you think about what Olympic athletes sacrifice to be faster, higher and stronger. It’s not as savagely satirical as his breakthrough novel, *The Slap* (now a TV series), but it does offer an intriguing look at contemporary Australian life.

Danny Kelly is a gifted swimmer who earns a scholarship to train at a posh Melbourne boys school, where he’s bullied because of his working-class background and his ethnicity – he’s part Greek, part Scots-Irish. Eventually he earns respect – and the eponymous nickname – for his swimming ability.

At home, things are equally complicated. His Greek-Australian mom, a hairdresser, caters to his every need, and his younger siblings look up to him, but his father, a long-haul truck driver, resents the fact that he's getting so much attention.

Danny has a few friends, and his Hungarian emigré coach becomes a bit of a father substitute, but mostly he finds solace in the water.

Until something drastic happens.

The book's complex structure interweaves the younger Danny's progress as a competitive swimmer with his present-day life as an ex-con, and much of the tension in the absorbing first half comes from wondering what crime he committed.

But even after his transgression is revealed, there's lots to explore about shame, family, ambition and class – this is one of the most convincing depictions of working-class life since D.H. Lawrence's *Sons And Lovers*. The book's final quarter, focusing on Danny's relationships, becomes richly emotional as the man's protective layers begin to crumble.

The many descriptions of swimming and competing are vivid, making you feel like you're in the pool. Tsiolkas is less successful in evoking Danny's adult inner life – particularly around his lover Clyde. But that could just be because Danny doesn't quite know who he is. Eventually he begins to find out, and it makes this poignant novel even richer.

Review published here: <http://www.nowtoronto.com/books/story...>

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### **AMEERA says**

I'm totally loved it ❤️?❤️?❤️?❤️?'

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### **Carolyn Francis says**

Reading Barracuda was a profoundly uncomfortable experience. Initially it is unclear whether Tsiolkas is celebrating or critiquing the culture of winner-takes-all, class warfare, emotional repression, power as currency, hate as fuel and survival of the fittest. The sex, real and imagined, is tawdry. The prose is often a steady, bracing stream of f\*\*\* this and c\*\*\* that, which is not how people like me speak. But Barracuda is not a story about people like me. It is, however, the best novel I have read in quite some time.

Danny Kelly is a champion swimmer, obsessed with winning, on scholarship to a private school where his swimming prowess is grudgingly admired, but his working class, Greek heritage is the stuff of isolation, and desolation. He draws on the bullying and violence and hatred of the other boys to fuel his dream of winning or, more specifically, beating them. Beating everyone. The complex mixture of bravado and self-loathing, fed by struggles with racial and sexual identity is disturbing and this makes the familiarity of the Melbourne setting (Lygon St, Toorak mansions, summers on the Mornington Peninsula) and the cultural references of the 1990s and beyond (the death of Kurt Cobain, Perkins v. Kowolski, the Sydney Olympics) strangely comforting.

There were unexpectedly moving reflections on the nature of home and belonging and, conversely, homesickness and isolation. But the book's most pervasive and poignant theme is shame, and this is as insightful a portrayal of its destructive power as I have ever read. It is an ever present reminder that the characters who dream and act with violence and brutality and apparent narcissism are human and vulnerable and even likeable; that even those actions we are tempted to judge most harshly are not so dissimilar from all the other things we do to either lose or find ourselves. It is a perfectly structured novel, slowly unfolding (or unravelling) as the different eras of Dan's life meld together. An extraordinary and, finally, redemptive book for those who can stomach it.

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### **Kelly (and the Book Boar) says**

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

3.5 Stars

*"I see a beautiful gigantic swimmer swimming naked through the eddies of the sea,  
His brown hair lies close and even to his head, he strikes out with courageous arms, he urges himself with  
his legs,  
I see his white body, I see his undaunted eyes,  
I hate the swift-running eddies that would dash him head-foremost on the rocks.*

*What are you doing you ruffianly red-trickled waves?  
Will you kill the courageous giant? Will you kill him in the prime of his middle-age?*

*Steady and long he struggles,  
He is baffled, bang'd, bruis'd, he holds out while his strength holds out,  
The slapping eddies are spotted with his blood, they bear him away, they roll him, swing him, turn him,  
His beautiful body is borne in the circling eddies, it is continually bruis'd on rocks,  
Swiftly and out of sight is borne the brave corpse."*

from *The Sleepers* by Walt Whitman

Before I begin an actual review I'm going to be *really* rude and say this yet another case of a horrible "official" synopsis. Danny's mother isn't single and his family isn't middle class – in fact, his father is one of the driving forces behind the story and the family is very much lower/working class people. The blurb is what draws the audience to new books, it's pretty important to get the basic facts correct. Grrrrr.

That being cleared up, the rest of the synopsis is true. This is the story of Danny Kelly – a promising young Australian swimmer who is discovered at a competition at the local pool. Danny is given a full scholarship to a prestigious private school that focuses on training athletes for various Olympic events. It is there that Danny will have to learn to deal with success and failure, being good enough for some, but *never* good enough for all (including himself), figuring out who/what to be proud of and what should make him feel shame.

This was a notable book. I'd never heard of Tsiolkas (or his previous book, *The Slap*) before and simply picked this one up because I got it for free. I love a good coming of age story, and this one was exceptional.

All of the details of life as a swimmer added depth to the story, the past to present narration was made fresh with the story being told in both third and first person (depending on whether you were hearing “Danny” or “Dan’s” story), and to read a solid homosexual main character? One where being “homosexual” is not the defining (or only) factor of his personality? Those kind of stories are way too few and far between.

I won’t go so far as to say this is a book for everyone. It’s very “book clubby” (for lack of a better term) and I can picture a series of Q&A/talking points being added to later editions at some point. There aren’t a lot of plot twists or outrageous scenes to propel the reader – *Barracuda* is very much driven by how remarkably well-written it is. Its simplicity and raw emotion are what make it so striking.

Oh, and I can’t wrap this up without saying **PLEEEEEEEEEEEEEEASE** make the song by Heart stop playing on a loop in my brain now that I’m done with this book!!!! Please???????

**“Ooooooooooooooh, Barracuda!”**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0OX\\_8...](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0OX_8...)

*ARC provided by Blogging for Books in exchange for an honest review*

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## **Demet says**

Reading *Barracuda* is like treading on a stony shore. It crashes into our consciousness like waves and unsettles us, challenges everything we are. It is unflinching and exposes the in between spaces of Australian society.

Danny Kelly is a working class boy from Melbourne’s north. He is a wog with a dream to win Olympic gold, to emerge from his many labels and be seen. His mother is a “wog Marilyn Monroe,” his farther a Scotch-Irish truckie. Dan is as fearsome in the water as Barracuda, a nickname the boys at a prestigious private school give him when he attends the school on a sporting scholarship. “With his tie so tight, the flat of a knife pressed against his throat so he couldn’t breathe freely...Danny was vanishing.” He was disappearing into the space between working and middle class who owned homes “with front yards as big as football fields.”

Danny Kelly is driven, passionate and angry.

Danny Kelly fails.

Danny Kelly’s future becomes dust.

This is a remarkable book about dreams that disintegrate like sand and the identities that disappear with them. It’s about mistakes and consequences. It’s about re-emerging from the dust to recover oneself, to create a life of integrity.

Christos Tsiolkas’s chapters are not chronological, they are scattered like thoughts. They are fragmented and lodge us in Dan’s turbulent mind. There is empathy for the boy who needs to lose before he can win, a place for him in our hearts that recognises his struggles, his frustrations, and his shame. Dan is the boy we pass at

Broadmeadows train station, the one we see through as he walks past on Sydney road in his trackie dacks. Danny Kelly dares us to listen. His voice is unrelenting, his complexities are revealed like scabs. We discover him and in the process we discover ourselves.

Barracuda beats with the rhythms of Australian culture. “Aussie Aussie Aussie, Oi Oi Oi,” “Barracuda...Barracuda!” the chants question what it is that we really barrack for. In a country driven by sport, could this be the common thread that binds us, that shapes our diversity? What does it mean to win? What does it mean to fail?

Barracuda asks us what it means to be human. The question is present in every lap, in every stroke, “bending and shifting” our consciousness like the water that welcomes Danny Kelly.

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### **Lauren Kennedy says**

This book was just like Tsiolkas' other books. It was a sort-of-not-really coming of age story with the usual bad language, descriptions that will make you cringe, sex (especially gay sex) and an element of Greek heritage and language. That's not a bad thing at all though, that's what I expect when I read one of his books. Though, some people will find it hard to read if they are sensitive to words like the 'c' word and detailed descriptions of late night masturbation and many sexual fantasies of a teenage boy. Though, even when there are things like that in the book, Tsiolkas' writing style still manages to make it sound almost poetic and beautiful.

If you are put off by this book it's about swimming, don't be. It's about a boy. We are introduced to him at the beginning of the book when he is 14 years old and the book ends when he is 32 years old. It's about how badly he wants to become the fastest, the strongest and the best and how he wants to win every competition he takes part in. It's about what happens when he doesn't win, when he isn't the best and what kind of a path his life takes after that. It is not about swimming, exactly. It's also about him discovering himself, discovering his sexuality, his hopes and dreams, his strengths and weaknesses etc. As Daniel changed throughout the story, he symbolised that change by changing his name. At the beginning when he was a great swimmer, he was known as Danny. When he gives up swimming, he becomes Dan.

I found it a little confusing to keep up with the timing of this novel. It was a mix of third person narrative and first person. It says the dates of the third person chapters, but the first person chapters don't have dates so it was hard to keep up with what age he was in those chapters. That's one of the reasons I only gave it 4 stars, not 5.

I thought the ending was great. It was very emotional and sad, though but it was perfect for it to end that way. A few loose ends are tied up but there's also a lot that's not mentioned, which leaves the reader wondering once they finish it.

I think my favourite character in this was Demet. Her character was very well developed as she changed through the book while some other characters didn't develop as well.

Overall it was a great book and very well written.

EDIT: I marked quite a few pages in this book which is unusual for me, but that just shows lovely the writing is. Here is one of my favorite quotes:

*He preferred the silence, the loneliness that was comfort; he didn't want uproar and infinite noise. Only books, books were all he wanted, and they were strewn across his flat. Books from the local library, books scavenged from boxes and crates at the Sunday markets. In reading he found solitude. In reading he could dispel the blare of the world.*

I think all of us can relate to that quote in some way!

And here's another one of my favourites:

*"I like you, Dan, I like that you are so into me that fucking with you is like having sex for the first time. Every. Time. I like you so much, Dan, that I am scared I'm falling in love with you. And why it is so terrifying, why I haven't the words before, is because I really don't have a clue what you think, what you feel. I don't have a fucking clue."*

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### **Paul says**

Barracuda – Really?

What can I say about this book? Well it is the first time since I left school with my A level in English Literature that I have really had to force myself to finish a book. I am sure that the anal retentive literary critics will love this book, but the book buying public will not be impressed. This book forced me to read others reviews to see if I was missing something and those who have bought the book regret their purchase and clearly it is not just me that is not impressed with Barracuda. To start with the prose does not flow it is not easy to read and my personal opinion is that the book could be better with an honest editor who could have dumped about 300 pages and cut out a lot of the repetition. Yes he is a swimmer and we know he feels powerful and a winner in the pool you do not have to keep telling us in every other chapter.

If this book had been shorter it would have been easier to see some of the themes that run through the book such as the examination of class in Australian society. How we all have dreams and the disillusionment that can come through this especially when we manage to screw things up ourselves. There is also an interesting examination of family units and friendships and that it is not until we have lost everything what it really means to be a good person.

If this book had been shorter with less repetition then this would have been a good read rather than a struggle to the end.

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### **Michael says**

Danny Kelly has only one true goal in his life: to win gold at the Sydney Olympics. In order to achieve that Danny attends a prestigious private school that has one of the finest swimming programmes in the country. Danny loathes the school he calls cunts college due to constant bullying and being shunned as an outsider due to his families working class roots. Danny's coach firmly believes in him and pushes him onward towards his goal. He will eventually win over the doubters with his winning or nothing mentality. He is Barracuda, a psycho and embodies everything that all his tormentors wished they could be. He is going to

show all of them how good he really is.

At the Australian Swimming Championships though disaster strikes as he misses out on automatic qualification for the Australian team. This event will have disastrous consequences for Danny who's life will go on a downward spiral culminating in him doing time in prison for assault. After his release Danny will struggle with the shame he feels he has put on his coach for not being his first Olympic champion swimmer and his family who he struggles to reconnect with. Slowly he will attempt to move on with his life while trying to find what to do and give meaning to a life that ended and a new one that began. Despite his shortcomings with the help of family and friends he will eventually find what he is looking for and be the person he has been looking for.

Barracuda is a book of many layers that will keep you thinking well after you have finished reading it. At the heart lies many searing questions about our country such as why we idolize our sporting heroes only to shoot them down when they under perform and the pressure it puts on the individual. The book lays bare everything that makes a person with family, friendship, love and work and how we see ourselves in our modern society. One were a person can so easily fall of the tracks and find it very difficult to get back on without going through many trials and tribulations. Danny Kelly was a wonderful creation and despite at times being totally unlikeable when he was on his self destructive path would leaves the reader with great hope for his future at the end. The rest of the characters are integrated perfectly into a hard hitting but equally tender story of life and the challenges of growing up.

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### **Elaine says**

Ideally I would have liked to have given this book 4.5 stars. It was a real rollercoaster ride of emotions. It was a very raw and heartbreaking read and at times quite confronting. I loved all the characters but especially my heart went out to Danny. Mind you at times I just wanted to thump him!!! I feel that the book leaves you with a sense of hope and shows that no matter what a person experiences, how downtrodden they may be the human spirit is quite resilient and can rise above almost anything. I loved this book and although at times it had me cringing....I wouldn't expect anything less from Christos Tsiolkas...for me this is by far my favourite book of his to date. This book was about so many things and touched on so many different themes that I don't feel I can do it enough justice in this small review. I would highly recommend it to fans and first time readers of this author without any hesitation.

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