

False Bay

William Dunn

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Reviewed by Jordan Durfee for Reader Views (04/2026)

4* - Life is Messy and Complicated

False Bay by William Dunn is a novel, the likes of which I have rarely encountered. Artistic, with flowing narration, interspersed poetry, and alternating points of view, centered around the people of False Bay over the course of many decades, the novel truly takes the readers on a fascinating journey. Following many different people, living many different lives, *False Bay* follows a South African town both pre- and post-apartheid; living with the consequences of apartheid and the taboo of queerness in society, many of the characters in the novel lead tragic, but truly human, lives. The pure humanness of the novel was beautiful and personally my favorite element of it; these characters and their lives are messy, but they are real, and it was great to read.

The flow of the story is such that the timeline isn't necessarily linear; the narrations of the characters flow from the early-to-mid-1900s to our modern day, showing the way South African politics and society evolved due to apartheid and immigration. Apartheid is an undercurrent of the entire novel, with the oppression of people of color a forefront of the narrative. I truly loved the detail and care that clearly went into researching the history of apartheid in South Africa, as well as the historical accuracy of the real-life places mentioned in the novel. There's an author's note, both a brief one at the beginning of the novel and a more detailed one at the end, talking about the research that went into the novel. Providing the readers with that information adds a deeper level of connection to the narratives and the histories, which I am grateful author William Dunn included.

My favorite part, aside from how messily and beautifully human it is, is how many different characters narrate throughout. It truly felt like being immersed in this town, where all the characters' lives are intertwined with one another over the course of roughly a century. Towns and communities are made up of all different people, with different backgrounds and different experiences. This novel addresses the diversity and complexity of community, as well as the nuance and complexity of love and connection. We all seek love and connection and support in varying ways, and we all have different needs, so to see different queer and familial love stories represented was really special. There were even chapters narrated by the animal companions of the novel, showing how important our pets are to our lives as well. So the large cast of characters was my favorite part of the novel!

Overall, while there were a few moments where transitions between chapters or narrators seemed a bit sudden, I really appreciated the artistic narration and the style of writing of *False Bay*. If

you're a reader who loves immersion into complicated, human, messy lives, I truly recommend picking up *False Bay* by William Dunn - it doesn't get more human and complex than this!