

RETURN TICKET

JON DOUST

ABOUT THE BOOK

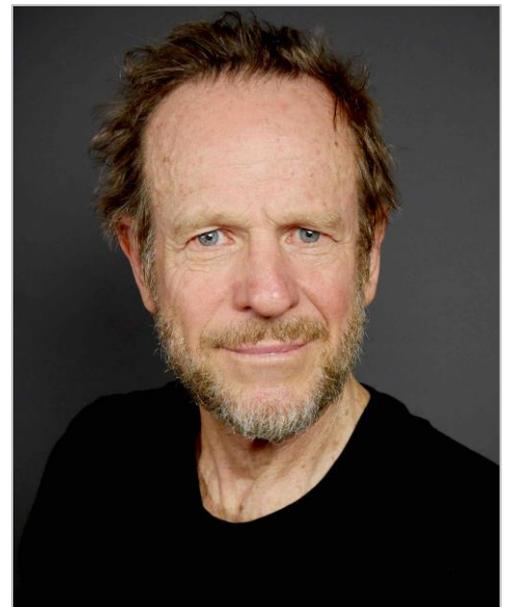
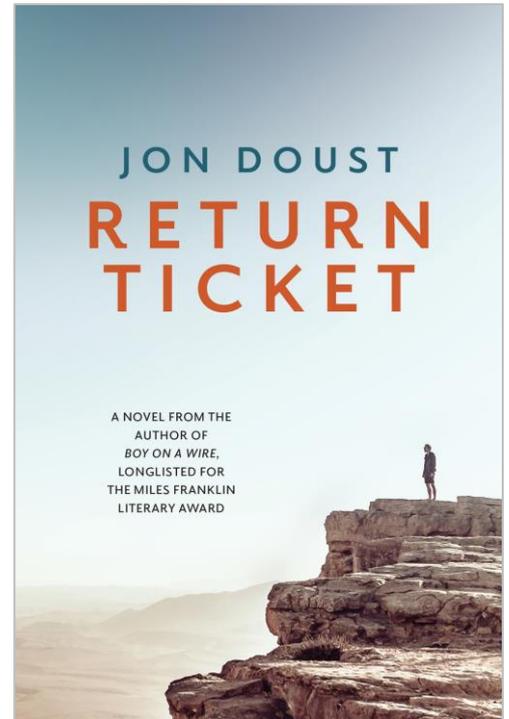
As a boy, the hot-headed impetuous young Jack Muir raged against injustice and authority. Now, from the vantage point of old age, Jack Muir recalls his stand as a young man against apartheid in Cape Town, and the flourishing of love in the orchard on Kibbutz Gavrot in a time of war and – across time and across continents – he also remembers the men who helped him reach an understanding of what it is to become a decent human being, a father and a friend. This novel is a powerful affirmation of vulnerability and masculinity, and an exploration of male friendships in the course of one boy's journey to man.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon Doust was born in Bridgetown into a farming/retailing family and worked in both until he was old enough to know better. He should have done well in school and studied law but he found himself without the necessary marks, and working in a bank. Asked to leave he stumbled back to the family farm and shop, then travelled, then studied, then worked as a journalist and used his funny bone to some success in comedy. Now, an aging adult, he is best known as a writer, professional speaker, big ideas inspirer and community projects facilitator. In the early 2000s, he studied Jungian philosophy and subsequently became an accredited deliverer of Jungian psychological theories. He is the author of three novels for adults: *Boy on a Wire* (longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award), *To the Highlands* and *Return Ticket*. Though each book works as a standalone title, the three form a loose trilogy called One Boy's Journey to Man.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first book about Jack Muir was described as a *dislocated memoir*. To what extent does *Return Ticket* also feel like a memoir?
2. Why does the young Jack Muir feel compelled to travel? What do you think is he looking for?
3. Why do you think this novel is called *Return Ticket*?
4. How does the presence of old Jack Muir work to frame the story of young Jack Muir?
5. What kind of a man is young Jack?
6. Young Jack Muir tell us that he is looking for love, but it often seems as if it is his friendships with men that save him. Which friends most help him understand what it is to be a good man, and how do they do this?
7. Is the relationship of Jack and Neeva doomed to fail?
8. Why does his relationship with Froukje survive?
9. How would you describe Jack's relationship with his father? Does it change over time?
10. What do we learn of the relationship between Jack and his parents from their phone call on p.37?
11. What do you think Jack's mother Glorvina means when she says *It's not our Jack, it's the company he keeps?* (p.31)
12. What is the meaning of dishwashing in Jack's life?



13. How do you think that South Africa changes Jack Muir?
14. Why did you think that Jack feels so at home in a kibbutz?
15. How do the conversations between old Jack Muir and his friends in Kincannup reflect the preoccupations of older men in general? What advice might these characters have for their younger selves?
16. What kind of a man has old Jack become?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Why was it important to you to write this trilogy, One Boy's Journey to Man?

All those stories in my head, they had to be released. I got tired of telling them, repeating them, at parties, over coffee, to casual acquaintances. Yet over the repetition, I did learn there were threads, and it was the threads that caused me to thrust some of them together and create the first book. The journey of a boy to a man is certainly the major thread running through all three novels. Another major thread running through *Return Ticket* is an exploration of the myth of race, that there was only ever one race, and in Jack's journey I wanted to reveal the interconnectedness of diverse national, religious or ethnic groups. It is my belief that there is no chance our major issues can be worked out if we do not come to terms with our common battle for survival. It's an impossible dream, of course, but it's a personal dream and I had to show it, to let it loose. In order to maintain a modicum of hope.

Why is it that each book in this trilogy feels quite different in its delivery and perspective?

Each book plots the growth of Jack Muir, from boy, through callow youth, troubled young man, to a wiser, kinder, older man. Jack is a seeker and as he seeks, experiences, falls, gets up, learns, loves, hates, so both his inner and outer voices change, their tone and his understanding of the world outside of his own headspace. Along the way he gets closer and closer to who he is.

Was there something in particular you wished to share with readers about your understanding of masculinity and of the importance of friendship between men?

Jack and I were both brought up in the culture of men. Our fathers dominated our families and their local communities. Both of us tried so hard to be strong, tough and hard men. Both of us failed. Both of us scoured history for examples and both of us found Rome. In Rome, there was a period between 96AD and 180AD dominated by what historians call the Five Good Emperors. Most of the five were fine warrior leaders, but also either homosexual or bisexual and most had artistic interests or pursuits. It is not enough to be tough and hard and we all know men who have spent most of their life playing the tough guy and when, in their latter years, they begin to soften and cry at random, they get frightened and imagine they are losing their minds, when all they are doing is getting to the other side, the soft side, maybe the feminine side. Living all sides of a personality, a psychological package, is what makes a person complete. It's a much easier transition if you explore the other sides earlier in life. In my life, I missed the older man, a mentor, someone I could go to and spill my guts without being judged. There was one man, but he was not a family member and did not know enough about us, our dysfunctions, complexities, and he worked with my father, which made open conversations difficult. But I gave Jack a few such men and, especially, one family man. Writing this man I found particularly emotional and then, once written, I found him moving to read.

What do you, Jon Doust, make of the man that Jack Muir has become?

I like him, love him. He's my twin brother. In some ways he is better than me and in others, worse. He is a whole man, one who has reached his other side and found a kind of peace.



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