

‘A unique reading experience, this hypnotic book unfolds like origami in reverse, revealing the layers that create each single moment – layers of individual experience, of ancestral inheritance, and of the physical world itself.’ Rachel Morton

From the award-winning author of *The Sitter* and *Night Blue* comes another mesmerising novel – told, in part, by a book.

Before Isabel has even cracked the spine of a novel she bought on a whim ahead of an overseas trip, she senses something beginning within her. From Sydney to London and back again, the book is a quiet observer. When it’s left in an airport taxi and Isabel’s new boyfriend takes it home, the book begins to learn about him – about his family and his past. Soon, it begins to understand: Isabel is not safe.

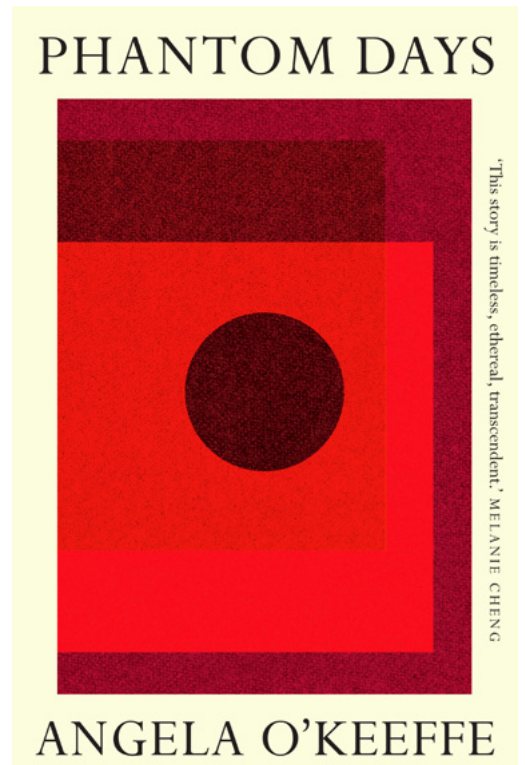
Angela O’Keeffe is the master of voice, and *Phantom Days* is a marvel: eerie, elegant and unforgettable. With O’Keeffe’s signature emotional depth and narrative quirkiness, this novel explores the unknowability of other people, the mysteries of the body, and the strange ways stories shape, complicate and safeguard our lives.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela O’Keeffe completed a Master of Arts in Writing at UTS, and her first novel, *Night Blue*, was shortlisted for the UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing and the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards. She was awarded the 2023 Varuna Eleanor Dark Fellowship. Her second novel, *The Sitter*, won the 2024 Christina Stead Prize for Fiction and was longlisted

for the 2024 Miles Franklin Literary Award. She lives and works on unceded Gadigal land.



BOOK DETAILS

B-format paperback | 978 0 7022 7288 2
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‘*Phantom Days* has faith in our strangest and most inexplicable instincts and permits us to see them as undeniable truths. An artful and bewitching story that seeps skilfully into the body and gently breaks the heart.’

Lucy Nelson

‘To read *Phantom Days* by Angela O’Keeffe is to be enchanted. The story is timeless, ethereal, transcendent. Most of all, however, this slim but weighty novel is an homage to the sacred bond that exists between a book and its reader. I could feel the story lingering within me long after I had finished reading it, like a gentle heat, or a light.’

Melanie Cheng



QUESTIONS OVER PAGE

Questions

1. *Phantom Days* opens with the line, ‘A book comes into the world knowing it is a saviour, of sorts’ (p.1). What do you think the novel is saying about the idea that stories can save us? What stories or books have changed your life?
2. What do you think Isabel’s phantom pregnancy might represent or symbolise in this story? How does it shape the emotional terrain of the novel?
3. Early in *Phantom Days*, Isabel observes, ‘What was real could be replaced with a semblance of what was real, and I wouldn’t necessarily know the difference’ (p.40). This touches on a central theme in the novel. How would you describe this theme, and in what ways is it developed through each character’s story?
4. *Phantom Days* is a novel concerned with aspects of truth. What is your impression of the ways truth is portrayed? What do you think this novel might be saying about truth?
5. Art and literature are woven into the novel’s themes and plot, notably the Seagram Murals by Mark Rothko and Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. What is the effect of this intertextuality? Does it change how you interpret – or even anticipate – certain characters or moments?
6. In the ashes’ story, there are quite a few references to Princess Diana. How do these references intersect with the novel’s concerns about observation, reality and violence against women?
7. The novel is narrated in part by a sentient book. Do you think this works? What does this perspective bring to the story?
8. The sea plays a crucial role in all the characters’ experiences, including those of the book. Can you provide some examples? What do you think is the effect of this?

Questions

9. Why do you think Isabel keeps secrets? How does Isabel’s secrecy – and that of other characters – affect the building tension and unfolding of danger in *Phantom Days*?
10. How does the novel’s structure affect your reading experience? In what ways does the fragmented or shifting form reflect the characters’ emotional lives or the themes of memory, loss and perception?
11. How does the act of observation operate in the novel? Who is watching whom, and what are the consequences of paying attention – or failing to?
12. Describe how the ending made you feel and why you think that is. In what ways do you think Isabel and Maggie are changed by their experiences? What kind of future do you imagine for them?