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# In The Wake: On Blackness And Being



CHRISTINA SHARPE **In the Wake**  
On Blackness and Being



## Synopsis

In this original and trenchant work, Christina Sharpe interrogates literary, visual, cinematic, and quotidian representations of Black life that comprise what she calls the "orthography of the wake." Activating multiple registers of "wake"—the path behind a ship, keeping watch with the dead, coming to consciousness—Sharpe illustrates how Black lives are swept up and animated by the afterlives of slavery, and she delineates what survives despite such insistent violence and negation. Initiating and describing a theory and method of reading the metaphors and materiality of "the wake," "the ship," "the hold," and "the weather," Sharpe shows how the sign of the slave ship marks and haunts contemporary Black life in the diaspora and how the specter of the hold produces conditions of containment, regulation, and punishment, but also something in excess of them. In the weather, Sharpe situates anti-Blackness and white supremacy as the total climate that produces premature Black death as normative. Formulating the wake and "wake work" as sites of artistic production, resistance, consciousness, and possibility for living in diaspora, *In the Wake* offers a way forward.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The book that will live on in me from this year is Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake*, on living in the wake of the catastrophic violence of legal chattel slavery. *In the Wake* speaks in so many multiple ways (poetry, memory, theory, images) and does so in language that is never still. It is, in part, about keeping watch, not unseeing the violence that has become normative, being in the hold,

holding on and still living." -- Madeleine Thien, The Guardian, Best Books of 2016"Christina Sharpe brings everything she has to bear on her consideration of the violation and commodification of Black life and the aesthetic responses to this ongoing state of emergency. Through her curatorial practice, Sharpe marshals the collective intellectual heft and aesthetic inheritance of the African diaspora to show us the world as it appears from her distinctive line of sight. A searing and brilliant work." (Saidiya Hartman, author of *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*)"Christina Sharpe's deep engagement with the archive of Black knowledge production across theory, fiction, poetry, and other intellectual endeavors offers an avalanche of new insights on how to think about anti-Blackness as a significant and important structuring element of the modern scene. Cutting across theoretical genres, *In the Wake* will generate important intellectual debates and maybe even movements in Black studies, cultural studies, feminist studies, and beyond. This is where cultural studies should have gone a long time ago." (Rinaldo Walcott, author of *Black Like Who?: Writing Black Canada*)"This could have been a one thousand page book, filled with 'evidence,' citations and systematic 'proof,' but instead it is an earned, slim volume of poetic, intellectual and, in fact, spiritual enactment of struggle. In this way, *In The Wake* is an effective, personal conversation with the reader that uses both fact, image, and emotion, legitimately, to illuminate argument." (Sarah Schulman Lambda Literary Review 2016-10-12)"With *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe looks out from the text and really tries to see us, both those here and gone, living and dead, in the wake, for all we are. We might begin, anew, by carefully looking backâ "double emphasis on care." (John Murillo III Make Literary Magazine 2016-10-05)"*In the Wake* is a necessary chapter in a lengthy tome of ending white supremacy." (Jonathan Russell Clark Literary Hub 2016-10-31)"Mourning can be and has been a politics, but it must avoid becoming only a litany of horrors. Refusing melancholy in favor of care, *In the Wake* understands mourning as a practice embedded in living, and vice versa. Sharpeâ "s beautiful book enacts this indistinctness through pulling language apart and putting it to new purposes." (Hannah Black 4 Columns 2016-11-18)"The book that will live on in me from this year is Christina Sharpeâ "s *In the Wake*, on living in the wake of the catastrophic violence of legal chattel slavery. *In the Wake* speaks in so many multiple ways (poetry, memory, theory, images) and does so in language that is never still. It is, in part, about keeping watch, not unseeing the violence that has become normative, being in the hold, holding on and still living." (Madeleine Thien The Guardian, Best Books of 2016 2016-11-19)"*In the Wake* is work that holds space for what is unbearable and insists on letting it remain unbearable." (Johanna Hedva Mask Magazine 2017-01-02)"[A] masterclass on form, and a must-read for those of us committed to the beautiful sentence, as well as the work of what is

commonly called theory." (Joshua Bennett Poets & Writers 2017-01-12)"Christina Sharpe [is] one of the boldest and most brilliant academics of our time. . . ." In the Wake is one of those rare academic books at once rigorously argued and multiply engaging: intellectually, stylistically, emotionally." (David Chariandy Transition 2017-03-23)"The present is saturated with grief about black lives in the wake of violence, being awake to the deaths and erasures can potentially create a future that can expand on being in the wake for more liveable lives of the black diaspora. It can also be the site of wake work, of attempts at creating social justice out of the metaphor Sharpe gives us.... Sharpe's work has come at the right time." (Angelina Eimannsberger Indulgence 2017-07-29)

Christina Sharpe is Associate Professor of English at Tufts University and the author of *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*, also published by Duke University Press.

Still reading this amazing, insightful and most astute analysis. Highly recommended!!!

Sharpe's work beatifully lays out crucial themes and understandings of life within Black diaspora. A must read for all, especially for those in the wake.

It is difficult to exaggerate this book's importance and power.

Moving and insightful excursion into the personal side of growing up in the 1970s in the tense racial atmosphere of Philadelphia -- as well as a sober account of learning to be a deft critic of race and the humanities.

Great book. Excellent writing and very moving, I highly recommend it.

Well thought out a significant read.

In the Wake stands at the thematic and methodological crossroads of Black literary, visual and queer studies and philosophy. Its evocations are so haunting and yet so seared into present/time, that they parallel Coltrane, part a complex and lush lyric/line that one can follow if focused, partly a brilliant engagement that's operating just at the outer edges of one's intellectual reach because of the ways in which it plays/with inherited forms that aren't capacious

enough to contain their subjects and expression. Like Coltrane, Sharpe plays and fractures form in the wake of Black life, insisted upon, as she puts it, in the face of imminent and immanent Black death and *in the residence time* inhabited by our ghosts and our Gods. In the Wake makes path-breaking methodological interventions, arguing not for inter- or multi-disciplinarity, but asserting, rather, that *we must become undisciplined*. Sharpe addresses the making and unmaking of (narrative, memory-laden, cross-temporal) afterlives of enslavement marked by continuous and connected traumas and argues for a *new mode and method*, one she models to luminous effect. Sharpe's curatorial practice is both so broad in Diasporic time and place and so precise in the rich and resonant tones of the archival notes she plays, that it both engages multiple (visual, performance, print, family) archives and moves past them to sit with the quotidian ruptures that were lodged but (so often) not logged. Sharpe's thinking about *The Ship: the Trans\* Atlantic* is a Diasporic and cross-disciplinary tour de force in a book that itself is a hallmark achievement. Sharpe manages to give voice to that which is beyond language, beyond border and nation, beyond human worth, beyond a grammar that can contain this expression. The work stuns in how it holds so many ideas and objects of analysis together with such eloquence and force. Christina Sharpe accomplishes a rare thing: it is beautifully, lushly written academic prose that's impeccably curated, deeply historical, and also both philosophically precise and evocative. This is a rare feat in a field that returns to her subject again and again because language and form are not expansive enough to hold (to invoke her term) the questions such an existential dilemma as Black diasporic wakefulness. Such a signal achievement will be read and taught widely.

Interesting subjects/anecdotal tellings but dryly written; definitely a read for specific fields of history, sociology and African-American studies

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