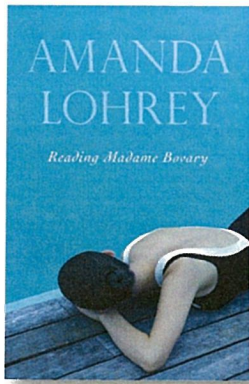


as academics need to make sure that we're not being elitist Leavistes, but that we're actually doing something about stuff that matters. It's about time we put Crime Writing on the literary map in Australia, and woke up in the literary community to realise reading True Crime isn't merely done for titillation, but often as much to pursue truth. Its many readers already seem to know and understand that, and it's about time we in the literary world got down from our pedestals to listen to them. Lindsay Simpson and Jennifer Cooke's *Honeymoon Dive* is a good book: in all senses of the term.

Honeymoon Dive is published by Pan Macmillan Australia (2010). RRP \$34.99 AUD ISBN 978-1-405-04012-9



ISLANDS OF STORY

Review of *Reading Madame Bovary*
by Eileen Spencer

In her first collection of short fiction the Tasmanian writer,

Amanda Lohrey aims at capturing story and message in small packages. As she says, "If you can do it in ten thousand words, why take fifty?" (Blog "Readings" September 2010). In the same Blog she states her main purpose in writing short fiction: "you want to capture the simple reading pleasure of childhood, the hypnotic spell of it." For the most part, the author achieves this for me.

In these nine stories Lohrey touches on many modern everyday dilemmas and philosophical problems in an accessible and readerly style. She deals with subjects as varied as the stressed working mother, coping with illness, the thoughts of a brain surgeon, eating disorders, choosing a school for your child, achieving self-knowledge in a decrepit barge on a canal, and living in a commune. Through this maze of modern life she grapples with profound themes such as the quest for meaning in life, the fear of death, defining moments that move us forward, choosing between freedom and structure, and finding redemption in unlikely places. There is a surprising depth to these apparently simple and easily read stories.

I will admit that the first story in the collection, "Primates," did not grab me at first. I found the jerky stream-of-consciousness disturbing and the neurotic, compulsive protagonist, Isadora unlikeable. While the cover of this book evokes its generally

inviting and reflective tone, this first story hardly welcomed me to cuddle up with the book for a good night's read. This said, the style was wonderfully reflective of the tension-ridden character; the constant interruption of station names as the protagonist's train passes through them is an evocative parallel to the choppiness of her mind and her behaviour as she careens from family responsibilities to marriage problems and on to friendship concerns and the eccentricities of her boss. As I read the story I felt as though I was riding the waves of a choppy sea in a small sailing boat and I came out of it feeling a little seasick. But my empathy was aroused for the character and I hoped she was eventually able to daydream again, just like the beguiling woman on the cover.

The eponymous story, "Reading Madame Bovary," describes the change that a young woman undergoes after reading Flaubert's book of the same name. She suddenly realises that, like Madame Bovary, she is a self-involved wretch, and this realisation encourages her to learn how to make the best of a miserable situation. The story tracks this character's gradual unfolding from herself as she reaches out to help others, and shows how her harrowing experience is transformed into a life-affirming one. This story is a reflection, then, of the transformational potential in literature, and an apt one for which

the collection is titled.

One of my favourite stories in this collection became "Perfect," which tells how a family moves into another woman's house where one of the children discovers her diary. The diary reveals the daily accounts of a woman whose life is governed by a neurotic attempt to achieve physical perfection through diet and exercise. A friend astutely zeroes in on core of the woman's problem – "Fear of death." It is noteworthy that this neurotic, tragic woman has "surprisingly few" books on the shelves, and one gets the feeling that she could never experience transformation like the character of "Reading Madame Bovary."

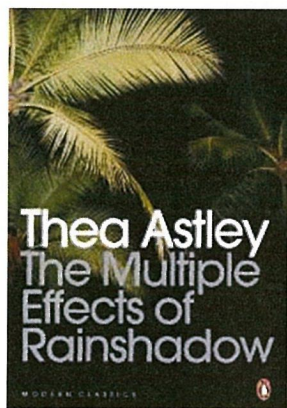
The theme that spoke to me most strongly, then, and which pervades this collection is that life can be enhanced by literature that helps us live our lives like characters in books. We can learn to weave our life stories into a significant narrative with the aid of the wonderful stories like those of Amanda Lohrey. She puts this point so well in "Primates":

Daydreaming is free-forming narrative. You let the facts of your past and present drift across the screen of your consciousness, like a diorama, and you form and re-form them in varying stories-as heroine, as failure, as navigator, as warrior, as magistrate, as woman, as

mother – and you surrender to its dreamy, excitational, trance-like state; ecstatic with the free flow, the sense of the story of your past, the wonderful form and drama of it, of having lived, completely, no matter how stressfully, your own plot.

The wonderful Australian short story writer Christina Stead once famously described narrative as an “ocean of story.” Lohrey’s collection zeroes in on a number of isolated individuals, and her detailed narrative attention magnifies them like glistening islands. For this, the short story form is appropriate, and used to its best. Contemplative, poetic, resonant fragments, just like the individuals in the stories, are sometimes remade as piece of the whole, a part of the main, reconnected again to the fabric of humanity through the salvific power of story.

Reading Madame Bovary (Amanda Lohrey) is published by Black Inc (2010). RRP \$32.95 AUD ISBN 9781863954907. 304pp.



LOCAL FOCUS. WIDESPREAD APPEAL

Review of Thea Astley’s *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*. Reprinted by Penguin Classics 2010.
by Jacqueline Connelly

“Nothing changed, he decided...even though hemispheres might.” (146)

So muses one of eight narrators in Thea Astley’s *The Multiple Effects of Rainshadow*. Unexpectedly, such sentiment for universalism can be applied to the novel itself.

Rainshadow received widespread well-deserved praise and a Miles Franklin Award nomination with its original publication in 1996. After going out of print, it was re-released in 2010—a decision that might be attributed to Chloe Hooper’s investigation of the custodial death of Palm Islander Cameron Doomadgee in *The Tall*