



Snake

Kate Jennings

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Set against the hard landscape of postwar Australia and moving through the 1950s and 1960s, "Snake" starts with a premise as frightening and commonplace as the deadly bush snake that lurks in the Australian interior: The loyal Rex, a good man, cherishes his wife Irene. Irene, bubbling over with feminine anger and unspecified desire, despises Rex. Into this marriage, this terrible emptiness, two people pour their very lives. "Snake" is about the loneliness of men married to unkind women, about the unloved becoming unlovable. Irene - an Australian Madame Bovary - moves through these pages like a force of nature. Chapter by brief chapter, Snake tells her story with archetypal force and subtlety - and a mesmerizing, zero-at-the-bone simplicity that literally propels the reader to the novel's stark climax.

Snake Details

Date : Published February 1st 2001 by HarperCollins Publishers (first published 1996)

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Author : Kate Jennings

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Booksy says

Kate Jennings is an Australian poet, essayist short-story writer and a novelist. I read her essays before and always wanted to read more from her. This novel struck me as truly original: original in form, in character depiction and in a way the writer approached the story line. Despite the bleakness of a story, the book leaves a feeling of enlightenment.

All chapters in this small and word-scarce book are extremely short and present snippets from lives of main characters - a family of rural New South Wales farmers and their children in the years after World War II. Every such snippet is a like a teaser: just when you are surprised and excited by a new turn in the narrative, the chapter finishes leaving you puzzled, eager to read more, and intrigued and somewhat deceived. The chapter titles are often obscure and sent me on the search for their meaning (which I am still looking for), some are from Australian folklore, some are poetry excerpts, but most of them left me guessing. I definitely recommend Kate Jennings for those readers who are interested in contemporary Australian prose, as she is undoubtedly one of the best. I will be looking forward to read her other novel – “Moral Hazard”.

Ian Herbert says

I think this is better suited for women, though definitely not bad

Sara Cutaia says

Short. Sad. Poetic. A story set in the Australian outback with a selfish and unhappy woman, and a lonely and simple farmer. They get married and have kids and the kids grow up and there are lots of snakes and the mother is unloving and the father isn't involved and the daughter is unapproachable and the son isn't cautious and together they make up the most heart-breakingly beautiful family dynamic.

Ginny says

The structure and craft of this novel is enlightening. The story itself is odd. It's a quick read - I started and finished it within 75 minutes. If you're interested in writing, then you will like this book. If you're looking for a story with closure, then this one is not for you.

kori kayleen says

i love these types of books - short little snapshots of bad people. i love the lack of character development

traded for straightforward descriptions of fact. nice, easy & sometimes cringy. irene was a terror and i loved her.

Irene Sauman says

This is an example of how much can be said in so few words. It is black and compelling and humorous. It resonated. I grew up during this period in this countryside. The landscape, the life, it's all there. The characters are well drawn and understood though not always likeable, certainly Irene is not. One can only wonder at the life Boy and his sister made for themselves after such a beginning. I don't know what else I can say. It's a five star read.

Cheryl Lawrance says

This is a great little read. In beautifully written short chapters the author captures effectively the experience of a woman living in the post war Australian outback. The atmosphere of small town life and the challenges facing both women and men in a harsh and challenging environment in the context of morphing social roles is captured brilliantly.

Katie Schmid says

i read this book in an hour and a half. it's brilliant, beautiful. about an australian farmer family. there are lots of snakes, everyone's bewildered and sad and dreaming of being somewhere else. you would like it, i bet.

Nene Davies says

Short. Very sharp. This book is written in a risky style. There's no time to flesh out the characters, but we get it. Brilliant writing and a bleak story. Nobody's warm, there's an absence of love. And yet I couldn't stop reading.

Emma says

This book was poetic and beautiful in many ways, but each moment was cut far too short. There were so many times where I just wanted to stay with a scene a little longer, but then it would be gone and as a result I just felt very distant from it all.

3.5

Tara Lynn says

I loved this short little novel in brief chapters. Jennings is a poet first, and that poetry comes through in full force in this wonderful story about life on an Australian farm.

Shel Sammut says

What is not said is easily more important than what is in this poetic novella. Each chapter evoking the reader's imagination so that tension within and around each character is uneasily absorbed by the reader. An album of verbal snapshots, telling an uncomfortable tale of a one-sided marriage, a make-shift family at best. Snake left me wanting more and grieving, but for what, I'm still not sure.

Rita says

A master study in the active voice. Sparse on extraneous detail. Light on dialogue, echoing the silence led by the main character, Rex. I liked it more for the structure than for the actual story, though that was also good. Incredibly quick read. Got through it in under 4 hours. Possibly less but I was trying to watch the Olympics in between.

Kimbofo says

Sometimes it's the things that aren't said which make a book more powerful than a verbose, overly written one. That's certainly the case for Kate Jenning's debut novella, *Snake*, which was first published in the UK in 2001.

A portrait of a marriage between two incompatible people in postwar Australia, it's written in bare, lean prose — the word "skeletal" comes to mind — and yet the story has an intensity that only comes when the author has taken the care to make each and every word count.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

Jane says

This is a stark book that evokes the harshness of the Australian bush and the people who try to make a living from the land. The story focuses on Rex and Irene who marry in haste in the aftermath of the 2nd World War. Jenning's writing style is spare with short vignettes rather than chapters that are seemingly unrelated until you finish the book and are left with an overwhelming sense of despair, bitterness, disappointment and tragedy.

Lisa says

First published 15 years ago, *Snake* depicts a disastrous post-war marriage in the backblocks of rural Australia. Among the notable blurbers is Shirley Hazzard who declares it 'irresistibly good' and indeed it is.

It is painfully terse, particularly in Parts I and IV. Only 153 pages long, this novella is structured in four parts, beginning with a sardonic address to the lame-duck husband of Irene. It's not his wife talking to him, but it's someone who knows his failings well. He's a 'nice' guy, but dull, under-educated and inarticulate. Incapable of registering his wife's frustrations with life, much less do anything about them, he's disappointed and lonely in the face of her contempt.

The second person narrative works well:

She is your wife, she despises you. The coldness, the forbearing looks, the sarcastic asides, they are constant. She emasculates you with the pure blade of her contempt. The whirring of the whetstone wheel, the strident whine of steel being held to it, that is the background noise to the nightmare of your days.

She passes on the loathing she feels for you to the children, solemnly, as if it were an heirloom. (p3)
To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.wordpress.com/201...>

Mary says

I adored this book. Jennings has the ability to create pared down yet beautiful scenes, and I found myself re-reading numerous passages where she deftly succeeded in creating the most exquisite imagery using such simple words. I found myself wondering how she'd done it as she managed to transport me to a world so very different from my own.

Amanda says

A little too contemporary for me. It reminded me of tableaux plays that consist of a few lines of dialogue per scene, and lots of shifting between scenes. I'm fairly certain this feeling was intentional on the part of the author, and she handled her chosen structure well, still creating a compelling plot and characters despite the brief but vivid scenes she painted.

Jennings excels at metaphor and imagery, at painting a single moment in time with words. I like more depth -- more time/plot and dialogue -- which is why I'm not rating it higher.

But if you're an imagery junkie, "Snake" is right up your alley.

Sarah Kingston says

I devoured this book. It was so short and seemingly simple but held so much. If I had to compare it to anything, I'd describe it as an Australian version of Revolutionary Road (I can never get enough books about people stuck in doomed dead end marriages, apparently.) I recognised people from this book - the digger who had grown up out on a station and felt emotions which rocked him but which he couldn't seem to communicate; the woman who marries the first man who asks and resents him for taking away the life he might have had; the children who desperately love their parents and cannot understand why they are so unhappy. This all sounds terribly upsetting, but somehow it wasn't, it was beautiful and comfortingly familiar.

Santino Prinzi says

A stunning novel(la)-in-flash.
