



Woman of the Inner Sea

Thomas Keneally

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Why would wealthy Kate Gaffney-Kozinsky flee her husband, lover, family, and society? What can she find by losing herself in the bleak Australian outback? The fascinating answers shape a novel that gives new definition to a woman's strength and endurance. Kate's odyssey takes her from a privileged girlhood, through her meaningless marriage to a lawless tycoon, and an empty erotic affair with a true-blue gentleman. But when her life of pampered pleasure gives way to one of unspeakable tragedy, all certainties are shattered, and Kate is plunged into a blind gamble on an unknown future in the middle of nowhere. The job she finds, the lovers she takes, and her final confrontation with her husband's power and her own past self interweave comedy, irony, drama, suspense, and wondrously affirmative human revelation. With its vivid setting, its cross-section of colorful characters, and, at its center, its passionate heroine caught in a nightmare of grief and deception, *Women of the Inner Sea* is at once startlingly intimate and universally appealing. It adds a new dimension and fresh luster to one of the major literary reputations of our time.

"One of the finest storytellers in the business . . . at the top of his form . . . an extraordinary, eloquently written tale."--*The Boston Globe*

Woman of the Inner Sea Details

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From Reader Review Woman of the Inner Sea for online ebook

Darlene says

Set in New South Wales, we follow the trajectory of a young woman's grief from lush Sydney to the spare, unpopulated desert towns of back and beyond. Kate leaves behind a philandering husband, a beloved Irish uncle and supportive parents as she wallows in the ordinary lives of strangers to numb her pain. It is a sober, suspenseful story with some colorful homespun characters.

Claire says

Haven't met a Thomas Kenneally book I haven't liked. And since a lot of the descriptions about Sydney's northern beaches hit close to home, it was even better.

Lisa says

I can't believe this was written by a man. He also wrote Sophie's Choice.

Mike Cuthbert says

I had this book on my shelves for years, spooked by the title into avoiding it. It sounded too soft, too mysterious. Tom Keneally is a friend and a favorite author, but the title just didn't grab me. The story sure did! Kate Gaffney is a comely lass in her thirties, married to a Sydney and Hollywood tycoon, Paul Kozinski. Paul is, like so many unfortunate tycoons, also a bit of a pirate, into all sorts of shady deals. Those are hidden from Kate. Not hidden from her are the shenanigans her Uncle Frank O'Brien gets up to. He is a "not-so-Reverend Father" in the Catholic Church and he and his mistress (there is no other name for Fiona Kearney) have amassed a certain number of properties in and around Sydney and the archdiocese is closing in on Father Frank. Father Frank also loves the ponies and there are rumors he's cut some corners in betting on them. Paul has not only become involved in shady deals but has taken a young mistress, Peridita. Siobhan and Bernard, Kate's children, have the advantages of wealth but Siobhan has the disadvantage of high intelligence and Bernard of being called "Bernard." They are getting along despite their handicaps and both doing well in school. One night, the Kozinski house burns down and we find Kate injured, burned about the shoulders and leaving the hospital with a resolve to abandon everything and move to "Back of Bourke," an Australian expression meaning beyond the Never-Never. There is actually a Bourke in Australia's New South Wales and Kate heads there, stopping on the way in a town called Myambaugh, a distinctly one-horse town, more village, and she adjusts from a slim, but damaged beauty to a barmaid feasting on steaks and potatoes in a desperate attempt to become matronly and plain while pulling pints at one of the three local pubs. Gradually, she achieves many of her goals and while she adjusts, we learn in bits and pieces that her house burned down with her children in it while she was out to dinner. In the meantime, a rough customer named Burnside, her husband's prime thug, tracks her down and offers her millions in a property settlement and divorce. The divorce is fine, but she suspects the property settlement is something more than that. She suspects that Paul is using the property settlement to get her to admit more of a role in his dealings than she

had. He is trying to stay out of prison. Kate eventually meets and works with a burly, kindly man named Jelly (as in “gelignite,” a popular Aussie explosive once used by an actual Aussie named “Gelignite Jack” to hunt kangaroos) and falls into a relationship with him. Later, there is Gus, a conservationist, with whom she travels for a time in the company of Chifley the gray kangaroo and Menzies, a placid emu, formerly residents of an amusement park. All this time the diet of steak and potatoes have taken their toll and there is less of the Sydney socialite and more of the Back of Bourke in Kate. The story unwinds and we eventually discover the whole story of the fire and the deaths of her children and why she had such scars on her body but they come late and almost as an afterthought to the glorious story that has preceded the denouement. This, in short, is a wonderful Australian story filled with Aussie slang and humor and the informed facts of Keneally who studied for the priesthood for six years himself and could have been Frank O’Brien. Kate is a wonderful heroine, the characters she meets are memorable without being types and this turns out to be one of Keneally’s most engaging stories. Try to find it (from 1994) and enjoy a major bit of Australiana.

Nerissa says

I really enjoyed this book, despite it being rather distressing for most of the story. Maybe it was the fact that I read it while in Australia but the portrayal of the characters and setting was very detailed and authentic.

Paula Maguire says

I found this book a bit melodramatic and irritating. I didn't particularly like the writing style, with one character constantly called, 'The not quite so reverend Frank'. However I did finish it so some parts were interesting - when the woman, Kate, travelled into the outback and tried to loose herself in a small town. The blurb on the back says that is was a true story, but it doesn't ring true. Maybe, it's the author's lack of empathy with the main character or this reactions or non reactions she is given. Was unconvinced by her attachment to a kangaroo, or by her relationships with Jelly and Gus. Kept thinking that the story would be a metaphor for something profound, which is may be but I don't get it .

Susan says

I found this a very well written and quite haunting read. The heroine suffered a huge shock and as a result went into a spiral of depression wanting to punish herself which I found quite upsetting but the things she went through were quite scary and also very upsetting and she dealt with them in her own unique way. I liked the outback Australian images and descriptions and could really picture the pub and its regulars. I could understand her bitterness and desire for revenge considering what she went through but some of her actions I found difficult to come to terms with. The characters were very real and so Australian that it could not have been set anywhere else in my view.

I have enjoyed some of his other books such as 'The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith' and 'Schinder's Ark' so was interested to read this and will read others if I come across them

Kathleen McAvoy says

I was disappointed by this book. I kept hoping it would get more interesting. A story based in Australia about marital discontent and revenge.

Jodie says

3.5 stars. A complex and difficult story with beautiful big round words. At times I just could not understand what he was saying, the language was so dense with words I could not make out the story. The images of Australia are lovely and desperate too, but that is the contrast of our land and of Kate.

Kate has suffered by being married to her despicable husband Paul, she has lost her children and is stricken with grief and guilt. She flees Sydney, feeling that the very earth of it is corrupt so she can no longer stay. She heads inland to what was once Australias inner sea to try and erase herself really. Poor Kate, she is constantly persued by disaster. Even though she builds some real relationships she ultimately is still unhappy and she does stay that way.

Interestingly Mr Keneally at times tells us up front what is about to happen, no foreshadowing at all, he just says it and then shows it. And even though you know what is going to happen you feel compelled to read the how of it. I liked that.

Dulcie says

Inane, formulaic trash. Yet another phone-in by Keneally. Dated tripe; save your time and give it a miss to read something worthwhile.

J.S. Dunn says

The difficult emotional terrain for the heroine has an apt metaphor in the flat plain of inner Australia, a prehistoric sea bed: hence the title. This novel covers a lot of emotional territory for less than 300 pages in length. It is not as accessible or folksy as some other titles by Keneally, but worth the effort.

He includes some pithy and amusing comments on the Celtic delusions of second and third generation Irish Aussies, which seem to resemble or at least to parallel the delusions of 'Irishamericans' [those who would still donate to the IRA not knowing these days it's a raft of thugs, or those feckless tourists who wander the auld sod in search of a thatched roof and who may be found cluttering up Irish cemeteries looking for their roots. Hand them a parsnip and send them home.]

Cindy says

Astounding beautiful language. "Big words" as my mom described it. It is actually a treat to read a novel that

taxes the brain not in context necessarily as the story is fairly straight forward but rather style, word choice and sentence fluency. No easy way out here; he phrases everything in the most complicated way possible. The obscure nature of the storytelling fits the poetic story line of a woman vanishing from a former life, her story buried deep within the outer surface of the telling. Bits and pieces of the events that mark the tragic past she is attempting to obliterate--eating herself into a new identity.

Set in Australia. Interesting Aussie phrases and characters.

Overall, an odd book. It sticks with you--but all in all I'm still not certain whether I liked it or not...exactly how I felt while I was reading it. Not a quick, easy read. Required several days of careful reading....perhaps I should not have read it in summer?

Philip says

Woman Of The Inner Sea by Thomas Keneally is a thoroughly satisfying novel. Via its pages, the reader shares its characters' experience, inhabits their landscape and almost participates in the stories told. Late twentieth century Australia is where everything happens, but the country's apparently inescapable sense of its own history continually seeps through the experience. The novel, thus, is more than a story, more than a personal history, more than a drama.

Kate Gaffney-Kozinsky is the book's central character. Née Gaffney, she was originally of Irish stock and gained the Polish double barrel by virtue of marriage. Virtue may be a stretch of both truth and reality when describing this particular marriage, however.

Kate Gaffney has an uncle who is a priest. Given the Irish connection this is not altogether surprising. But Kate's uncle is not the usual sort of cleric. He has particular interests and proclivities that result in his rubbing shoulders with the rich, the powerful and the infamous. Thomas Keneally's novel pre-dates scandal relating to personal abuse by clerics, and there is no mention of this in relation to the story of Kate's uncle, but the rest will eventually conspire to condemn him and indeed defrock him. But a tension that is present and one that Thomas Keneally brings out to great effect is the way that this Irishness, this anti-British nationalism, can in Australia be lumped together with the traditional English rump to form a contrast with the later arrivals to the country from Greece, Poland, Lebanon, Vietnam, Italy and elsewhere.

It is pertinent to Kate's story because she meets and marries a Kozinsky, a Pole, one of the more recent, non Anglo-Saxon antipodeans. The family has made a huge fortune in developing investment property. They are rich, famous and successful. Kate's life is duly transformed.

Two children are born and they begin to grow up in a family whose cracks are beginning to appear. Kate internalises anything that might appear to fall short of overt success. But then mothers often do regard as failure anything less than perfection in themselves, especially in those things that impinge upon their children's lives. Kate turns to new relationships, seeking there perhaps to fill some of the cracks that have appeared in the very structure of her own family life. And then things really fall apart.

Kate seeks out a new life. She takes a train into her country's interior, that vast, even now largely unknown hinterland where it is usually failure, not opportunity, that awaits. She becomes a barmaid in a back-of-beyond town that suffers chronic and regular flooding, and, sure enough, climatic disaster strikes again. A man called Jelly reckons that a hole blown through a railway embankment would relieve the town of its

unwanted surfeit of water. Predicting the blast proves more difficult than setting it.

The plot wanders across country after explosive events. A large kangaroo and an emu travel in the party, on their way to a film set where they are cast in parts of a living national coat of arms. Kate thus travels again, but always pursued by her husband's family lawyer, who wants her to sign away her rights, responsibilities and any presumed guilt.

When, later, abortive attempts at settlement have been attempted and come to nothing, Kate tries to take things into her own hands and seeks a settlement of her own. Her priest-uncle's fate has taken its turns, as, she discovers, have the fortunes of the Kozinskys. While she has been bound up in the detail of her own life and its imaginings, fears and guilt, things outside of her direct experience have moved on. The world she rediscovers has changed. The landscape, though still unchanging ancient Australia, is now utterly different, offering new possibilities to new lives and even the opportunity to rewrite her personal history. Kate Gaffney thus explores the great inner sea of her country at the same time as navigating the tides of her own innermost fears. The journey, as ever, lands on new shores in old places.

Brian says

Recommendation from reader: *re-read the very beginning conversation after completing the book*

Not really sure why above recommendation was made. Not even sure which is the "very beginning conversation"...mostly understandable would be between Kate and Uncle Frank, but that's on p. 32.

Very interesting tale of Kate Gaffney-Kozinski, a woman suffering from tragedy and guilt who runs off to the bush to transform into another woman, to kill her original self. Well-told, engaging and very creative. Don't really understand the bit about her dreams of the kangaroo and his tears and his giving her the curse of language. Felt contrived and incomplete. Maybe only Australians could understand. ;)

Deb says

3 1/2 stars. Set in Australia it tells the story of woman bent on transforming herself after tragedy. Interesting and dark. As an American, I felt lost at times in the Australian references and discussion of its history since it is not my own. Good storytelling.
