

REVIEWS FROM AUSTRALIA

Feather Man

Rhyll McMaster

‘Rhyll McMaster has struck gold with her debut novel of betrayal and loss...This is a stunning, dark story with tight, controlled prose. Unforgettable. *****’

Goodreading Magazine – June, 2007

‘... I think it would be a good choice for book clubs as there can be different reactions both to the adventures and the structure of the story.’

Eve Abbey, *Abbey’s Bookshop newsletter*, Issue #215, August 2007.

‘...a well-structured and accomplished character-driven work...a flowing, subtle and rewarding read.’

Australian Bookseller and Publisher, April-May 2007

‘McMaster achieves many brilliant effects...a *tour de force* of vivid and surprising imagery and allusion ...Her eye for detail, for recognizing the exceptional in the most mundane of things, illuminates these pages. The seedy ordinariness of life in London is superbly conveyed.’

Andrew Riemer in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 2007

‘Rhyll McMaster tosses us in at the deep end... enlivened by a genuine mystery, a slender but powerful narrative thread ...It’s a masterstroke...she makes this novel so much more than a simple story: in the clever patterns of imagery, the brilliant descriptions, the narrative structure and the understanding – more and more absent from contemporary fiction – that a good novel has something to say about the world’.

Kerryn Goldsworthy in *The Australian*, Review, June 2 - 3, 2007.

‘...a novel which explores the impact of childhood sexual abuse on adult life ...a brutal tale, but an exquisite read, full of the most satisfying psychological truths.’

Ramona Koval, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 6 June, 2007.

‘...an exhilarating and absorbing work of prose...’

Catherine Freyne, Producer, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National.

‘McMaster is interested in the fragility of identity and the dynamics of personal power. This superb first novel is beautifully written but not for the faint-hearted. ...in a class of its own.’

Christina Hill, *Australian Book Review*, July-August, 2007.

‘...a novel about privacy, about an experience so secret and so traumatically internalized that its effects go on reverberating long after the child victim has grown up. In tracing Sooky’s progress from a traumatized suburban childhood to the beginnings of a successful international career as an artist, McMaster charts the emotional complexities of dependence, loyalty, cruelty and betrayal...’

Kerryn Goldsworthy, *The Australian Literary Review*, July 4, 2007.

‘*Whose girl are you?* It’s the question everyone asks in this spiky little bildungsroman – a tale of growth and development – and our protagonist, Brisbane-born boomer

Sooky, never really knows the answer. ...men will loom over Sooky in one way or another, demanding to know whose girl she is.

Sooky is ...observant and clever and at times wonderfully funny. At a gallery opening, annoyed by the old man leering at her breasts, she grabs his hand and says 'why don't you have a feel, since you're so keen'.

Michelle Griffin, *The Age*, Saturday 21 July, 2007

'Moving from a sleepy 1950s Brisbane to a grubby London of the 1970s, McMaster's narrative is at once both intense and detached; she renders the lived experience of both cities and the characters in them with painful clarity. ... the search for identity in all the wrong places. ... an impressive first novel – rich, darkly funny and disturbing.'

Rachel Slater, *Australian Women's Book Review*, Vol.19 No.1 2007.

'*Feather Man* is boldly original and self-assured. The narrative voice is darkly witty, but beguilingly honest. Nothing is sugar-coated here...Sooky is the consummate loner, albeit a girl with guts and a sense of irony'.

The Courier-Mail, 5-6 May 2007

'A highly original first novel...'

The Daily Telegraph, 12-13 May 2007

'In *Feather Man* Rhyll McMaster has written a love-letter to the physical landscape of Brisbane. The intimate and panoramic are in equally sharp focus: the beauty and mastery of each is undeniable.'

Karen James, co-producer/presenter *OzWrite* – National Community Radio Network book program, June 2007.

'The writing is impeccable ...and the descriptions are truly memorable and repellent. Like Sooky, this is not a scene we can easily leave behind.

The descriptions of the art she creates are particularly vivid: confessional and sometimes surreal... a coming-of-age novel, and a story of an emergent artist.'

The Canberra Times, June 23, 2007

READERS' COMMENTS

'I think *Feather Man* is a great book – it grows stronger the more I think about it, and I believe that with the excellent attention it is receiving it will reach a very wide readership and become recognized as a truly important and powerful work of Australian literature – a moon, not a meteor!'

Peter Bishop, Director, Varuna Writers' Centre, Blackheath, NSW.

'How wonderful to read something so fully developed that it is not only complicated in structure but still so fluid. Like a complicated woven fabric. The constant rewriting and polishing has produced a truly great piece... had my heart in my mouth most of the time...The kid was in such permanent danger. And so damaged. But then she became so dangerous! And I was glad.... And what about that hand leaping out of the grave in the last sentence, grabbing me by the throat?... I will tell all my friends to buy and read it... "just for fun".'

Errol Sullivan, film producer, *Southern Star*

‘It’s great – as I suspected it would be. Very visual, I loved that the protagonist was an artist. I really liked the outcome however – neither good nor bad – very life-like! The fact she ends up with a combination of her father and her childhood abuser is such a salient illustration of how we keep recreating unresolved scenarios from our youth. The whole story stayed with me after I finished the last page.’

Megan Brownlow, Television producer.

‘...read the first chapter today while eating lunch and had to slam it shut lest I do no work for the rest of the day.’

Morgan Smith, Events Manager, *Gleebooks*

‘...And it’s so funny, sometimes, and so sad, and black but never bleak – just what readers (like me) desire in any novel. And it is wonderfully chilling the way the story unfolds – just when you’re thinking what a foul beast Lionel is, and how misused Sookie has been, she describes the pleasure of watching Lionel shave in the mornings, and everything becomes clearly more complicated ...

And what a great chilling last sentence, because...even very thoughtful reflective people may keep repeating their mistakes, if their new mistakes come along in clever disguises. I feel she has many rigorous adventures ahead of her.’

Sally McInerney, author and artist.

‘ it’s often very funny...and as vivid as life- what higher praise of a novel could there be than this last phrase?’

Professor Peter Alexander, Uni. NSW

‘...an astounding and assured first novel, full of sharp insight and very real pain.’

Tom Shapcott

‘...can I just mention that while we in the office primarily knew of you as a poet and loved your writing, each of us has read *Feather Man* and enjoyed it as one. It is a regular topic of conversation and we have put it into the hands of many who have ventured into the office looking for their next book to read.’

Jeni Caffin, Director, Byron Bay Writers’ Festival.

Other readers say:

‘I love your book...I found it chilling from half-way through and couldn’t put it down. It really is a stunning achievement... I see it as a powerful women’s book... not women’s libbers – all women.... I reckon *Feather Man* would make a great film. What I love is the grappling with emotional complexities and the insights which result. That’s what for me is most absent from contemporary writing and it’s what *Feather Man* delivers in aces.’

‘I can’t get my head out of *Feather Man*! But when I do, I can’t stop thinking about it! I love it. It has taken me right back to those puzzling and troubling days. Your sharp eyes and incisive prose have captured everything so acutely. It makes me realize how I relied on my shortsightedness to blur the reality of my early history.’

‘...the whole structure of the book, the skillful story-telling, combined with your incredible ability to put into words who people are, and what’s going on in their heads, is quite remarkable.

I was struck breathless at times by the exquisite aptness of some of your descriptions. Sure, there was ugliness, and gut-gripping fear/disgust for what was happening, and would eventually happen to Sookie – but I couldn’t hate her, really felt for her, admired her in some ways, was pleased for her accomplishments and in the end preferred to take the happier option from the ambiguous conclusion!

...you were very successful in conveying that insidious way a predator grooms his victim, and then the mixed emotions and responses of that victim, and the way his/her future life is so affected.

I never read a book a second time unless for study or re-visiting one of the classics that I haven’t read for years – I’m now reading yours again!’

‘There’s so much atmosphere. I’m transported back to the times and the backyards, and the blokes in them. I was completely drawn in from the first couple of paragraphs, right into 50’s Australia... You write with such heartbreaking beauty... the razor sharp observations of the main character tore through me and left me reeling sometimes. The subtleness of her revenge. On the surface, almost no revenge at all.’

‘It was great to get back into reading again after having a baby, the book was easy to read and it was like watching a really good movie. I certainly didn’t like that horrid, wretched Redmond or Lionel and at times I thought Oh my gosh, is this poor woman ever going to have something good happen to her. She certainly had an awful non supporting mother too. I look forward to reading more stories from you. It has inspired me to take up reading again.’

...frantically hoping that Lionel would not prevail in her life – too many Lionels in too many innocent lives... The novel is extraordinary – avoiding every cliché – what a knowing, unsentimental but clear-eyed commentator. ...

What a book, what skill, what depth of understanding and what forgiveness of human frailty...’

‘I thought it wonderfully well written and a novel of “our” experience in Australia. To me more relevant than so much of the “approximately” historical fiction of the day.’

‘It was absolutely amazing and enthralling.’

‘I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your book... it was so beautifully written... I loved how you described how you would paint... I have never had any of the experiences that Sooky had but could identify with the child and the adult... thanks.’

