



Madeleine: A Life of Madeleine St John

Helen Trinca

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Winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Non-fiction, 2014.

The compelling story of Madeleine St John, one of Australia's finest female novelists.

At the age of fifteen Madeleine saw herself as a painter and pianist, but Ms Medway peered down at Madeleine during her entrance interview in 1957 and announced: 'You know dear, I think you might write.'

Madeleine would write. But not for some time. *The Women in Black*, a sparkling gem that belied the difficulties that had dogged her own life, was published when Madeleine St John was in her fifties. Her third novel, *The Essence of the Thing*, was shortlisted for the 1997 Booker Prize, and she continued to write until her death in 2006.

Helen Trinca has captured the troubled life of Madeleine St John in this moving account of a remarkable writer. After the death of her mother when Madeleine was just twelve, she struggled to find her place in the world. Estranging herself from her family, and from Australia, she lived for a time in the US before moving to London where Robert Hughes, Germaine Greer, Bruce Beresford, Barry Humphries and Clive James were making their mark. In 1993, when *The Women in Black* was published, it became clear what a marvellous writer Madeleine St John was.

Helen Trinca has co-written two previous books: *Waterfront: The Battle that Changed Australia* and *Better than Sex: How a Whole Generation Got Hooked on Work*. She has held senior reporting and editing roles in Australian journalism, including a stint as the *Australian's* London correspondent, and is currently Managing Editor of the *Australian*.

'The only lasting fame for any of the rest of us will reside in the fact that we once knew her.' Clive James

'[A] brilliant biography.' *Australian Women's Weekly*

'a rich and moving account of a difficult life redeemed by art.' *Independent*

'a compassionate understanding of St John's development and eventual deterioration. This biography enriches our appreciation of St John's four novels, and Trinca is a thorough detective but not a judge.' *Good Reading*

'Moving, frustrating, fascinating: *Madeleine* is a wonderful book. One thinks St John might have appreciated its elegance, at least. Though she would have hated it, of course; which is to say Trinca has told her story scrupulously, and well.' Delia Falconer, *Weekend Australian*

'Expertly researched and fair in its portrayal...[Trinca's prose] is able to masterfully conjure the affluence of 1950s Sydney, its lonely housewives and lost migrants, as well as the shabby chic of 60s London and its bohemian share houses, head with casual sex and marijuana.' *Readings Monthly*

'[*Madeleine*] isn't merely a history of a singular writer, it is also a trenchant interrogation of a period and a

country.' *The Monthly*

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