
Review by Gillian Dooley, Adelaide Review, 27 April 2007, p. 19

The setting: a nameless tropical island just south of the equator, north of Australia, at an indeterminate time – before the present but after the second world war, when this edenic paradise was first visited by a white man.

The unlikelihood of such an island being left uncolonised let alone unvisited by Europeans until then is, perhaps, irrelevant. Elizabeth Stead has created a fantasy island with its own brand of transformative magic. The first white man is an Adventist missionary, but hot on his heels come the Catholics, the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Anglicans. Then a seasease is built and a settler society is formed. The happy, wise, but indistinguishable indigenes resent this activity at first. However, things settle into an implausibly peaceful co-existence quite quickly.

The energy and wit of this novel is all concentrated in the first part, when the first contact is being made, and when the troubled (white) souls who will find their paradise here are introduced. The narrative runs out of puff about two-thirds of the way through, with 100 pages of births, marriages, deaths and minor crises still to wade through. This novel is finally pure essentialist romance, despite its satirical veneer.