

'Not a wasted word, not an observation missed' JOCK SERONG

LUCY  
TRELOAR  
DAYS OF  
INNOCENCE  
AND  
WONDER

READING NOTES



'in full possession of her powers, as assured and ambitious as  
Barbara Kingsolver or Isabel Allende' AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

# BLURB

*When someone is taken away, what is left behind?*

All her life, Till has lived in the shadow of the abduction of a childhood friend and her tormented wondering about whether she could have stopped it.

When Till, now twenty-three, senses danger approaching again, she flees her past and the hovering presence of her fearful parents. In Wirowie, a town on its knees, she stops and slowly begins creating a new life and home. But there is something menacing here too. Till must decide whether she can finally face down, even pursue, the darkness – or whether she'll flee once more and never stop running.

Both a reckoning with fear and loss, and a recognition of the power of belonging, *Days of Innocence and Wonder* is a richly textured, deeply felt new novel from one of Australia's finest writers.

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# ABOUT LUCY TRELOAR

Lucy Treloar was born in Malaysia and educated in England, Sweden and Melbourne. She is the author of *Salt Creek*, which won the Dobbie Literary Award and was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and the Walter Scott Prize. *Wolfe Island*, Lucy's second novel, won the Barbara Jefferis Award and was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Award and the Christina Stead Prize. She is a previous winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize (Pacific region).

Lucy's essays and short fiction have appeared in publications including *The Saturday Paper*, *Meanjin*, *The Age*, *Overland* and *Best Australian Stories*. She is an occasional teacher of creative writing.

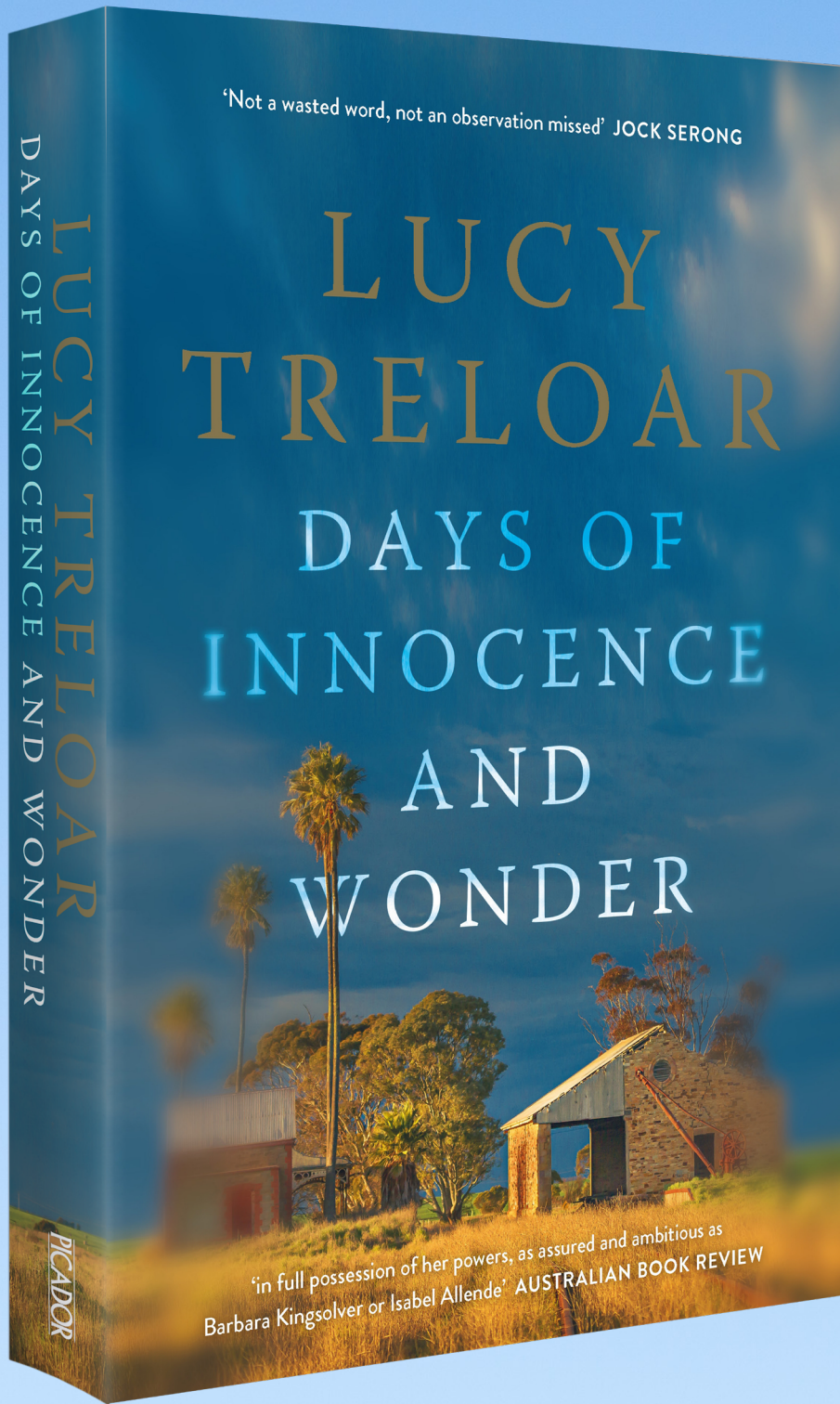
A graduate of the University of Melbourne and RMIT, Lucy lives in inner Melbourne with her family. *Days of Innocence and Wonder* is her third novel.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Till has a deep connection to journeys and travel throughout the novel. How does her physical journey in the novel parallel her emotional and psychological journey? In what ways is her journey more than just a physical relocation?
2. The perspective shifts between Till and the narrator. How did this affect your understanding of the novel? Why do you think the author chose to tell part of the story from the narrator? As the story unfolded, who did you think was the narrator? How did you understand the reveal at the end – who was the narrator?
3. ‘Names matter’, so begins Chapter 24, and they seem to have special significance in the novel: E not being named; the story about the Englishwoman’s baby with E’s name; ‘the man’ never being given a name, and Till refusing to answer to or use her own name. She hints that the song her name ‘Till’ comes from has some significance to her, but – ‘*She couldn’t trust anyone with that information ... It felt safer.*’ (page 254) What is the power that names have across cultures? What power do names have to Till? Did you come up with any possible meanings for the name she assumes?
4. The theme of death recurs throughout, from the obvious one in E’s disappearance and assumed death, to Zoe’s recount of childhood deaths, Tundra’s story about the dying woman, Mr Anderson’s passing, Bear. How do these various references to death contribute to the overall themes and tone of the novel? Does Till’s perspective on death change over the course of the narrative?
5. What does the thylacine anecdote and Till’s anger at the man who shot it reveal about her character and her other preoccupations, including her awareness of who holds power and who gets to wield it? Do you see these power dynamics elsewhere in the novel?
6. ‘*Till thought about trains and railways, arrival and departure, the way the buildings kept you safe and gave shelter for as long as a person needed.*’ (page 110) The train station holds a special significance for Till throughout the novel. What does the station represent for her, and why does she find it comforting? How does it contrast with her love of driving and journeys?
7. Till’s relationship with the station building is described as her efforts to heal and restore it: ‘*She had bandaged its wounds and splinted its broken bones, she had anointed its skin and applied some concealer.*’ (page 245) How does her connection to the station reflect her own journey of healing and self-restoration? In what ways does healing the house help Till heal herself?
8. How does the novel explore the nature of memory, and how does Till’s childhood trauma affect her memories of the past? Contrast Till’s memory of a family car trip to her mother’s memory (page 288), and how Till doesn’t want to hear that it wasn’t the happy one she remembered.
9. ‘*The fiction that childhood was a time of innocence was intolerable to Till. It was adults who were the innocents in this belief. Children knew. Something crept over people as they emerged from childhood, like cataracts, blinding them to the truth, which was that the world could be horrifying.*’ (page 17) How does this perspective relate to the events of the novel and the characters’ experiences with trauma and loss?

10. Till refers to her parents as ‘*helpless soft things*’ (page 95) and questions their competence. Do you agree with her assessment of her parents, or do you see their actions differently? How did their parenting choices influence Till’s character?
11. ‘Once, Zoe said to Till, “You think the most terrifying thing is the thought of dying. Then you find out thinking of your own child dying is worse. It doesn’t seem possible. I am never not afraid.”’ (page 149) How does this fear impact the characters in the story, particularly Zoe?
12. Till’s encounter with the policeman (Rod) elicits complex emotions, including ‘thrills’ and pleasure in a sense of danger. What does this encounter reveal about Till’s character, and how does it impact her journey?
13. The novel incorporates real-life events, such as the 2019/2020 summer bushfires and the COVID-19 lockdowns, which place it in recent history. How effectively does the author evoke these contemporary events, and how do they enhance the story’s themes?
14. How does Till’s interest in Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* connect to the novel’s themes of fear, isolation, and societal responses to crisis?
15. Till’s singing is an important aspect of her character. How does her singing evolve throughout the novel, and what role does it play in her personal journey and healing process? The novel explores the idea of finding one’s voice, both literally and metaphorically. Discuss the role of Till singing in E’s voice. Is it a way for Till to hold on to E, to remember her, or to pay homage to her memory? Does this hold Till back?
16. The novel incorporates elements of Indigenous culture through Tundra. How do these cultural elements contribute to the themes of the story and the development of the characters?
17. Homelessness is a prevalent theme in the novel, from the makeshift tents in the Melbourne lanes to the women living out of their cars in South Australia, and the people squatting in abandoned houses in Wirowie. How does this contribute to the novel’s exploration of displacement, alienation, and the search for a sense of belonging?
18. The constant sense of menace, such as Till’s late-night walks and her feeling of being watched, creates a pervasive atmosphere of tension and unease. How effective is this atmosphere in building suspense and engaging the reader?
19. Guilt is a central emotion that Till grapples with throughout the novel. How much of Till’s problems and decisions are driven by guilt, and how does her guilt affect her actions and relationships with others? Does her attempt to rescue Liz at the end help her come to terms with her guilt?
20. ‘Save us all from angry men’ Till says on page 299, after Liz’s rescue. What does the novel convey about violence against women, and how does it address the theme of male domination and/ or aggression and its consequences? How does this relate to the causes and effects of colonialism?
21. Consider the role of female solidarity and support among the women in the novel – how do these relationships highlight the importance of women looking out for one another in the face of danger and adversity?

- 22.** *'All Till could think of was flight, since the action of flight itself, being in a car that was moving fast, meant safety, comfort, all the old words.'* (page 222) At different stages in the novel, Till exhibits flight, fight and freeze. How do these physiological responses show her development from a scared five-year-old to a person who finally confronts her fears?
- 23.** How do the 'innocence and wonder' of the book's title relate to the landscapes of Melbourne and the mid-north of South Australia, and to Till's perception of people and her world? What do these different landscapes represent to Till?
- 24.** In many ways, this is a book of shadows and hauntings: of the past, lost children, the legacies of colonialism, death. Where do you see these? What are the possibilities for coming to terms with the past, thinking of Tundra and Mr Oldham and their son Bear, Marian's failed marriage, E's death, Till's shadow, Wilf Batty, the guilt-stricken woman on her deathbed?
- 25.** Colonisation is an undertow in this book and can be seen as an expression of patriarchal power. To what extent can Rod's actions be seen as a continuation of that process or parallel with it? Where else does it appear in this book?
- 26.** The novel can in some ways be seen as an expression of the #MeToo movement. Should we see Till simply as an individual, or does she represent all women?
- 27.** Till is a fearful person, but is she a victim? Is this a novel about fear and weakness or resilience and strength?



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