

GENERAL EDITOR: NICHOLAS JOSE



# THE LITERATURE OF AUSTRALIA

FOREWORD BY THOMAS KENEALLY

AN ANTHOLOGY



*The*  
LITERATURE  
*of*  
AUSTRALIA

*An Anthology*

General Editor: Nicholas Jose  
Foreword by Thomas Keneally



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# FOREWORD

‘They call her a young country but they lie,’ runs the opening line of a not entirely complimentary but classic poem by A.D. Hope, ‘Australia’. They do lie, in fact. As an immigrant society Australia is relatively young, dense though it may be in literary aspiration. But as a crucible for the world’s oldest culture it is the most antique of the earth’s continents—the first of lands, a milieu which predates the landscapes and the inhabiting deities which sparked European sensibility from the Greeks onwards. This tension between antiquity and the recent is often palpable in Australian writing—it can be seen in the great modernist novels of Patrick White, and in the poet Judith Wright’s wonder at her particular inheritance in the magnificent ‘South of My Days’.

But that is not the only creative contradiction which will become apparent in these pages. As is well known, Australia as a modern community had its origins in a penal experiment. Though other colonial societies might have had an admixture of convicts, this is the only major society in the world to derive from a purpose-designed convict netherworld. Our book of Genesis featured a pre-fallen Adam and Eve, and that pattern remained long after the end of the convict era—Australia was imagined as a place where all was reversed and the damned became the rescued. If literature has a measurable purpose, as well as the immeasurable and imponderable function it performs for the species, one of the purposes of Australian writing has been to define this netherworld, this anti-Europe.

The associated irony is that Australia was always a strange place to find people of Northern European descent, separated from the wellsprings of their blood and culture by the mass and archipelagos of Asia. And so a further tension arose, which began with mistrust, arguments and sundry legislated and induced hysterias, but which involved an increasing embrace of Asia—both by receiving Asian immigration and by Australia’s increasing engagement in

the region. Though cultural comprehension of Asia has lagged behind trade and diplomacy, the presence of Asia is reflected in these pages.

And a few more things that might aid in enjoyment of this collection: There was a time when Australia—perhaps to distinguish itself from the republican United States—defined itself as ruggedly and monolithically British. The reality is otherwise—a most ethnically diverse community inhabits the country; many claim, the most ethnically diverse on earth.

So within this book one encounters a literary community unexpectedly diverse, one influenced internally by the nature of the continent, and externally by the reality of its position on the globe; an English-language literature arising as far as you could get from European wellsprings of language and sensibility, and at the terminus of Asia to the north, and with the breath of Antarctica on it from the south. It was always a place designed to produce a voice like no other.

The editors have defined this voice in the broadest terms possible. They begin with the first diarists of the colonial experiment, they encompass the letters of Aborigines, the poetry of convicts, the journals of explorers and enquirers, the stories of settlers. They introduce us to the earliest self-appointed Sons of the Southern Cross, poets of national consciousness, men such as Charles Harpur, child of convicts. They trace the near-normalisation of a literary culture in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the ongoing and tragic discourse between displaced natives and immigrant society: two cultures plagued by mutual incomprehension but one possessing the arms to express their chagrin more fatally.

In the nineteenth century, the great voices which would flower in the twentieth century were born either in soon-to-be emigrant households in Europe or in one of the states or colonies of an as yet unfederated Australia. There was the most popularly nationalist Henry Lawson, born in a gold camp in New South Wales, and a poet of such sublime Blakean sophistication as Shaw Neilson, born in 1872 in South Australia. The splendid novelist Henry Handel Richardson was born in Melbourne in 1870, and in the same year in Sydney was born the fine symbolist poet Christopher Brennan.

Given that Australia acquired in the world—and cultivated for itself—a reputation for hard-handed taciturnity, the lusciousness of twentieth-century Australian verse found here will break on the reader as a revelation, involving unexpected lightnings. It is a poetry the reverse of laconic—it is sensual, mystical and richly colloquial. Nor does Australian fiction tend towards minimalism. It is more urgent than that, with its sense that there is so much to reveal.

The apogee of Australian fiction may well have been the stylistic spaciousness and the piercing gaze of Nobel-Prize-winner Patrick White,

and of other writers of his generation such as Christina Stead. There was a lot of what people might call *business* to be done in fiction, non-fiction, verse in the mid-twentieth century. Almost as much as in 1788, Australia was still seen by the world as an antipodes into which immigrants vanished to live unexplained and unexamined lives. Australian writing sought to define that condition, to examine those unexamined lives, and—in the ambiguous way of literature—to celebrate them.

From the 1970s, however, when Australian writing and publishing came to flourish in new ways, until, like Australian art and film, it was almost as visible to the community as the game of cricket, the tone changed. Australians started to engage with the Aboriginal cosmos, as the Aboriginal poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal wrote her *Aboriginal Charter of Rights*—‘give us Christ, not crucifixion’. Australia’s geographic Dead Heart became a central enlivening inheritance. The country became more and more racially diverse and more and more urbanised; and the American connection and the realities of Asia increasingly engaged our attention. Post-colonial straining eased. The voice became more relaxed in its location, more secure and above all more urban, less dependent on the Australian picturesque. The brilliant and assured stories of David Malouf are characteristic of a newer writing, not disconnected from the Australian tradition but without any intrusion of national questions which occupied much previous literature. It is always the preserve of writing to deal with alienation. But the issues that arise in the work of Malouf and other modern Australian writers are not to do with whether we should feel alienated in what was once a European Hades. Such questions have all been rendered irrelevant not only by the certain instincts of writers such as Malouf but by the arrival of new populations whose experience raises other and probably richer questions.

I was fortunate enough to witness the origins of this remarkable collection, unprecedented in the breadth of what it offers from both the ancient and the recent literature of my country.

The idea was proposed at a meeting of the Sydney PEN Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney, by Mary Cunneane, an American-born Australian literary agent and former senior editor at W.W. Norton & Company, whose comprehensive anthologies are in wide use in the United States. It was time Australian writing was gathered in such a collection, she argued. Earlier, over lunch with the writer Nicholas Jose, then president of Sydney PEN, Mary had asked about the Australian equivalent of the Norton. When Nick said there wasn’t one, Mary said: ‘Let’s do it.’ So the proposition was hatched, to be taken up enthusiastically by the Sydney PEN committee, and by others. As a result of considerable effort, the patronage of good friends and much public support, here is that envisioned volume of treasures.

The editors deserve praise for having so skilfully found a balance between disparate presences and for generously including so many voices. These include our significant expatriate writers, from Germaine Greer to the dazzling poet Peter Porter. And they manage to provide readers with a sense, too, that one of the benefits of a literature such as Australia's is that, despite a massive accomplishment, the room for expansion, or more accurately for freshness, seems unlimited. The definitive word has not yet been fully spoken, the canon is not set in place but open-ended. Wrongly interpreted, this could seem an excuse for what has gone before. It is not that. It is a celebration of what has happened and an excitement for what is still possible.

I am sure this volume is so rich in quality as to instigate in you an enduring interest in what we write here, in what we tell you of ourselves and of yourselves, of the fascination of lives lived, and lives still to be lived, on 'this fifth part of the earth'.

And now, just start reading.

*Thomas Keneally*

## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Kerryn Goldsworthy** is an independent scholar and a freelance writer, reviewer, critic and essayist. She lectured in literature at the University of Melbourne from 1981 to 1997, specialising in Australian literature and creative writing. A former editor of *Australian Book Review*, she has also edited four anthologies of Australian short fiction. Her books include a collection of short stories, *North of the Moonlight Sonata*, and a critical study of the work of Helen Garner. She lives in Adelaide.

**Anita Heiss** is a member of the Wiradjuri nation of central NSW and a writer, poet, activist, social commentator and academic. She is author of *Dhuuluu-Yala: Publishing Aboriginal literature, Not Meeting Mr Right* and *Who Am I?: The diary of Mary Talence, Sydney 1937*. She won the 2004 NSW Premier's History Award (audio/visual) for *Barani: The Aboriginal history of Sydney*. She is National Coordinator of AustLit's Black Words subset and co-editor of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*.

**Nicholas Jose** has published short stories, essays, several acclaimed novels, including *Paper Nautilus* (1987), *The Custodians* (1997), *The Red Thread* (2000) and *Original Face* (2005), and a memoir, *Black Sheep: Journey to Borroloola* (2002). He has written widely on contemporary Asian and Australian culture. He was president of Sydney PEN (2002–05) and held the Chair of Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide from 2005 to 2008. He has a Chair in Writing with the Writing and Society Research Group, University of Western Sydney and holds a Harvard Chair of Australian Studies for 2009–10.

**David McCooley** is the author of *Artful Histories: Modern Australian autobiography* (1996) and *Blister Pack* (2005), a collection of poems. *Artful*



*Histories* won a NSW Premier's Literary Award. *Blister Pack* was awarded the Mary Gilmore Award. He has written numerous book chapters, essays, poems and reviews for many national and international publications. He is Associate Professor in Literary Studies at Deakin University, Geelong.

**Peter Minter** is an award-winning poet, editor and scholar. He is the author of several collections of poetry, including *blue grass*, *Empty Texas* and *Rhythm in a Dorsal Fin*, was the editor of the *Varuna New Poetry* series, a founding editor of *Cordite Poetry and Poetics Review* and co-editor of *Calyx: 30 Contemporary Australian Poets*. From 2000 to 2005 he was poetry editor of *Meanjin*, and guest editor of two special issues. He is co-editor of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*. He lectures in Indigenous Studies and Poetics at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney.

**Nicole Moore** has published widely, both nationally and internationally, on twentieth-century Australian literature. She is editor of a scholarly edition of Jean Devanny's novel *Sugar Heaven*. With Marita Bullock, she is the author of *Banned in Australia* (2008), the first comprehensive bibliography of federal literary censorship in Australia. Her history of Australian literary censorship is forthcoming. She teaches Australian literature and Australian Studies at Macquarie University, where she is a senior lecturer.

**Elizabeth Webby** has been carrying out research into the literary and cultural history of Australia for over 45 years. Her publications include *Early Australian Poetry* (1982), *Colonial Voices* (1989), *Modern Australian Plays* (1990), *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (2000), as well as jointly edited anthologies, literary histories and scholarly editions. From 1988 to 1999 she was editor of *Southerly*, Australia's oldest literary quarterly. She was a judge of the Miles Franklin Literary Award from 1999 to 2004. In 2004 she received an AM in recognition of her contributions to teaching and research in Australian Literature. She is now Emeritus Professor of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney.

# ABBREVIATIONS

**ABC:** Australian Broadcasting Corporation

**ADB:** *Australian Dictionary of Biography*

**AIATSIS:** Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

**AIF:** Australian Imperial Force

**ALS:** *Australian Literary Studies*

**ANU:** Australian National University, Canberra

**ANZAC:** Australia and New Zealand Army Corps

**APA:** Aborigines Progressive Association

**ASIO:** Australian Security Intelligence Organisation

**ATSIC:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

**DLB:** *Dictionary of Literary Biography*

**FCAATSI:** Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

**HREOC:** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

**NAIDOC:** National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee

**NIDA:** National Institute of Dramatic Art

**NSW:** New South Wales

**NT:** Northern Territory

**NZ:** New Zealand

**RAF:** Royal Air Force

**RAAF:** Royal Australian Air Force

**RMIT:** Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

**RSL:** The Returned Services League of Australia

**SA:** South Australia

**SBS:** Special Broadcasting Service

**WA:** Western Australia

**WRANS:** Women's Royal Australian Navy Service

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As work began on *The Literature of Australia: An anthology*, a team of expert editors was invited to make the initial selection. Indigenous author and activist Dr Anita Heiss and poet and scholar Peter Minter were asked to compile the Aboriginal Literature component, a different configuration of which has appeared separately as the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature*. Emeritus Professor Elizabeth Webby, Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University until her retirement in 2007, took responsibility for the literature of the period to 1900. Dr Nicole Moore, Senior Lecturer in English at Macquarie University and key researcher into early and mid-twentieth century Australian writing, especially radical women's voices, covered the period from 1900 to 1950. Dr Kerry Goldsworthy, essayist, reviewer and research fellow at the University of Adelaide, was responsible for the fiction and drama from 1950 to the near present. Poet and scholar Dr David McCooey, Associate Professor in Literary Studies at Deakin University, selected the poetry and non-fiction from 1950 on and assisted in the role of deputy general editor. These six gifted writers and scholars are the primary makers of this anthology. They have stayed with the project for five years and are to be thanked for their dedication, inspiration, judgement and good humour. They have contributed the introductory essays that variously contextualise the literature represented in the selections they have made. They have also written or coordinated the introductions that precede each author's work and compiled lists of selected reading and provided all kinds of other editorial help. The selection consists of authors who were established by 2000, and includes some works after that date by the authors chosen.

The editorial team has been closely and indispensably supported throughout by the Centre for the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature established at Macquarie University by the then Dean of

Humanities Professor Christina Slade. The Centre has operated under the directorship of Professor Emerita Jill Roe. Dr Chris Cunneen, the Centre's expert coordinator, and his able research assistant, Dr Geoff Payne, have brought scholarly passion and camaraderie to every aspect of the project. Thanks, too, to Terry Mangan, Jan Zwar, Jenny O'Brien, Dr Teresa Petersen, Dr Trevor Evans, Dr Bert Peeters, Dr Karin Speedy at the Warawara Department of Indigenous Studies, and the research work of Dr Marita Bullock, all at Macquarie, Dr Mary-Anne Gale at Adelaide and Dr Maria Takolander and Alistair Welsh at Deakin.

No less integral to the team has been the publisher, Allen & Unwin, especially Elizabeth Weiss, Angela Handley, Pedro de Almeida, Ali Lavau, Jo Lyons, and Renée Senogles, with their professionalism, enthusiasm and good counsel. Our advisory publishing editor Mary Cunnane, vice-president of Sydney PEN when the idea for the project arose, has also played a continuing and crucial role and must take a good deal of any credit.

Seed funding for the project came from the Australian Academy of the Humanities and Macquarie University. We are grateful to Professor Iain McCalman, past president of the Academy, and Dr John Byron, its executive director, for their early encouragement and support. We also thank the Academy for generously providing funding to enable us to print the anthology on library-grade, acid-free paper for archival purposes. After preliminary consultation with a further group of advisers that included Dr Debra Adelaide, Professor Virginia Blain, James Bradley, Professor Ian Donaldson, Professor Ivor Indyk, Miri Jassy, Professor Susan Lever, Professor Stephen Muecke, Dr Vivian Smith and Dr Annette Stewart, we held a series of workshops as we worked towards a table of contents. Essential to this process was the involvement of Associate Professor Donna Gibbs and Dr Kerry-Ann O'Sullivan, experienced curriculum advisers from the School of Education at Macquarie University, whose work supplemented our market research and user surveys with information and guidance about the needs and interests of secondary school students.

It took many hours of debate and exchange among the editorial group before the contents could be agreed upon in draft form. All of us benefited from the vigorous discussion and close consultation that marked this phase of the project—and so did the anthology. We were now ready for feedback from an expanded group of national and international scholarly and educational advisers. In naming them, we not only thank them for their constructive commentary, but also acknowledge that the book in final form takes its shape in part from their input, as it is shaped by the contribution of all those mentioned here and many others besides. This anthology has always been conceived as a collaborative project, significantly owned by those for whom

it is intended. Sincere thanks to our distinguished advisers, beginning with those overseas: Associate Professor Chadwick Allen, Ohio State University; Dr Susan Ballyn, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain; Professor Nicholas Birns, New School University, New York; Associate Professor Chen Hong, East China Normal University, Shanghai; Associate Professor Donna Coates, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada; Professor Witi Ihimaera Smiler, University of Auckland, New Zealand; Professor Paul Kane, Vassar College, New York; Professor Santosh Sareen, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Professor Angela Smith, University of Stirling, United Kingdom; Dr Irene Vernon, University of California at Berkeley; Professor Albert Wendt, University of Hawaii; Professor Lydia Wevers, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand; and Professor Adi Wimmer, University of Klagenfurt, Austria. In Australia: Adrian Atkins, University of Sydney; Associate Professor Catherine Beavis, Deakin University; Professor Larissa Behrendt, University of Technology, Sydney; Professor Bruce Bennett, University of New South Wales and Australian Defence Force Academy; Associate Professor Delys Bird, University of Western Australia; Associate Professor Tracey Bunda, Flinders University; Dr Kate Fagan, University of Sydney; Dr Delia Falconer, University of Technology, Sydney; Professor Marcia Langton, University of Melbourne; Dr Wendy Morgan, Queensland University of Technology; Phillip Morrissey, University of Melbourne; Associate Professor Marnie O'Neill, University of Western Australia; Dr Selina Samuels, Head of English, Ascham School, Sydney; Sandra Smith, Museum Victoria; Dr Penny van Toorn, University of Sydney; Emeritus Professor Chris Wallace-Crabbe, University of Melbourne; and Sam Watson, University of Queensland. This is also the place to thank those scholars who contributed author introductions and all those who made suggestions for texts to be included or provided other, often hard to come by, information.

The project began with Sydney PEN in accord with PEN's charter to nurture literary heritage and make it available to contemporary audiences. We are grateful to PEN, and especially those members, notably John Durack SC and Angela Bowne SC, who assisted the project with legal advice. Nor would a major initiative of this kind have been possible without generous support from partner institutions and philanthropic bodies for research infrastructure and, especially, copyright permissions costs: the Australian Research Council; the Australia Council for the Arts, especially the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board and the Literature Board; the Myer Foundation; the Nelson Meers Foundation; the University of Adelaide; the University of Sydney, especially its Koori Centre; Deakin University; and AIATSIS. There are individuals to thank too: Louise Walsh of the Australia Council's Artsupport Australia, Imre Saluszinsky as Chair of the

Literature Board, director Josie Emery and her successor Susan Hayes and their staff all contributed in important ways. The editorial and research work required for a project such as this also draws extensively on the scholarship and productivity of our predecessors and peers. We gratefully acknowledge the earlier publications, compilations, reference works and resources (see Selected Reading), as well as the many library and other institutional collections that have been made available to us, particularly the National Library of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales. Special mention must be made of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Australian volumes edited by Dr Selina Samuels, and the AustLit database and its executive manager Dr Kerry Kilner. Let me express, on behalf of all involved, our appreciation for a remarkable set of partnerships with which we are proud to be associated. Finally we wish to thank those authors who are living and the representatives of the estates of those authors who are not, and the publishers, agents and family members who have cooperated with us so magnanimously to produce this anthology. The continuing development of the project, including resources and links for teachers and students, can be followed on our website: [www.macquariepenanthology.com.au](http://www.macquariepenanthology.com.au)

*Nicholas Jose, General Editor*

## A Note on the Dates

The anthology is arranged chronologically by year of birth of author and then by date of first publication in book form of work or extract, as indicated at the end of each item. The date of first journal publication or year of writing is used if book publication did not occur until much later; in this case, both dates are given. Anonymous works are ordered by year of production or first publication following the author of the work of closest date. The date of a play's first performance is given in italics in the introductions and author biographies.

Texts derive from authoritative editions or manuscripts as indicated in the list of Sources and Permissions and generally follow original spelling and punctuation.

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