

AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

OVERVIEW

Before European settlement in 1788, Aboriginal Australian society had no written literary tradition. Aboriginal Australians had an oral literary tradition dating back thousands of years. Dreamtime stories, myths, and legends were passed on orally or visually by artistic representations on rocks, in caves, and on tree bark.

Australian literature in the English language covers the period 1788 to the present day and includes not only fiction, verse, drama, history, biography, and autobiography, but also journals, diaries, letters, and memoirs.

The literature of the first hundred years of European settlement in Australia reflects the feelings and observations of people who often had not been born in Australia, and, in many cases, had no wish to be in the country. Early Australian literature reflects this unusual social context and the physical demands of the environment which dominated the lives of Europeans moving into the countryside in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, many of the nineteenth-century Australian writings are considered social and historical records, rather than creative literary publications. They document the attitudes and lifestyles of the early colonists.

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The following books cover just very few of the contributions to Australia's rich literary legacy.

Source: "History of Literature Introduction." (n.d.). In WebsterWorld (Encyclopedia of Australia). Retrieved May 27, 2018.

PRE-WORLD WAR II

| TITLE | REVIEW |
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| My Brilliant Career (1901) <i>by Miles Franklin</i> | <p>“I am given to something which a man never pardons in a woman. You will draw away as though I were a snake when you hear.’</p> <p>With this warning, Sybylla confesses to her rich and handsome suitor that she is given to writing stories and bound, therefore, on a brilliant career. In this ironically titled and riotous first novel by Miles Franklin, Sybylla tells the story of growing up passionate and rebellious in rural New South Wales, where the most that girls could hope for was to marry or to teach. Sybylla will do neither, but that does not stop her from falling in love, and it doesn’t make the choices any easier.”</p> <p>Source: My Brilliant Career. (n.d.). Copyright Agency - Reading Australia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |
| We of the Never Never (1908) <i>by Jeannie Aeneas Gunn (pen name, Mrs. Aeneas Gunn)</i> | <p>“In 1902, Jeannie Gunn, a Melbourne schoolteacher, went with her new husband to live on the remote Elsey cattle station near the Roper River in the Northern Territory. Though she spent little more than a year there, her experiences in the outback and her contact with the local Aborigines impressed her deeply, and on her return to Melbourne, she set down her recollections in two books: <i>We of the Never Never</i> and <i>The Little Black Princess</i>.”</p> <p>These books have become classics of Australian literature, beloved by generations.</p> <p>Source: We of the Never Never. (n.d.). In HarperCollins Publishers Australia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |
| The Magic Pudding (1918) <i>by Norman Lindsay</i> | <p>“The Magic Pudding was first cooked in 1918, and thousands of children (and their parents) have been relishing it ever since.</p> <p>Norman Lindsay’s timeless classic follows the adventures of debonair young koala Bunyip Bluegum, sailor Bill Barnacle, and penguin Sam Sawmoff – owners of the much-desired Magic Puddin’ Albert. They try to outwit Possum and Wombat, the professional and extraordinarily persistent puddin’ thieves.”</p> <p>This story is definitely worth savoring for ages 8+.</p> <p>Source: The Magic Pudding by Norman Lindsay (n.d.). In Readings. Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |

POST-WORLD WAR II

| TITLE | REVIEW |
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| The Harp in the South (1948) <i>by Ruth Park</i> | <p>“Ruth Park’s classic novel, <i>The Harp in the South</i>, is one of Australia’s greatest novels. Hugh and Margaret Darcy are raising their family in Sydney amid the brothels, grog shops, and run-down boarding houses of Surry Hills, Sydney. Money is scarce and life is not easy.</p> <p>Filled with beautifully drawn characters that will make you laugh as much as cry, this Australian classic will take you straight into this colorful area of early Sydney with convincing depth, careful detail, and great heart.”</p> <p>Source: <i>The Harp in the South</i> (n.d.). In Penguin Books Australia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |
| Voss (1957) <i>by Patrick White</i> | <p>“<i>Voss</i> is set in nineteenth-century Australia. It is the story of the secret passion between an explorer and a naïve young woman. Although they have met only a few times, Voss and Laura are joined by overwhelming, obsessive feelings for each other. Voss sets out to cross the continent. As hardships, mutiny, and betrayal whittle away his power to endure and to lead, his attachment to Laura gradually increases. Laura, waiting in Sydney, moves through the months of separation as if they were a dream and Voss the only reality.</p> <p>From the careful delineation of Victorian society to the sensitive rendering of hidden love, and to the stark narrative of adventure in the Australian desert, Patrick White’s novel is a work of extraordinary power and virtuosity. Patrick White was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973. The great poet of Australian landscape, he turned its vast empty spaces into great mythic landscapes of the soul. His position as a man of letters was controversial, provoked by his acerbic, unpredictable public statements, and his belief that it is eccentric individuals who offer the only hope of salvation.”</p> <p>Source: <i>Voss</i> by Patrick White. (n.d.). In Penguin Books Australia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |
| Picnic at Hanging Rock (1967) <i>by Joan Lindsay</i> | <p>While Joan Lindsay’s haunting Australian classic <i>Picnic at Hanging Rock</i> is a work of fiction, the story is often considered one of Australia’s best mystery novels.</p> <p>“In 1900, a class of young women from an exclusive private school go on an excursion to the isolated Hanging Rock, deep in the Australian bush. The excursion ends in tragedy when three girls and</p> |

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| | <p>a teacher mysteriously vanish after climbing the rock. Only one girl returns, with no memory of what has become of the others.”</p> <p>The novels conclusion, which leaves the reader “hanging,” has sparked significant public, critical and scholarly analysis, and the narrative has become a part of Australia’s national folklore as a result.</p> <p>Source: Picnic at Hanging Rock / Joan Lindsay. (n.d.). In Trove (National Library of Australia). Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |
| <p>The Female Eunuch (1970) <i>by Germaine Greer</i></p> | <p>Germaine Greer is an Australian writer and intellectual regarded as one of the major voices of the second-wave feminist movement in the latter half of the twentieth century.</p> <p>“Greer’s ideas have created controversy ever since her first book, <i>The Female Eunuch</i>, made her a household name. An international bestseller and a watershed text in the feminist movement, the book offered a systematic deconstruction of ideas such as womanhood and femininity, arguing that women are forced to assume submissive roles in society to fulfill male fantasies of what being a woman entails.”</p> <p>Her work since then has focused on literature, feminism, and the environment.</p> <p>Source: Germaine Greer. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.</p> |
| <p>The Thorn Birds (1977) <i>by Colleen McCullough</i></p> | <p>Treasured by readers around the world, this is the sweeping saga of three generations of the Cleary family. Stoic matriarch, Fee, her devoted husband, Paddy, and their headstrong daughter, Meggie, experience joy, sadness and magnificent triumph in the cruel Australian outback. With life’s unpredictability, it is love that is their unifying thread, but it is a love shadowed by the anguish of forbidden passions. For Meggie loves Father Ralph de Bricassart, a man who wields enormous power within the Catholic church.</p> <p>In 1983, the American TV channel ABC adapted <i>The Thorn Birds</i> for a miniseries starring Richard Chamberlain and Rachel Ward.</p> |
| <p>Shindler’s Ark (1982) <i>by Thomas Keneally</i></p> | <p>Keneally wrote the Booker Prize-winning novel in 1982, inspired by the efforts of Poldek Pfefferberg, a Holocaust survivor. In 1980, Keneally met Pfefferberg in the latter’s shop, and learning that he was a novelist, Pfefferberg showed him his extensive files on Oskar Schindler, including the original List. Keneally was interested, and Pfefferberg became an advisor for the book, accompanying Keneally to Poland where they visited Kraków and the sites associated with</p> |

the Schindler story.

Keneally dedicated *Schindler's Ark* to Pfefferberg, "who by zeal and persistence caused this book to be written." He said in an interview in 2007 that what attracted him to Oskar Schindler was that "it was the fact that you couldn't say where opportunism ended and altruism began. And I like the subversive fact that the spirit breatheth where it will. That is, that good will emerges from the most unlikely places."

The book was later made into a film titled *Schindler's List* (1993), directed by Steven Spielberg.

Source: Schindler's Ark. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.

**The Fatal Shore
(1986)**

**by Robert Studley
Forrest Hughes**

The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding is a history of the birth of Australia which came out of the suffering and brutality of Britain's infamous convict transportation system. It also addresses the historical, political and sociological reasons that led to British settlement.

Hughes was an Australian-born art critic, writer, and producer of television documentaries. He was described in 1997 by *The New York Times* as "the most famous art critic in the world."

Hughes earned widespread recognition for his book and television series on Modern art, *The Shock of the New*, and for his longstanding position as art critic with *TIME Magazine*. Known for his contentious critiques of art and artists, Hughes was generally conservative in his tastes, although he did not belong to a particular philosophical camp. His writing was noted for its power and elegance. He is the author of *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (1977).

Source: The Fatal Shore. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.

**Oscar and Lucinda
(1988)**

by Peter Carey

Oscar and Lucinda won the 1988 Booker Prize and the 1989 Miles Franklin Award. It was shortlisted for The Best of the Booker.

It tells the story of an Anglican priest and Lucinda Leplastrier, a young Australian heiress who buys a glass factory. They meet on the ship over to Australia and discover that they are both gamblers—one obsessive, the other compulsive. Lucinda bets Oscar that he cannot transport a glass church from Sydney to a remote settlement at Bellingen, some 400 km up the New South Wales coast. This bet changes both their lives forever.

Source: Oscar and Lucinda. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved May 27, 2018.

True History of the Kelly Gang (2000)

by Peter Carey

In *True History of the Kelly Gang*, the legendary Ned Kelly speaks for himself, scribbling his narrative on errant scraps of paper in semiliterate but magically descriptive prose as he flees from the police. To his pursuers, Kelly is nothing but a monstrous criminal, a thief, and a murderer.

To his own people, the lowly class of ordinary Australians, the bushranger is a hero, defying the authority of the English to direct their lives. Indentured by his bootlegger mother to a famous horse thief (who was also her lover), Ned saw his first prison cell at 15 and by the age of 26 had become the most wanted man in the wild colony of Victoria, taking over whole towns and defying the law until he was finally captured and hanged.

Here is a classic outlaw tale, made alive by the skill of a great novelist.

Source: True History of the Kelly Gang: A Novel. (n.d.). Amazon plot summary. Retrieved in May 27, 2018.

Gould's Book of Fish: A Novel in Twelve Fish (2001)

by Richard Flanagan

Once upon a time that was called 1828, before all fishes in the sea and all living things on the land were destroyed, there was a man named William Buelow Gould, a white convict who fell in love with a black woman and discovered too late that to love is not safe.

Silly Billy Gould—invader of Australia, liar, murderer and forger—was condemned to the most feared penal colony in the British Empire and there ordered to paint a book of fish.

Source: Gould's Book of Fish. (n.d.). In BrillianceAudio. Retrieved May 27, 2018.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North (2013)

by Richard Flanagan

The Narrow Road to the Deep North is the sixth novel by Richard Flanagan. It received critical acclaim on its release and won the 2014 Man Booker Prize.

The book tells the story of Dorrigo Evans, an Australian doctor haunted by memories of a love affair with his uncle's wife and of his subsequent experiences as a prisoner of war. Post-war, he finds his growing celebrity as a war hero at odds with his sense of his own failings and guilt.

Taking its title from 17th-century haiku poet Matsuo Bashō's famous haibun *Oku no Hosomichi*, best known in English as *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, the novel is epic in form and chronicles an Australian century, with one horrific day at its heart on the Burma Railway in August 1943. As that day builds to its climax, the novel grows to encompass the post-war lives of Japanese and Korean prison guards as well as Australian Far East Prisoners of War. The

novel deals both with the effects of war and the many forms of love.

Source: The Narrow Road to the Deep North (novel). (n.d.). In Wikipedia.
Retrieved May 27, 2018.