



Cambria Australian Author's Series
Postcolonial Heritage and Settler Well-Being:
The Historical Fictions of Roger McDonald

[*Postcolonial Heritage and Settler Well-Being:
The Historical Fictions of Roger McDonald*](#)

By Christopher Lee

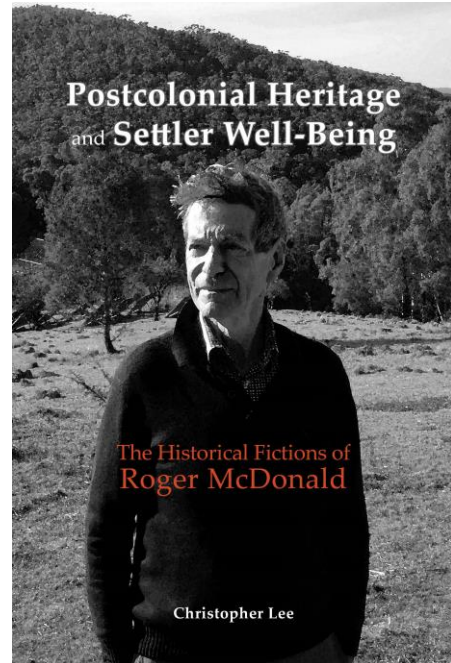
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The Miles Franklin Award winning Australian writer Roger McDonald writes about ordinary characters whose lives have often been overtaken by historical forces they do not understand and cannot control. These men and women are commonly defined by whom they know and what they do rather than through the display of extraordinary qualities of mind, sensibility, or virtue. The writer often situates his characters' within foundational Australian historical periods such as the

convict period, frontier settlement, the development of the pastoral industry, the Great War, the Golden Age of Aviation, and the Second World War and its aftermath. This later post-war period saw the transformation of Anglo-Celtic Australia by waves of initially southern and eastern European migration, followed by Asian and indeed wider international migration. The emerging multicultural character of the country coincided with the decline of rural Australia and the pastoral industry as the preferred locations for representative Australian types and values. These events or periods are well entrenched within the public memory of a White Australia and that enables McDonald to explore his characters' search for purpose and fulfilment within the mythological registers of his nation's postcolonial history.



The common narrative problem is the elusiveness of a condition of Being that is well settled in an interpenetrating web of social, cultural, and environmental relations. The historical novels pursue the possibilities for a wider more satisfying sense of human connection but the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism continue to bedevil that project. Lee draws upon the disciplines of psychoanalysis, history, sociology and philosophy to explore McDonald's extensive engagement with the anxious heritage of settler colonialism. He combines detailed multi-disciplinary studies of the key fictions with an argument about how they circulate through the institutions responsible for a literary culture. The study is fundamentally interested in the problem of writing a literature of engagement in a culture of denial troubled by

dissident voices and the rise of a new history which places race at the centre of the social contract.

“Roger McDonald started out as a poet and became one of Australia’s best-known novelists. In this perceptive, vigorously argued study, Chris Lee shows how McDonald’s remarkable literary career, and in particular his determination to re-understand history, epitomizes a crucial shift of the Australian literary mainstream in the direction of moral reckoning and social justice.” Professor Nicholas Birns, New York University; author of *Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Yet Dead*.

"Beautifully written, Lee's book carves out critical space for Roger McDonald in the contemporary canon of historical fiction in Australia and internationally. Particularly impressive is Lee's ability to combine insightful close readings with attention to readers, imagined and real, and to the individuals and institutions that shape the literary work's movement through the world." Professor Katherine Bode, Australian National University, author of *Digital Collections and the Future of Literary History*.

Author Biography: Christopher Lee is a Professor of English in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science and a member of the Centre for Social and Cultural Research at Griffith University. He has a Diploma of Applied Science from QUT, an honours degree in literary studies, and a PhD in cultural history from the University of Queensland. Chris has published widely on postcolonial culture and has developed a special interest in the social life of literature. He is the author of *City Bushman: Henry Lawson and the Australian Imagination* (CUB 2004), editor of *Turning the Century: Writing of the 1890s* (UQP 1999), and co-editor of *Trauma and Public Memory* (Palgrave 2015), *The Frank Hurley Diaries 1912-1942* (Anthem 2012), *Frank Hardy and the Literature of Commitment* (VP 2003), *Authority and Influence: Australian Literary Criticism 1950-2000* (UQP 2001) and *Australian Literature and the Public Sphere* (ASAL 1998). Chris is the reviews editor for *Australian Literary Studies* and a former President of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature.



