

Book Reviews

- *Edenglassie* / Melissa Lucashenko Fiction 2023
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Book Review

Edenglassie / Melissa Lucashenko

Fiction 2023



When Mulanyin meets the beautiful Nita in *Edenglassie*, their saltwater people still outnumber the British. As colonial unrest peaks, Mulanyin dreams of taking his bride home to Yugambeh Country, but his plans for independence collide with white justice.

Two centuries later, fiery activist Winona meets Dr. Johnny. Together they care for obstinate centenarian Granny Eddie, and sparks fly, but not always in the right direction. What nobody knows is how far the legacies of the past will reach into their modern lives.

In this brilliant epic, Melissa Lucashenko torches Queensland's colonial myths, while reimagining an Australian future.

Lucashenko writes a fierce, no-holds-barred truth that is simultaneously full of generosity and a hopeful belief in humanity. An Aboriginal author of Bundjalung and European heritage, she was already one of Australia's great writers, with a Walkley and a Miles Franklin Literary Award under her belt. *Edenglassie* well and truly cements her status as a voice for our times.

Edenglassie weaves together two timelines, shifting between the 1850s and 2024. Both timelines are populated with a fantastic cast of characters. Through their experiences, we come to a new and nuanced understanding of contemporary Australia, Indigenous culture and the harrowing realities of colonisation. *Edenglassie* is loaded with historical insight – an author's note at the back of the book distinguishes the characters and events that have been drawn from history from those that Lucashenko has invented. Lucashenko brings to light a past that has long been stifled in the mainstream Australian retelling.

I am grateful to Lucashenko for sharing this insightful rebuttal – and for making it so rewarding and accessible for her readers. Rewarding, because while *Edenglassie* details harrowing events in a necessarily unflinching fashion, it is also an immensely warm and life-affirming read. In our present-day timeline, there's a delightful will-they-won't-they tension between Winona and Dr. Johnny, complete with some of the best banter I've ever read. And we have determined Granny Eddie, at times high on medication but always dropping the truth – a reminder to listen well when Elders speak. The historic timeline is steeped in love: romantic love, love for Country, familial love and love between friends. Mulanyin's coming-of-age is a beautiful exploration of what it means to move from boyhood to manhood with humility and grace.

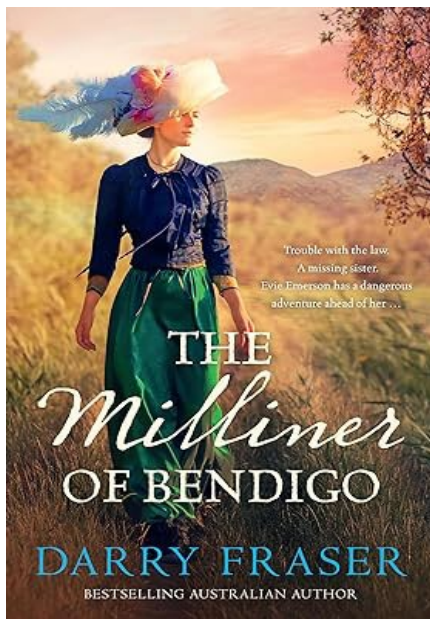
Edenglassie is a rich tapestry of so many huge themes, all so astutely handled. If I had to pick one that stands out to me, it is that of looking to the future while holding the past close. Lucashenko shows us how this is done in this thoroughly researched dual-timeline narrative, and in the journeys of the characters it contains. She proves that moving forward is never about forgetting; rather, it is about drawing on the nourishment of the past, learning from its atrocities, and listening to the stories of the Elders who have lived it.

For me, as a white Australian, reading Lucashenko's work is a challenge, a privilege and a mind-opening experience. This book is heartbreaking, heartwarming, hilarious, surprising and absolutely unforgettable. *Edenglassie* should be compulsory reading for all Australians. It will probably be your read of the year.

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Book Review

The Milliner of Bendigo / Darryl Fraser Fiction 2023



Trouble with the law, a missing sister, and a growing attachment to the wrong man – Evie Emerson has a dangerous path ahead of her...

1898, Bendigo, Victoria: Evie Emerson has worked hard to build a fashionable clientele for her hats. But when an ex-paramour employs underhanded tactics after his attempt to coerce an engagement fails, Evie's reputation is in tatters. On the heels of having to put a case together to defend herself in court, Evie's life is thrown into further turmoil when the disappearance of her sister takes her to Cobram.

Roving reporter Fitzmorgan O'Shea has troubles of his own: his involvement in uncovering police corruption has placed a target on his back. And while Fitz is hunting a new story in Cobram his problems collide with Evie's when his research exposes malicious intimidation and threats designed to make local landholders give up their properties.

For Raffety Dolan, he accepted long ago it's Fitz Evie he loves – and his feelings will remain unrequited. But when a disgraced ex-policeman comes searching for revenge, Raff is ready to go save his friends.

There, on the banks of the mighty Murray, with so much misunderstood history and secrets between the three friends – plus the legitimate threat of being shot at – will they survive long enough to discover the truth?

Fraser has well and truly established herself as one of Australia's leading historical fiction writers, and she's long been an absolute darling of the BR community. BR readers love Fraser's strong feminist leads, fast-paced plotlines and depth of historical insight. Fraser also writes the Australian landscape, particularly the banks of the Murray, like no other – it's where she grew up, and it shows. You can hear Fraser talking about her writing process, and the inspiration she draws from the landscape, in her podcast episode with Cheryl.

In *The Milliner of Bendigo*, Fraser delivers another enthralling adventure, sweeping us along on the remarkable journey of a woman determined to forge her own path, despite the constraints of her circumstances. Fraser's latest novel is equal parts mystery, romance, and riveting historical insight into late 19th-century rural Australia. Combined, these elements create a gripping page-turner that keeps you fully immersed in Evie's world until the very last sentence.

One of the things that makes Fraser's writing so incredibly appealing is how she manages to go far beyond simply presenting a convincing snapshot of a historical era. Of course, she does this impeccably – her historical research is meticulous, with everything from the fashion to the paddle steamers conveyed in vivid detail. But what sets Fraser apart is the way she so fully immerses her reader within these detailed milieus. Just like all her books, *The Milliner of Bendigo* feels like a complete world that readers can escape into for the duration of the story. We're right there with her characters, railing against their injustices and celebrating their triumphs.

With such complete immersion comes the inevitable book hangover when you reach the conclusion and have to say goodbye to these characters who have come to feel like friends – but with a writer as prolific as Fraser, it hopefully won't be too long before we can explore another wonderful world of her creation. In the meantime, there's always her backlist to return to!