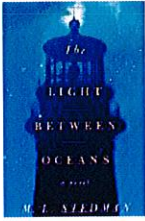


Light Between Oceans (Stedman)[Summary](#) | [Author Bio](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Discussion Questions](#) | [Full Version](#) | [Print](#)http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1451681739/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il?ie=UTF8&tag=litl-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=1451681739***The Light Between Oceans****H.L. Stedman**Scribner**352 pp.**ISBN-13: 9781451681758***Summary**

The debut of a stunning new voice in fiction—a novel both heartbreaking and transcendent

After four harrowing years on the Western Front, Tom Sherbourne returns to Australia and takes a job as the lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock, nearly half a day's journey from the coast. To this isolated island, where the supply boat comes once a season and shore leaves are granted every other year at best, Tom brings a young, bold, and loving wife, Isabel. Years later, after two miscarriages and one stillbirth, the grieving Isabel hears a baby's cries on the wind. A boat has washed up onshore carrying a dead man and a living baby.

Tom, whose records as a lighthouse keeper are meticulous and whose moral principles have withstood a horrific war, wants to report the man and infant immediately. But Isabel has taken the tiny baby to her breast. Against Tom's judgment, they claim her as their own and name her Lucy. When she is two, Tom and Isabel return to the mainland and are reminded that there are other people in the world. Their choice has devastated one of them.

M. L. Stedman's mesmerizing, beautifully written novel seduces us into accommodating Isabel's decision to keep this "gift from God." And we are swept into a story about extraordinarily compelling characters seeking to find their North Star in a world where there is no right answer, where justice for one person is another's tragic loss.

The Light Between Oceans is exquisite and unforgettable, a deeply moving novel. (From the publisher.)

Author Bio

M.L. (Margot) Steadman was born and raised in Western Australia and now lives in London. This is her first novel. (*From the publisher.*)

More

Excerpt from [The Age \(Australia\)](http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html) ([http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-](http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html)

[1vkty.html](http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html)) .

Her official biography comprises a single line: "M.L. Steadman was born and raised in Western Australia and now lives in London." Even her first name, Margot, is concealed.

In only her second media interview, by phone from Perth, Steadman is nervous and bats back questions about her age, schooling, family and her work as a lawyer with a polite: "I really don't want to answer that." Steadman later explains that she has never been one to seek out the limelight. "As the book's not autobiographical, details of my life won't really shed light on the story for the reader and I'd much rather let readers focus on the book and their own experience of it."

These are the dot points of her writing life that Steadman reluctantly offers for public consumption: raised and schooled in Perth, she says she always adored the artistry of words, had an affinity for them. Working in London as a lawyer in 1997, while staring at her office computer screen, she had a eureka moment, "from God knows where", deciding then to try creative writing. She hired a writing coach, went to Greece on a creative-writing holiday, where she wrote her first published short story, *Flight*, and went on to study creative writing part time at the University of London. Three novellas were published in an out-of-print anthology, *Desperate Remedies*, in 2008. [Read more](http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html#ixzz22mXZQ4Rc) ([http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-](http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html#ixzz22mXZQ4Rc)

[1vkty.html#ixzz22mXZQ4Rc](http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html#ixzz22mXZQ4Rc)) . . .

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/interview-ml-stedman-20120322-1vkty.html#ixzz22mXZQ4Rc>

Book Reviews

As time passes the harder the decision becomes to undo and the more towering is its impact. This is the story of its terrible consequences. But it is also a description of the extraordinary, sustaining power of a marriage to bind two people together in love, through the most emotionally harrowing circumstances.

Victoria Moore - Daily Mail (UK)

This fine, suspenseful debut explores desperation, morality, and loss, and considers the damaging ways in which we store our private sorrows, and the consequences of such terrible secrets.

Martha Stewart Whole Living

(*Starred review.*) In Steadman's deftly crafted debut, Tom Sherbourne, seeking

constancy after the horrors of WWI, takes a lighthouse keeper's post on an Australian island, and calls for Isabel, a young woman he met on his travels, to join him there as his wife. In peaceful isolation, their love grows. But four years on the island and several miscarriages bring Isabel's seemingly boundless spirit to the brink, and leave Tom feeling helpless until a boat washes ashore with a dead man and a living child. Isabel convinces herself—and Tom—that the baby is a gift from God. After two years of maternal bliss for Isabel and alternating waves of joy and guilt for Tom, the family, back on the mainland, is confronted with the mother of their child, very much alive. Stedman grounds what could be a far-fetched premise, setting the stage beautifully to allow for a heart-wrenching moral dilemma to play out, making evident that "Right and wrong can be like bloody snakes: so tangled up that you can't tell which is which until you've shot 'em both, and then it's too late." Most impressive is the subtle yet profound maturation of Isabel and Tom as characters.

Publishers Weekly

(*Starred review.*) Haunting...Stedman draws the reader into her emotionally complex story right from the beginning, with lush descriptions of this savage and beautiful landscape, and vivid characters with whom we can readily empathize. Hers is a stunning and memorable debut

Booklist

(*Starred review.*) The miraculous arrival of a child in the life of a barren couple delivers profound love but also the seeds of destruction. Moral dilemmas don't come more exquisite than the one around which Australian novelist Stedman constructs her debut.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the novel's title, *The Light Between Oceans*. Why do you think the author selected this title? What do you visualize when you hear or read *The Light Between Oceans*?
2. The novel is rich with detailed descriptions of the ocean, the sky, and the wild landscape of Janus Rock. Is there a particular passage or scene that stood out to you? What role does the natural world play in Tom and Isabel's life?
3. "The isolation spins its mysterious cocoon, focusing the mind on one place, one time, one rhythm—the turning of the light. The island knows no other human voices, no other footprints. On the Offshore Lights you can live any story you want to tell yourself, and no one will say you're wrong: not the seagulls, not the prisms, not the wind." (page 110) Discuss the impact of living in seclusion on both Tom and Isabel. Why do you think each of them is drawn to live on Janus Rock? Do you think, in the moments when we are unobserved, we are different

people?

4. When Isabel tries to get Tom to open up about his family, he responds: "I'll tell you if you really want. It's just I'd rather not. Sometimes it's good to leave the past in the past." (pages 44-45) Do you think it is possible to leave the past in the past? What do you think of Tom's opinion that it's a "pity" that we're a product of our family's past? What does this tell you about his character? Discuss the impact of family history on Tom, Isabel, Hannah, and Frank.

5. Tom is haunted by what he witnessed—and what he did—during his enlistment in World War I. The narrator reflects that he's not "one of the men whose legs trailed by a hank of sinews, or whose guts cascaded from their casing like slithering eels....But he's scarred all the same, having to live in the same skin as the man who did the things that needed to be done back then." (page 10) How do you think Tom's experiences as a soldier impact his decisions throughout the novel? What other outside elements, like the war, influences the narrative?

6. Janus Rock is named for Janus, the Roman God of doorways, "always looking both ways, torn between two ways of seeing things." (page 65) How does this knowledge impact your reading of *The Light Between Oceans*? Who is "torn between two ways of seeing things"?

7. Discuss the theme of opposites in *The Light Between Oceans*—darkness and light; safety and danger; land and water; truth and lies. How do these opposing forces shape your reading?

8. When Isabel brings Tom the map of Janus, complete with new names for all the locations on the island, Tom has an interesting reaction: "Janus did not belong to him: he belonged to it, like he'd heard the natives thought of the land. His job was just to take care of it." (page 62) Discuss the difference in Tom's point of view compared to Isabel's. Does this difference in opinion foreshadow future events? How does it relate to their conflicting opinions of what to do with Lucy?

9. Did you sense that the silver rattle might turn out to play a pivotal role in the story?

10. Tom believes that rules are vital, that they are what keep a man from becoming a savage. Do you agree with him?

11. Which characters won your sympathy and why? Did this change over the course of the novel? Did your notion of what was best or right shift in the course of your reading?

12. Tom and Isabel's deception impacts the lives of everyone around them. What did you think of the other characters' reactions when they discover the truth about Lucy? Consider Hannah, Gwen, Septimus, Isabel's parents, Ralph, Bluey.

13. Discuss Hannah's reunion with Grace. Do you think she had fair expectations? Did you agree with Dr. Sumpton's advice to Hannah about completely cutting Lucy off from Isabel and Tom?

14. M.L. Stedman makes it clear that there is no one perfect answer to the question of who should raise Grace/Lucy. She seems to undermine all notions of absolutes. It is clear that she will not dismiss all Germans as evil either. There is Hannah's husband, ripe for persecution, and yet he is utterly innocent. Discuss the places in the novel where easy certainty turns out to be wrong.

15. Were you surprised by Isabel's final decision to admit her role in the choice to keep Lucy—freeing Tom, but losing her child forever? Why or why not? What would you have done?

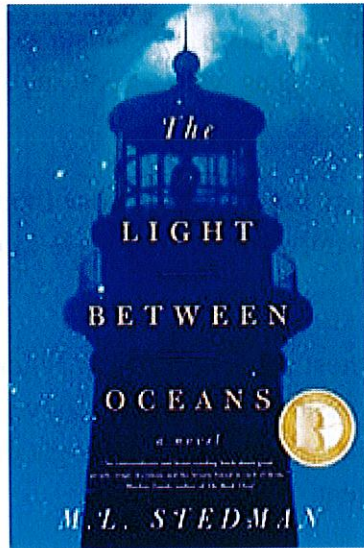
16. What did you think of the conclusion of the novel? What emotions did you feel at the story's end? Did it turn out as you expected? Were you satisfied?
(Questions issued by publisher.)

[top of page \(summary\)](#)



M.L. Stedman talks about 'The Light Between Oceans'

'The Light Between Oceans' author M.L. Stedman discusses her debut novel, her world view, and how her background as an attorney grounds her as a writer.



'I grew up with the West Australian landscape, and I so enjoyed putting it on the page,' M.L. Stedman says of the remote setting of her novel 'The Light Between Oceans.'

By Marjorie Kehe

posted September 18, 2012 at 4:30 pm EDT

"Haunting." "Atmospheric." "Harrowing." These are the kinds of adjectives readers are applying to "The Light Between Oceans," the debut novel by London attorney M. L. Stedman. Set on an island off the coast of Western Australia (home territory for Stedman), the book tells the story of a World War I veteran and his wife, a childless couple with a loving marriage but no child to share the remote outpost that they call home. This couple – with a single breathtaking decision – set into motion an unimaginable course of events. I recently spoke with Stedman about her book.

Q: The story of "The Light Between Oceans" is so atmospheric, intense, and – in several senses – remote. How did this story come to you?

A: I write very organically – a picture or phrase or voice turns up in my mind, and I just follow it. For this story, I closed my eyes and could see a lighthouse and a woman. I could tell it was a long time ago, on an island off Western Australia. A man appeared, and I sensed he was the lightkeeper, and it was his story. Then a boat washed up, carrying the body of a dead man. I kept looking and saw there was a baby in it too, so I had to keep writing to see who all these people were and what happened next.

Q: Several of your characters face difficult ethical dilemmas. Some make poor decisions, but in the end, as we come to understand them, most turn out to be quite sympathetic people. Would you say that this reflects your world view?

There's a great deal to be said for that old expression 'walk a mile in the other person's shoes', don't you think? I believe that people are born with a strong instinct for good. Of course, views of what 'good' looks like differ wildly. But I think it's usually possible to find compassion for even the most misguided of individuals: that's different from condoning harmful behavior. It's just recognizing that the business of being human is complex, and it's easy to get things wrong. Compassion and mercy allows society to heal itself when we do.

Q: Much of the story involves either loss – or fear of loss – of love. Would you say that you see this fear as the great driver of much of human experience?

You probably only fear losing love if you already have it, so I'd say that the driver starts a step earlier – satisfying a basic human need for love in its very broadest sense: that includes giving as well as receiving it. In its infinite variety of forms, it plays a role in bestowing life with meaning.

Q: The plotting in this novel is tight and neatly crafted (almost like a ship, I kept thinking as I was reading). Do you think that your work as a lawyer has impacted your writing style in terms of attention to details, an ability to cross all the "t" and dot all the "i"s?

I love the idea of the plot being as sound as a ship! I think the greatest impact of my legal background is that it allows me to write freely and spontaneously, without meticulously plotting in advance. Lawyers are probably hard-wired for structure, so it's a reflex rather than something to spend a lot of conscious thought on. And yes, the legal training helps on the detail, too, making sure that things are consistent.

Q: When it comes to the setting, the book seems to be written with much love. Is that coastal setting close to your heart?

Definitely! I'm always happiest beside an ocean. I grew up with the West Australian landscape, and I so enjoyed putting it on the page – describing the place I've loved all my life.

Q: Who are your own favorite writers? Do you think any of them have had an impact on this novel?

A few favorites who spring to mind (in no particular order) are Graham Greene, George Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Cormac McCarthy, Jane Gardam, Andre Gide, Ian McEwan, Edith Wharton, Katherine Mansfield... I suppose what they have in common is an unflinching eye, a profound understanding of the human heart, and a mastery of language. Those are the qualities I find most rewarding in books, so they're the ones I'd like to bring, in however pale a reflection, to what I write.

Marjorie Kehe is the Monitor's books editor.

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. Terms under which this service is provided to you. Privacy Policy.

Q: Several of your characters face difficult ethical dilemmas. Some make poor decisions, but in the end, as we come to understand them, most turn out to be quite sympathetic people. Would you say that this reflects your world view?

There's a great deal to be said for that old expression 'walk a mile in the other person's shoes', don't you think? I believe that people are born with a strong instinct for good. Of course, views of what 'good' looks like differ wildly. But I think it's usually possible to find compassion for even the most misguided of individuals: that's different from condoning harmful behavior. It's just recognizing that the business of being human is complex, and it's easy to get things wrong. Compassion and mercy allows society to heal itself when we do.

Q: Much of the story involves either loss – or fear of loss – of love. Would you say that you see this fear as the great driver of much of human experience?

You probably only fear losing love if you already have it, so I'd say that the driver starts a step earlier – satisfying a basic human need for love in its very broadest sense: that includes giving as well as receiving it. In its infinite variety of forms, it plays a role in bestowing life with meaning.

Q: The plotting in this novel is tight and neatly crafted (almost like a ship, I kept thinking as I was reading). Do you think that your work as a lawyer has impacted your writing style in terms of attention to details, an ability to cross all the "t" and dot all the "i"s?

I love the idea of the plot being as sound as a ship! I think the greatest impact of my legal background is that it allows me to write freely and spontaneously, without meticulously plotting in advance. Lawyers are probably hard-wired for structure, so it's a reflex rather than something to spend a lot of conscious thought on. And yes, the legal training helps on the detail, too, making sure that things are consistent.

Q: When it comes to the setting, the book seems to be written with much love. Is that coastal setting close to your heart?

Definitely! I'm always happiest beside an ocean. I grew up with the West Australian landscape, and I so enjoyed putting it on the page – describing the place I've loved all my life.

Q: Who are your own favorite writers? Do you think any of them have had an impact on this novel?

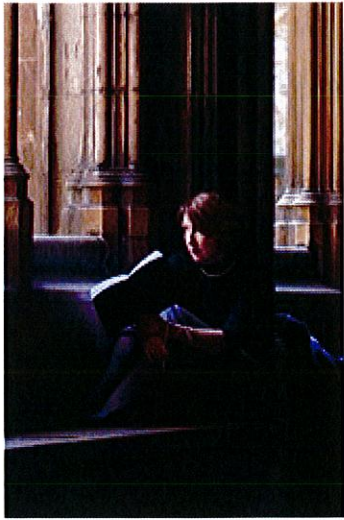
A few favorites who spring to mind (in no particular order) are Graham Greene, George Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Cormac McCarthy, Jane Gardam, Andre Gide, Ian McEwan, Edith Wharton, Katherine Mansfield... I suppose what they have in common is an unflinching eye, a profound understanding of the human heart, and a mastery of language. Those are the qualities I find most rewarding in books, so they're the ones I'd like to bring, in however pale a reflection, to what I write.

Marjorie Kehe is the Monitor's books editor.

© The Christian Science Monitor. All Rights Reserved. Terms under which this service is provided to you. [Privacy Policy](#).

Interview with M.L. Stedman

December, 2012



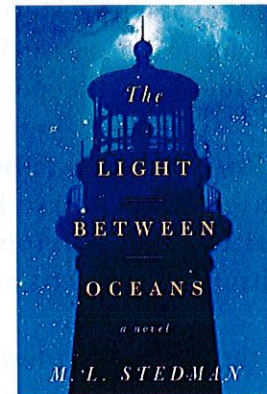
The success of **M.L. Stedman's** first novel has outstripped most freshman attempts, especially considering its secluded and contemplative story. This best-selling historical novel, **The Light Between Oceans**, is set in the years following World War I and tells of a lighthouse keeper, Tom, and his wife, Isabel, who discover a dead man and a crying baby washed ashore on their island off the coast of Australia. In mourning for her own miscarried children and against her husband's wishes, Isabel nurses the child as her own. A native Australian, Stedman speaks to Goodreads from her current hometown, London, about her wish to stay "behind the curtain" and writing by the seat of her pants.

Note from the author: Massive Spoiler Alert! I strongly recommend that people read no further until they've read the book, so as not to spoil their experience. (Otherwise it's probably a bit like doing a crossword puzzle

where someone's already filled in most of the spaces.)

Goodreads: Your novel started off with a lot of momentum; nine international houses bid on the manuscript. That's amazing and extremely unusual for a first-time author. How did this happen?

M.L. Stedman: How did this happen, indeed! I can only put it down to a combination of factors. My wonderful agent, Sue Armstrong from Conville and Walsh, sent the manuscript out to publishers, and it seemed to strike a chord with people, which led to an auction process in various countries around the world. The comment I heard a lot was that the story was universal—readers from pretty much any culture or country could engage with the issues it raised. Another vital factor was, in my view, just old-fashioned good luck, for which I'm very grateful.



GR: You're a lawyer and a writer based in London, far from your Australian homeland. Why write about Australia versus your current residence?

MS: I've written stories based in contemporary London, too, but I suppose what I enjoy about writing is the chance to explore other worlds and other lives—so it's more than just geography. These days I'm a full-time writer.

GR: Instead of the usual blurb, your bio is a single line: "M.L. Stedman was born and raised in Western Australia and now lives in London." Please tell us more about your reticence toward sharing details from your personal background and the usage of your initials rather than your first name. Do you think sharing more from what's behind the curtain affects how people read your story?

MS: I like the reader to be free to inhabit fully the world of the book. I think that's more difficult if the author is effectively standing between the reader and the story—a bit like making a movie and then standing in front of the screen. Promoting the author rather than the work is a fairly recent trend. As to using initials—there's a very long and respectable history of writers of both genders

doing so: T.S. Eliot, P.G. Wodehouse, C.S. Lewis, P.D. James, A.S. Byatt, J.D. Salinger... Things from "behind the curtain" must surely affect readers' experience, and more importantly, take them out of the story. Details of my life won't shed any light on the book. Ultimately I think any novel should stand or fall on the words on the page. Every novel effectively begins with the appeal from the writer to the reader: "Imagine the following..." For me, the key is "imagine."

GR: What was it about lighthouses that inspired you to focus an entire novel around the people who inhabit such an unusual place?

MS: To answer this, I have to say a word or two about my writing process. I write very instinctively, letting a picture or phrase or voice come into my mind and just following it. For this story the setting turned up first—I closed my eyes and saw a lighthouse, then gradually a woman, and I knew it was a long time ago, on an island off Western Australia. Then a man appeared—the lightkeeper. As I wrote, a boat washed up, with a dead body and a crying baby, so I had to keep writing to see what happened. I didn't consciously decide to write a book about lighthouses, but I found they provided an incredibly rich metaphor: They betoken binary opposites such as safety and danger, light and dark, movement and stasis, communication and isolation—they are intrinsically dynamic because they make our imaginations pivot between those opposites.

I researched as the story progressed, reading old logbooks in the Australian National Archives and visiting lighthouses in Western Australia. They're such iconic things and inspire affection and fascination in equal measure. It's sad that they're more or less functionally extinct. I can't say I come from a long line of lightkeepers, though since writing the book I've met many people who do!

GR: Speaking of lightkeepers, Goodreads member Thom Jones says, "My wife and I are volunteer lighthouse keepers. We don't know if the author is responsible for the cover, but we were curious why there is no fresnel lens depicted and why the light is not lit, since it seems to be a night scene."

MS: I love the U.S. cover (designed by the amazingly talented Rex Bonomelli at Scribner). I think most people assume that the silhouette in the light tower is a man—presumably Tom [the lighthouse keeper]. But if you look at it very, very closely, it seems more likely that it's about a third or fourth order lens of some sort (possibly a bivalve?). What seems to be the head is just one of the astragals. There's something metaphorical about the light being in darkness, given what Tom goes through.

GR: Goodreads member German Rogers asks, "If you could, nowadays or in the past, would you have lived in a lighthouse? And why?"

MS: I adore the ocean, and I find solitude very restorative, so I'd happily volunteer for a stint on Janus Rock. I suspect, however, that the reality would be daunting: Lightkeepers led incredibly tough lives. The job was poorly paid, physically demanding, and required keepers to sign up for years at a time without a break. The Commonwealth Lighthouse Service was incredibly mean with its money and was constantly taking keepers to task for breaking or losing equipment. In spite of all that, I'd still be willing to have a go, but maybe just as a relief keeper.

GR: Goodreads member Alamosa Books said, "Is your familiarity with child loss personal or from others? Because reading the account of her failed pregnancies was so forcefully real—and accurate—that I had to put the book aside several times and just deal with memories. And in a similar vein, my grandfather was in World War I. I did not know him well, but when I went through that 'fascinated with history phase,'

having a grandfather who was part of the British Army in the Great War seemed really cool. But I couldn't get anything out of my mother or uncles other than 'He never would talk about that.' Did you create the psychology of the war experience from reading accounts of others, or did you know someone who would actually talk about it?"

MS: I think a writer can ask for no greater reward than that something resonates with a reader in the way Alamosa Books describes. And as a reader myself, I love those moments when I read something and feel that someone I don't know has truthfully captured an experience that is deeply personal to me. I think the answer belongs "behind the curtain" mentioned above, but I'm curious as to how knowing one way or the other would enhance, diminish, or otherwise alter your view of the book. As for the psychology of war experience, your grandfather's response is typical of returned soldiers of that generation. One of the few places where Australian WWI veterans "spoke" was in the field diaries and battalion journals written during and shortly after the war. Essentially private records rather than anything to be published commercially, they are truly heartbreaking to read—stories told without self-pity, facts recounted without commentary, and all the more devastating for that. I frequently found myself not just in tears but actually sobbing as I read them, in the otherwise orderly silence of the British Library reading rooms.

GR: Goodreads member [Linda](#) asks, "Seems the conclusion that being moral is more critical than being happy. Do you feel this way?"

MS: The key point about this is that it's how the ending seems to Linda. I find readers take very different things out of how the book ends—most find it uplifting, but some find it unbearably sad. These differences are natural given that we see everything in this world through the filter of our own experience—there's no "correct" response. I'm interested that Linda's question seems to see "being moral" and "being happy" as mutually exclusive. I wonder if anyone feels completely happy if they're going against their own personal sense of right and wrong? Perhaps, like [The Princess and the Pea](#), it's not possible to sleep easy? Can that then rightly be called "happiness"?

GR: What is your writing process? Please describe a typical day.

MS: There really isn't such a thing as a "typical" writing day for me, except insofar as I only write in the daytime—never at night. I'm rather allergic to rules about writing, and pronouncements such as "you must write at least an hour a day" or "you must plot everything in advance" or "do all your research before you write a single word." My philosophy is "find out what works for you, and do that: Everyone is different." So, for example, I wrote this book on my sofa, in the British Library, in a cottage by the beach in Western Australia, on Hampstead Heath, and anywhere else that felt right. I consider it a true privilege to have the opportunity to do what I love.

GR: What authors, books, or ideas have influenced you?

MS: This is a Rather Big Question for this space, so the answer isn't exhaustive! I'm not entirely sure what it means to say that I've been influenced by a writer—I hesitate lest it seem I'm claiming to be in their league. Writers I admire include [Graham Greene](#), because of his beautifully honed prose and fascination with moral struggles; anyone who turns a beautiful sentence—like [Cormac McCarthy](#), [Marilynne Robinson](#), and [Anne Michaels](#); and writers who know what makes people tick: [Dickens](#), [Eliot](#), [Salinger](#). For [The Light Between Oceans](#) I was also influenced by people who wouldn't call themselves writers at all but who communicated the facts of their lives through documents: the soldiers of the Great War I came across in battalion histories; those left behind

fretting for them in letters; the Australian lightkeepers whose correspondence is in the National Archives. And as for ideas, one of the basic principles of natural justice is *audi alteram partem*—i.e. let the other side be heard. So in this book I was very aware of putting across each character's point of view as convincingly as I could, even though it may have been very different from my own way of seeing things.

GR: What are you reading now?

MS: As usual, I have several books on the go at once. I've just started *The Map and the Territory* by Michel Houellebecq, and *Elijah's Mermaid* by Essie Fox. On my iPod I'm listening to *Jude the Obscure* by Thomas Hardy, and *Brighton Rock* by Graham Greene.

GR: What's next? Are you working on another book? If so, what's it about? Please give us a morsel about it! Goodreads member Brenda asks, "Will she have a follow-up to this brilliant book, one which will include the life of Tom, his now grown-up daughter, and her life?"

MS: At the moment I'm still very busy with the launch of this book. I'm looking forward to things quieting down so that I can close the door and let my imagination go roaming again. As to Brenda's question, I don't have any plans to revisit Tom's life after the end of the book, but as the saying goes, I never say never...

Western Australia

[Table of Contents](#)

[How to Cite this Article](#)

Thousands of miles of desert separate **Western Australia** from the "civilized" side of the continent, where the vast majority of Australians live. This isolation inspires a fiercely independent pioneer spirit in **Western** Australians. It has also produced a unique array of wildlife, most famously the state's 2,000 species of native wildflowers. More-fearsome wildlife resides along the state's tropical north coast. There, one can find **Australia's** saltwater crocodile, one of the most dangerous creatures in the [world](#). **Western Australia** also boasts one of the world's most beautiful coastlines. It includes many "endless" white-sand beaches stretching uninterrupted for up to 80 mi. (130 km.). The state's interior, by contrast, remains one of the continent's most forbidding regions—albeit exceptionally rich in minerals, from gold to diamonds.

The Land

Western Australia, its nation's largest state, encompasses the entire **western** third of the Australian continent. With a land area of 975,920 sq. mi. (2,527,633 sq. km.), it could accommodate both [Texas](#) and [Alaska](#) with room to spare. The state's coastline runs for 12,880 mi. (20,724 km.) along the Indian Ocean, from the Timor Sea in the north to the Great Australian Bight in the south. All but the eastern edge of the state sits atop the continent's **Western** Shield. The vast and ancient block of Earth's crust stands about 1,000 ft. (300 m.) above sea level. The **western** edge of the shield rises slightly to form the Stirling, Darling, and Hamersley Ranges just inland from the coast. A far more rugged range, the Bungle Bungle Mountains of the northern Kimberley Plateau, remains largely inaccessible.

Most of **Western Australia's** rivers can be found in the state's temperate south and its tropical far north. Dry scrub brush and deserts cover the interior. Indeed, **Western Australia's** "outback" encompasses four of **Australia's** five major deserts: Great Victoria, Gibson, Great Sandy, and Nullarbor Plain.

Climate. The northern third of **Western Australia** lies within the tropics. The rest extends into the Southern Hemisphere's temperate zone. Overall, the state experiences three distinct kinds of climate. Hot and rainy "monsoonal" summers typify the state's northern Kimberley Plateau. That area also experiences some of the country's hottest annual temperatures—with daytime highs above 90° F. (32° C.) throughout the year. A semidesert to desert climate dominates the state's interior. It receives less than 10 in. (254 mm.) of rain per year, with summer temperatures frequently exceeding 100° F. (38° C.). The state's southwest enjoys a pleasant "Mediterranean" climate. The mild, rainy winters see average temperatures of 60° F. (16° C.); the hot, dry summers average around 80° F. (27° C.).

Wildlife. **Western Australia's** vegetation changes dramatically across its three climatic regions. Tropical rain forests and savannas create a patchwork across the northern Kimberley Plateau. South of the tropics, dense eucalyptus forests cover the coastal hills and low mountains. The sparse, drought-tolerant vegetation of the state's outback includes the baobab tree. The unusual plant's trunk and lower branches swell into bizarre shapes after a rain.

For good reason, **Western Australia** calls itself the wildflower state. Spring brings an explosion of more than 2,000 species of colorful, if short-lived, flowers. Prominent among them is the unusually shaped kangaroo paw—the state flower.

Western Australia is even more famous for the sea life that thrives in the offshore waters. The friendly wild dolphins of Monkey Mia, along the central coast, draw visitors from around the world. A similar reputation surrounds the thousands of whale sharks that gather farther offshore and allow divers to swim in their midst. Ningaloo Reef, off the state's northwest coast, is home to manta rays and nesting turtles, and teems with colorful tropical fish.

The People

Many of **Western Australia's** native, or Aboriginal, people continue to lead a largely traditional way of life in the state's vast outback. Altogether, they number about 60,000, and make up about 3 percent of the state's population.

Most **Western** Australians trace their ancestry to either the [United Kingdom](#) or to [Ireland](#). In recent years, the state has welcomed large numbers of immigrants from southeastern [Europe](#), [Southeast Asia](#), and the [Middle East](#). Dubbed the "new Australians," these recent immigrants now make up nearly 20 percent of the state's population.

Cities

The state capital of **Perth**, on the south coast, is **Western Australia's** only big city, with a population of about 1.3 million (see sidebar). The state's largest towns include the commercial port of **Bunbury** (population 63,500), about 75 mi. (120 km.) south of Perth. About 375 mi. (600 km.) inland from Perth, the historic mining town of **Kalgoorlie-Boulder** (population 32,000). Situated at the heart of **Western Australia's** "Goldfields" , it is still the center of the state's profitable gold- and nickel-mining region. It is also the largest urban center in the Australian outback.

Economy

Early in its settlement, **Western Australia** became a profitable agricultural region: enormous livestock "stations" (ranches) were established in its outback; vast wheat farms appeared in the southeast. It remains a major exporter of grain, wool, beef, and lamb. In the north, farmers grow large amounts of tropical fruits and vegetables, most of which they export to various Asian countries.

In the past half century, **Western Australia's** mineral wealth has surpassed agriculture in importance. The state has become one of Asia's most valuable sources of natural gas, thanks to large reserves discovered along the coast. Some 300 mines operate across the state's vast interior, making **Western Australia** a leading producer of gold, nickel, aluminum, diamonds, iron, and mineral sands.

History

The first humans to populate **Australia** arrived some 50,000 years ago. They soon found their way to **Western Australia's** northern Kimberley Plateau. Over the course of the next 30,000 years, these Aboriginal hunter-gatherers spread south and west to occupy the entire region.

In 1616, the Dutch trading-ship captain Dirk Hartog landed on the island in Shark Bay that now bears his name. He claimed the region for [Holland](#). Over the next century, Dutch, [French](#), and British explorers stopped along the coast of **Western Australia**, but stayed only long enough to name various places.

In 1826, a small group of convicts established the first European settlement: a penal colony that would become the southern port town of Albany. In 1829, Britain formally claimed "New Holland," renamed it **Western Australia**, and established the Swan River Colony on the site of present-day Perth. During the 1880s, the discovery of huge gold deposits drew more than 20,000 "diggers" from the east. In 1901, **Western Australia** joined the new Commonwealth of **Australia** as its sixth state.

[Go to Top of Page](#)

How to cite this article:

MLA (Modern Language Association) style:

"Western Australia." *Lands and Peoples*. Grolier Online, 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.

Chicago Manual of Style:

"Western Australia." *Lands and Peoples*. Grolier Online <http://lp.grolier.com/ncpage?tn=/encyc/article.html&id=4101566> (accessed November 25, 2013).

APA (American Psychological Association) style:

Western Australia. (2013). *Lands and Peoples*. Retrieved November 25, 2013, from Grolier Online <http://lp.grolier.com/ncpage?tn=/encyc/article.html&id=4101566>