



Salt Creek

Lucy Treloar

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Settings are technicolor in this brilliant and engaging historical novel.

Lucy Treloar's *Salt Creek* is a mesmerizing novel in which an English woman reminisces about her Australian youth and the tragedies that befell her family.

In 1855, the Finch family settled on the isolated southern Australian frontier of Salt Creek, one more step into lost prosperity. Stanton Finch left England seeking adventure, but his every enterprise turned sour. A Salt Creek farm may be his final chance.

Sometimes violent, sometimes skewed by love and death and arbitrary misfortune, Finch's dreams, and family, give way to the realities of weather, debt, race, and religion, as well as to his own rigidity. His oldest daughter, Hester, narrates their story.

The narrative is driven by characters. Stanton, a bearded man given to biblical pronouncements, rules Salt Creek like a Hebrew prophet, with all the troubles of Job. Hester's voice is perfectly authentic as she observes her family's implosion, especially when death strikes Salt Creek.

Hester's younger sister, Addy, is the family flibbertigibbet—until her depth, resolve, and iron will are revealed through a tragedy. Their brother Fred has the intellect of an artist or scientist, but their father cannot see his promise.

The most nuanced of the characters is Tully, an aboriginal boy who is the product of a white man's rape. To the elder Finch, Tully becomes like a son, though that bond comes to face a critical test and Australia's racial tensions become apparent.

Settings are technicolor, including descriptions of the sweat-inducing heat and the claustrophobic cold, fog, and wind. Dialogue is perfectly rendered. The literary narrative is dense, but easily read, and contains allusions to women's rights and colonialism, and familial loyalty and the nature of love, all reflected through the dynamics of the Finch family.

Brilliant and engaging, *Salt Creek* is first-rate historical fiction.

GARY PRESLEY (September/October 2017)

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