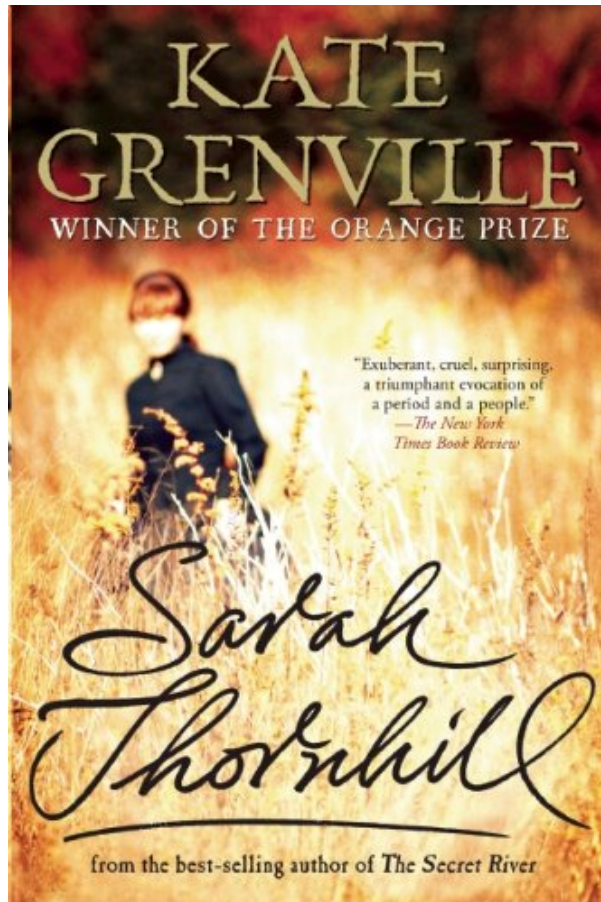
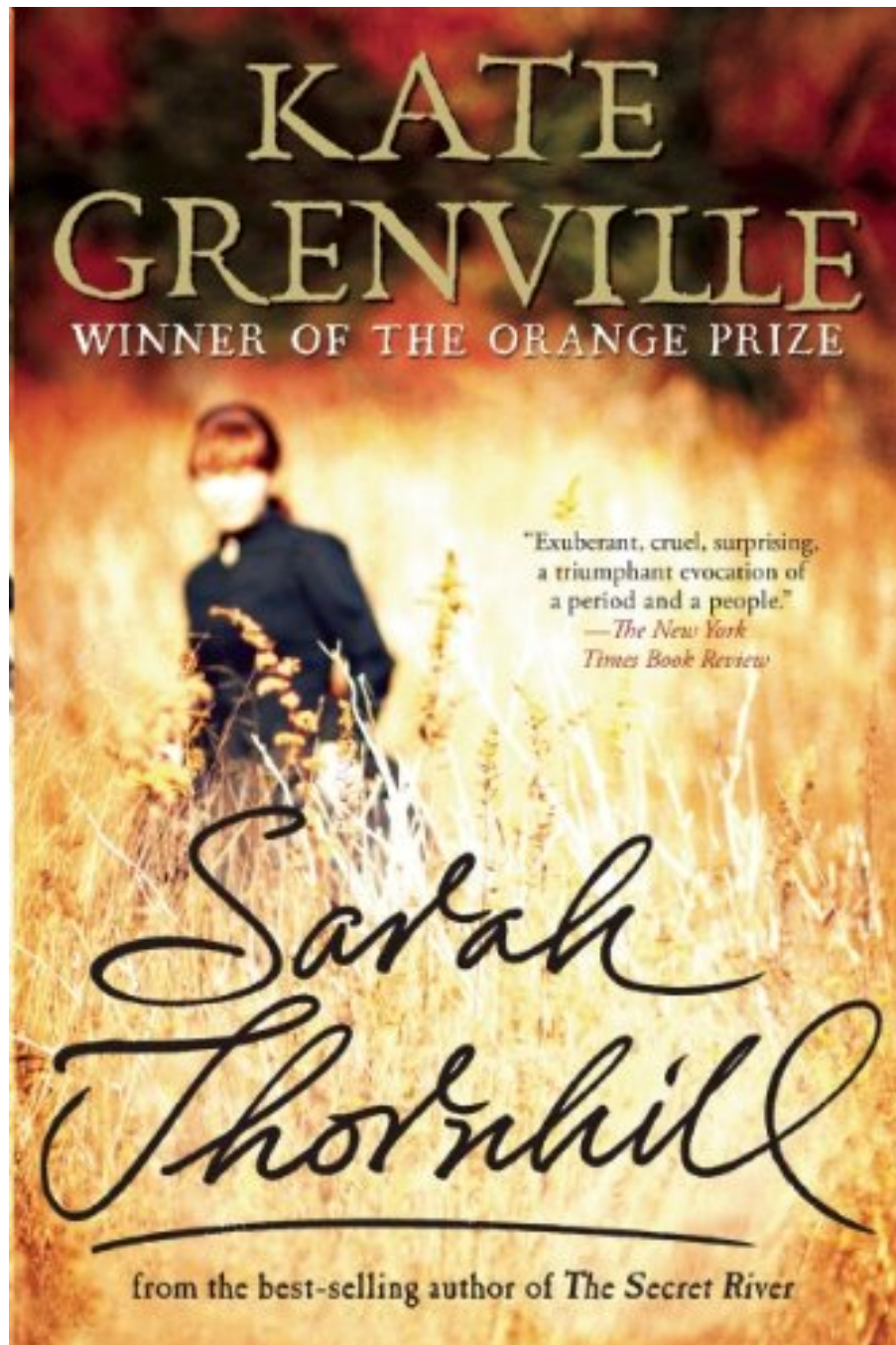


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When *The Secret River*—a novel about frontier violence in early Australia—appeared in 2005, it became an instant best seller and garnered publicity for its unflinching look at Australia’s notorious history. It has since been published all over the world and translated into twenty languages. Grenville’s next novel, *The Lieutenant*, continued her exploration of Australia’s first settlement and again, caused controversy for its bold view of her homeland’s beginnings. Sarah Thornhill brings this acclaimed trilogy to an emotionally explosive conclusion.

Sarah is the youngest daughter of William Thornhill, the pioneer at the center of *The Secret River*. Unknown to Sarah, her father—an ex-convict from London—has built his fortune on the blood of Aboriginal people. With a fine stone house and plenty of money, Thornhill is a man who has reinvented himself. As he tells his daughter, he “never looks back,” and Sarah grows up learning not to ask about the past. Instead, her eyes are on handsome Jack Langland, whom she’s loved since she was a child. Their romance seems idyllic, but the ugly secret in Sarah’s family is poised to ambush them both.

As she did with *The Secret River*, Grenville once again digs into her own family history to tell a story about the past that still resonates today. Driven by the captivating voice of the illiterate Sarah—at once headstrong, sympathetic, curious, and refreshingly honest—this is an unforgettable portrait of a passionate woman caught up in a historical moment that’s left an indelible mark on the present.

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Most helpful customer reviews

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

‘Nothing ever gone, just you got to know where to look.’

By Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Sarah is the youngest child of William Thornhill, the figure at the centre of ‘The Secret River’. William was a transported convict, now ‘an old colonist’ who has a family, land along the magnificent Hawkesbury River, and money. No-one had settled this land before William, but even so, when he surveys his estate (on the last page of ‘The Secret River’): ‘He would not understand why it did not feel like triumph.’ Readers of ‘The Secret River’, knowing of the ‘affray’ at Blackwood’s will understand. But for much of Sarah’s story, this event is an unknown part of the past.

Born in 1816, Sarah - called Dolly by her family - has played no part in the events of the past. Sarah’s story is told in the first person. We learn of her life and her loves, and her illiteracy shapes the narrative in particular ways. New South Wales is home for Sarah and her generation: they cannot share their parent’s nostalgia for Britain.

Sarah’s first love is Jack Langland. Jack is the eldest son of Jack Langland, another settler, but not of Jack’s wife: ‘Jack’s mother was not Mrs Langland. She was a darkie, long dead.’ Jack is the best mate of Will, William’s son, and is a well-known to, and liked by most members of, the Thornhill family. But events, assisted by Sarah’s stepmother, conspire to separate Jack and Sarah.

After Sarah’s brother, Will, drowns on a sealing expedition to New Zealand, Jack brings Will’s half-Maori daughter to her grandfather. This is a pivotal and ultimately very unhappy event in Sarah’s story and has echoes from William Thornhill’s past.

Sarah marries an Irish settler, John Daunt, and moves with him to the edge of European settlement. This is the part of the story I enjoyed most: the growing bond between John and Sarah. Here Sarah’s voice is

strongest and her world comes to life.

`That was what it was to belong to a place. To be brought undone by the music of the land where you'd been born.'

I didn't care for the end of the novel: while Sarah's journey to New Zealand makes its own form of sense for the story, it didn't work well for me in terms of the character. And it's hard for me to reconcile the following passage (beautiful as it is) with Sarah's illiteracy:

`How will I ever find a way to tell everything that brought me here? How I found myself in that place where the winter never stops blowing and nothing lies between the land and the ice at the bottom of the world but an ocean full of dark water? How tell the story of me and Jack Langland and a girl who only ever had someone else's name? Of those things left undone that we ought to have done, and those things done that we ought not to have done?

Rippling away into all those lives, down along the fathers and daughters and granddaughters. Generation after generation, the things joining us and the things cutting between us. All made by something done so long ago.'

This as a story about love, about family secrets, and about the hidden aspects of Australia's past. But I found that I did not care as much for Sarah's story as I did for William's. There are a few reasons for this, one of which is the unevenness of Sarah's voice, and another is the way the story ends. Although the three books are loosely linked as a trilogy, it isn't necessary to read `The Secret River' and `The Lieutenant' first.

I'd rate this book somewhere between 3 and 4 stars.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Pete's Books

By Pete's Books

I absolutely loved *The Secret River* and *The Idea of Perfection*, and I enjoyed *The Lieutenant*, but this latest effort is my least liked novel from this writer. I was definitely disappointed with this follow-up to *The Secret River*. I enjoyed most of the first 1/3 of the text but it quickly became too much of a soap opera after that, and I doubt few men would enjoy reading it. I might be wrong, but I think it is geared for the light romance reader, just in time for Xmas 2011. Unfortunately, I thought it was a follow up to *The Secret River* that probably should have been avoided.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

History Isn't Always Pretty?

By E. M. Griffith

review of an advanced publication copy of 'Sarah Thornhill' by Kate Grenville

Unlike many other reviewers, I haven't read earlier books of the series, which might make a difference for those who have. The view into the Thornhill family from Sarah's eyes during what seems to be a transitional period in Australia's history is interesting, yet for this reader seemed almost too superficial. What's clear is Sarah is different from the rest of her family members while remaining shaped by them... especially her father.

Perhaps part of the difficulty is its first person narrative style in a decidedly uneducated and naive voice from

beginning to end? There's little proper grammar; it gets tedious after awhile. Other readers might find it artsy or refreshing, but I found myself wanting to skip past dialog.

Only in the final third of the book are we introduced to the real meat of the story and moral questions/lessons... history is often ugly with future generations bearing the shame of those who came before. No spoilers here, but the ending just didn't seem plausible in any way, and felt disappointing. Again, I didn't read earlier books in the series so your mileage may vary.

Given the true weight of its historical subject matter and moral struggle tied to that history, 'Sarah Thornhill' could have been a 5 star novel for any reader had the story been more fully and deeply developed.

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