

Miles Franklin Literary Award 2006
Longlist

The Ballad of Desmond Kale
Roger McDonald

In the early 1800s, out of the prison society of governors, redcoats, English gaolers, Irish convicts, and the few free settlers of Botany Bay, one had ventured much farther inland than a few dozen miles from Sydney into the vast territory claimed, New South Wales. Or so it was believed until the escape of Desmond Kale and the vengeance of his rival, the wildly eccentric parson magistrate Matthew Stanton.

THE BALLAD OF DESMOND KALE is Roger McDonald's broad-sweeping novel of the first days of British settlement in Australia. At the centre is Stanton's pursuit of Kale - an Irish political prisoner and a rebelliously brilliant breeder of sheep. The alchemy of wool fascinates, threatens, and transforms when it is discovered that fine wool thrives in New South Wales as nowhere else in the world, producing veritable gold on sheep's backs. The laying to waste of Spain (Britain's chief supplier of fine wools) at the end of the Napoleonic wars, opens vast new opportunities of supply.

THE BALLAD OF DESMOND KALE is both a love story of unusual interest and an epic novel of greed, ambition, conceit, and redemption. The novel is rich in its characterisations and the rawness of its settings, vigour of language, and vividness of personality. The action moves from the early Australian bush to the halls of Westminster, the mills of Yorkshire, the sierras of Spain, the wilds of the Southern Ocean, and returns at last into the far outback for its finale. Once the ballad is sung, ordinary experience is heightened, the world can never be the same again. A brilliant and inspired recreation of the early days of white Australian settlement by one of Australia's finest writers working at the height of his powers.