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Terra Nullius

Margaret Visciglio

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Terra nullius means 'empty land'. It is the title of the first story in this collection, which is related by Hugh Foulkes, bullock driver to Captain Charles Sturt, as the men of the expedition wait at Depot Glen for Sturt's return from his final push in search of the mythical inland sea. To the early explorers, the land appears empty and they try to ignore the presence of the indigenous people who inhabit the vast plains through which they pass. The explorers and colonists believe the land is theirs for the taking. Subsequent stories in the collection illustrate how Australia was populated by migrants from many places, their reactions to their new home and the blending of their diverse cultures. There are stories that celebrate migrants of British background, of Greek and Italian and Chinese origins. And the last story tells the story of a refugee family that is as pertinent today as it was in 1956, the year in which it is set. Many of these stories have won awards or been published in anthologies. They represent a body of work that has grown over many years. Margaret Visciglio is best known for her debut novel The Blue Roses of Orroroo, which won both the Three Day Novel Race at Salisbury in 2007 and the South Australian People's Choice Award in 2013. She has also written a young adult novel, On the Edge, but the short story was her first love. The short story, Margaret believes, is excellent discipline for a writer as one has to concentrate plot, characterisation and setting into a very small space. Although the novel gives one time to expand on themes, the short story must be succinct. Every word counts. Margaret Visciglio is currently engaged in writing Only Two Letters in Orroroo, the much-awaited sequel to The Blue Roses of Orroroo.

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