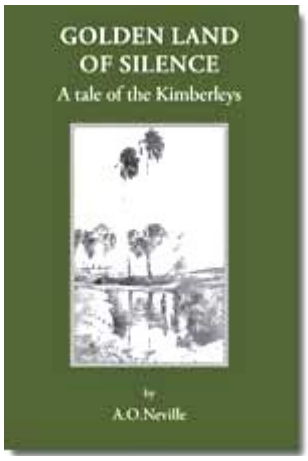

Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Golden Land of Silence: A tale of the Kimberleys* by A.O. Neville. Hesperian Press, Carlisle (WA), 2010. Soft cover, 171 pages, images, ISBN 978-0-85905-479-9, RRP $30.**

This novel, published decades after the death of its author, sits well with other early works that include Zane Grey's *Wilderness Trek: A Novel of Australia* (1944), Arthur Upfield's *The Cake in the Hat Box* (1955), and Jon Cleary's *Justin Bayard* (1955). Like those books, its central characters are non-indigenous people working in a setting that brings them into contact with indigenous people. There are also parallels with Richard Dehan's *The Sower of the Wind* (1927), Katherine Susanna Prichard's *Coonardoo: The Well in the Shade* (1929), Tom Ronan's *Vision Splendid* (1954), and Mary Durack's *Keep Him My Country* (1955). Like those books, this one revolves around the social taboos, angst, and ramifications that were commonly associated with sexual liaisons between indigenous women and non-indigenous men.

The setting, seemingly in the 1920s or 1930s, is Crystal Head Government Native Station, which the author positions adjacent to the mouth of the Mitchell River and 100 km from the fictitious town of Hunter River. In the foreword to the book, Derrick Tomlinson points to the likely link with Munja Aboriginal Reserve, which incorporated the former Avon Valley Station. He also mentions Neville's visits to Munja.

Golden Land of Silence is most likely to attract attention because Neville was Western Australia's Chief Protector of Aborigines (1915–1936) and the state's first Commissioner of Native Affairs (1937–1940). It does, however, deserve to be read in its own right.

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