

## THE SILENT COUNTRY

Author: Di Morrissey

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Reviewed by: Susan DeLong, The Mudgee Guardian

This is the 17<sup>th</sup> novel from this most prolific Australian author who delights her fans by always delivering a cracking good story. With a charming dedication to her first grandchild, Morrissey writes, “with the hope that you will experience the natural beauty of Australia and know a country which has been cared for, respected and left for generations to enjoy and appreciate. And that you too, will fight to keep it so.”

There are two stories unfolding in the novel. Veronica Anderson is a TV producer who has been given the opportunity to make a documentary about a seemingly foolish effort fifty years ago, by an eccentric Russian, Maxim Topov, to film a documentary of the vast wilderness of the northern territory and Arnhem Land. Topov believes his film showing the colourful, wild country to the world before the Melbourne Olympics, will make him and his motley crew a fortune and make a star of his beautiful actress Marta. Problems abound from the beginning as money, food and good sense seem to be in short supply. The crew have to camp and fish to feed themselves. The roads were rough or nonexistent and Topov seemed to have a different agenda to movie making as he searched for uranium. Despite stunning film footage, the movie never gets made. The newspapers report that a member of the crew is attacked and eaten by a crocodile. Or was he? The plot thickens!

Veronica tracks down Colin one of the crew. He eagerly tells her a lot of the story then backs off and refuses to continue. Another member of the crew is now a very rich and shady businessman who threatens legal action if the TV documentary ever goes to air. She visits the very rich and pampered Marta who now lives in splendour in Lake Como. What Marta reveals shocks the TV producer and makes her even more determined to uncover what really happened to disband the company and make the surviving members reluctant to have their story told on TV.

Guided by local environmentalist Jamie McIntosh whose mother Doris was the mixed race child who, fifty years ago, captured the hearts of the crew, Veronica falls in love with the land and the man, whose heart and soul belong to his native people and their traditional lands. She completes the TV documentary with stunning original film footage. Her career is on the front burner but Jamie won't move to the city so she begins to question her own priorities.

Throughout the book, Morrissey points out the sad dilemmas faced by aborigines. Fifty years ago kids with white blood were taken from their parents and raised and educated in missions. Fifty years ago the aboriginal tribes had strong cultural bonds to their ancestors. Today's kids don't respect their elders and don't care about their culture. Too many aborigines are in jail and alcoholism and ill health plague them. The Silent Country is an entertaining way to learn about some of Australia's most vexing problems.