Praise for *The End of Longing*

*The End of Longing* is a cleverly written piece of historical fiction...a complex story of mystery and intrigue...I was completely absorbed from the first page until the final scene.

BOOKSELLER AND PUBLISHER

Filled with allusions to nineteenth-century literature, history and mores, *The End of Longing* is distinguished by its sense of place, which is ironic really, as one of the themes in this richly layered book is that of travel and the peripatetic lives of the married couple at the centre of the story. But wherever his characters go, be it Japan, Canada or Honolulu, Ian Reid places us vividly there.

THE AGE

Reid scores a considerable success in recreating the hard-scrabble frontier towns of an age that is increasingly alien to our own...The reader encounters a pageant of nineteenth-century lives here...a realistic portrait of a bleak world.

AUSTRALIAN BOOK REVIEW

Ian Reid’s fine and unusual historical novel...concerns a man who is a fugitive not only from the law and his past misdeeds but perhaps more essentially from his repressed better nature...Maybe – as Reid subtly suggests – it is the desire for revenge against the angels of his own nature that Hammond self-destructively seeks.

THE AUSTRALIAN

Compelling ... intense ... poetic ... it stayed with me and has been hard to shake off.

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD
A tale rich in historical detail, creating two memorable and affecting main characters.

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

Frances is a 30-year-old spinster living in Dunedin, New Zealand, restless and dissatisfied with the parameters of her life... Typical of colonial heroines, Frances is destined to satisfy a terrible curiosity – what is it like out there? Her husband, and perhaps her nemesis, is the Rev. William Hammond... Reid's exploration of William’s background is suspensefully threaded through the book... very seductive.

WARRNAMBOOL STANDARD

An imaginative story of two people struggling to understand themselves and their relationship to the world around them.

WRITING WA

Skilfully realised... How well does any person know the ‘truth’ of another? This question underpins much of the novel and keeps the reader turning the pages... The gradual revelation of clues allows the reader to become the detective in pursuit of truth.

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Beautifully told.

LAUNCESTON EXAMINER

What Reid has done is to subvert the usual [family history] genre by telling the tale of an ancestor not at all respectable, and not at all predictable. It’s based on documentation not at all reliable... Reid has invented good bits of his ancestor’s story. Reid is also a poet, and he writes beautifully.

ANZ LIT-LOVERS BLOG
That Untravelled World
Ian Reid is a widely published author of literary and historical non-fiction whose writings have been translated into several languages. His poetry has earned him the Antipodes prize in the USA. His acclaimed first novel, *The End of Longing*, was published by UWAP in 2011. He lives in Perth where he is a Winthrop Professor at The University of Western Australia and Emeritus Professor at Curtin University.
That Untravelled World

Ian Reid
To Zoë and her kith
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.

Tennyson, *Ulysses*
Part 1

1912 – 1915
She seemed to have left without any trace, and her parents too, as if whisked inexplicably into utter oblivion.

All his anxious questioning led nowhere. There wasn’t a single person who could tell him where they might have gone, or why. The sheet of brown paper tacked to the bakery door said bluntly, in a thick pencil scrawl, closed. No explanation.

At first he told himself that some urgent family matter must have summoned them suddenly – perhaps the illness or death of a relative somewhere away from Perth. No doubt they would soon return. In the meantime, Nellie would surely write to him, clearing it all up. Knowing how intense his feelings were towards her, she’d want to reassure him with some words of shy affection. But days went by with neither letter nor reappearance.

The neighbours said they had no idea at all. Even the Biddles, right next door, had heard and seen nothing. ‘Not a squeak, not a glimpse,’ Cec Biddle kept repeating; and to the notebook-wielding constable who seemed to expect
a fuller statement he added with a final flourish, ‘Not the slightest glimmer’. Old Mrs Polly Milligan, the jowly one across the street who took pride in knowing everybody’s business, shook her head in a pantomime of puzzlement until her wattles jiggled. ‘Just vanished into thin air,’ she averred worriedly, clucking with a slack tongue against her palate.

Into thin air: it struck Harry as a strange notion. Hardly less fanciful to imagine some ghostly thickening of the ether had carried them off, a dense fog rolling slowly up the Swan River from Fremantle during the night like a silent vaporous wave to envelop the whole Weston family and spirit them away.

That all three of them had been somehow abducted was almost beyond belief; but that they could have departed of their own accord in secret, slinking off without so much as a word to him – or to anyone else, apparently – seemed just as absurd. Then, if not a forced removal or a furtive getaway, what had happened?

The Weston mystery was the talk of the village. Could be a money problem, Freddie Dingle said, could well be. Others nodded. George Weston didn’t own the bakery, according to Polly Milligan – he’d been running it for years on a long-term lease from some fellow down Albany way, no-one knew who – and perhaps had got himself into debt and decided to skedaddle, being a church stalwart and not wanting to face up to the shame.

‘But what if they’re still in there?’ wondered Marge Biddle as she bent down to fill a saucer of milk for the Westons’ querulous cat. ‘Murdered in their beds, might be?’

Tom Torrence, local cop, had waited several days before peering in through the Westons’ windows and a further day
before breaking one of them to get in and have a bit of a squiz. Half the street’s residents gathered outside while he smashed the pane and clambered through, sweating, tearing his sleeve, muttering to himself.

‘Any sign of foul play?’ a voice called out eagerly as he emerged at last. He shook his head.

‘Nup. Most things in their usual place, looks like, more or less, ’cept for clothes – nothing much left in the wardrobes or chest of drawers. Not sure about some other stuff. Hard to tell what mighta gone. Whether they coulda taken it away themselves, or robbery or what. Anyway, got a report to write up. So off ya go now, all of ya.’

For a week Harry kept a lid on his fears. Some kind of message would reach him before long. But nothing came. Expectation gave way to alarm, and then subsided into a dull ache.

Troubled nights made the mornings weary. He found it hard to stay asleep for more than an hour or two at a time. Waking with a start from dreams of confusion, he would stare into the inscrutable darkness, sit up in his narrow bed, rearrange sheet and pillow, lie down again, turn this way and that, while his mind went tick-tock-tick through every obscure and agitated possibility.

‘I feel sort of numb,’ Harry told Sven as they unloaded crates at the little jetty and stacked them on the cart. But not just drowsy, he thought, plodding along the sandy track beside the straining horses and their load. It was the shock, too – mixed up miserably with a sense of powerlessness, and with sheer perplexity.

It would be a long while before he could begin to free himself of this troubled tangle of feelings, and years more
before he knew there are some secrets so painful to discover that they may need to be closed up again.

As the enigma of Nellie’s sudden disappearance deepened, Harry sifted through every retrievable moment of the four months since he met her, trying to recall each conversation, looking for any shadowy hint that he could somehow have missed at the time. Although the wireless station project demanded close attention throughout the working day, part of his mind kept slipping back distractedly to those early weeks. He thought of the things that had brought them together.

Their first encounter had begun inauspiciously.

Weston’s Family Bakery: the lettering on the front wall was matchstick-plain. Turning the loose brass knob and pushing the door open, Harry found the shop dim and unattended. A yeasty smell drifted warmly through it. When he tinkled the bell on the counter there was the sound of someone moving about in a back room. He saw on a shelf, as he waited, the framed text admonishing customers with the words *Man shall not live by bread alone*. He recognised it as a biblical injunction, but tried impulsively to turn it into a little joke when a young woman emerged – shapely, he noticed, and comely – wiping her hands on an apron and disconcerting him with a sunbeam smile of welcome.

‘G’morning, miss. Just a half loaf please. And I assure you,’ he added in a facetious tone, pointing to the stern text, ‘I’ll be having plenty of cheese with it.’

She cancelled her smile with a prim reproof. ‘My father wouldn’t like to hear you making fun of God’s word.’
‘Sorry,’ he said, twitching his shoulders in a half-shrug of chagrin. He’d always been told he had a way with words, the gift of the gab, so it was galling that his usual fluency had deserted him at such a moment.

But she didn’t seem to hold it against him. When he went back a couple of mornings later to buy another loaf for his lunch-bag, she greeted him with the same sparkle that had gladdened him the first time.

‘Making more cheese sandwiches?’ she asked. A dimple of amusement flickered near her pretty mouth. Her eyes were as bright as a candle flame.

‘Whatever I put between the slices, your bread’s perfect for it,’ he declared, conscious that it sounded like a stilted advertisement. Taking the loaf she placed on the counter, he picked at its kissing crust, put a little piece in his mouth and chewed appreciatively. ‘Mmm. Lovely!’ he said, nodding like a clown. ‘Straight from the oven, isn’t it? Thought so. Mmm.’ Prolong this transaction somehow, he told himself. Ask her a question, chatter about anything. But luckily she had her own string of queries.

‘Put the sandwiches together yourself, do you?’ she asked.
‘Certainly do. Who else’d be doing it for me?’
‘So you live alone?’
‘Not exactly, miss. I lodge at a boarding house just along the road there, past the Mends Street corner.’
‘With the Rivens?’
‘Yes. You know them?’
‘We see them on Sundays, mostly. They worship at the same chapel as we do.’

His turn now. Stalled in self-consciousness, Harry pursed his lips and whistled a scrap of a tune while trying to think
how to keep the conversation going. A small grizzled cat emerged, as if in response to the whistling, and approached him with cautious tread. Glad of the diversion, Harry knelt and tickled its ears. It favoured him with a slow wide yawn.

‘Family pet?’ he asked the young woman.

‘Not exactly. Not in the pampered sense. She’s supposed to be working for her keep – as a mouser. Doesn’t do a bad job, actually, though she’s getting on in years.’

‘Seems friendly now, but I guess she’d frighten the daylights out of a rodent. Have you given her a name?’

‘We just call her Beastly.’

Harry toyed for a moment with the idea of a forced joke about Beastly and the Beaut, but dismissed it. Better to draw her into an exchange of information: getting to know about her would probably be easier if he mentioned a few things about himself.

‘I’ve been here in Western Australia just a couple of weeks,’ he told her. ‘Came over from Sydney. On a P&O mail steamer, RMS *India*. Arrived New Year’s Day.’

‘So Sydney’s your home? Yes? Then why have you come to Perth?’

‘Well, I’m a junior engineer, y’see, brought over here to work on…’

But before he could tell her anything about his job, let alone about all the plans, enthusiasms and stories that he had a sudden urge to share, a man’s voice called out sharply from one of the back rooms: ‘Nellie!’

She responded at once to the peremptory tone as if tugged by a string. ‘Coming, Dad!’

‘Name’s Harry Hopewell,’ he blurted as she turned away, and her acknowledging smile seemed to anticipate further
exchanges. Nellie: he savoured her name as he left the shop. So it’s Nellie.

When he tried afterwards to picture the details of her face he couldn’t be quite sure of the colour of her eyes, or hair, or exactly what her nose looked like, but her shy smile stayed with him. And her voice, pleasantly modulated – he could hear again the hint of gaiety at the edge of her words.

In contrast, the sound of her father’s gruff voice had led Harry to imagine an ogre, but when he encountered him a couple of days later on his next visit to the bakery the small thin man behind the counter didn’t look formidable. His dour unsmiling manner was perhaps just a mask for diffidence. Nothing ventured, thought Harry, clearing his throat as he paid his money and picked up the warm loaf. ‘Ah – Mr Weston…’ he began, and then hesitated, feeling a flush in his cheek and sweat in his armpits. Weston did something quizzical with a tufty eyebrow.

‘Your daughter, sir – Miss Nellie: I wonder whether you might let me take her to the zoo this Saturday afternoon. If she agrees, that is. I haven’t asked her yet.’

There was a long pause. Weston brought his hands together slowly and cracked his knuckles; then, frowning, he adjusted his spectacles.

‘You’re Hopewell, I suppose?’

‘I am, sir. Harold Hopewell.’

‘Nellie mentioned you. Doesn’t usually talk about our customers, so you must’ve sparked a bit of interest somehow. I don’t doubt she’d like to go to the zoo in your company. But we know nothing about you. Whaddya do for a living, lad?’
‘I work for Australasian Wireless. We’re building the new station on the hill behind Applecross.’ Harry squared his shoulders proudly.

‘Heard something about it. Can’t see the point, I must say. But I suppose it pays well. How old are you?’

‘Twenty. Well, nearly twenty, to be precise.’

‘I prefer precision. New to these parts, aren’t you?’

‘Yes. Just arrived from Sydney in early January. The company sent me here for the wireless station work. I’d been employed on the other station that the government commissioned, the one at Pennant Hills. Twin projects. There aren’t many people who know about setting up the equipment, you see. Very specialised.’

‘Hmm.’ Weston wrinkled his brow, thrumming the counter with his fingers. ‘Answer’s no. You’re still just a young fellow, and I won’t let our Nellie go anywhere with you on your own. Tell you what, though: you can come along to the zoo with the three of us – Nellie and Mrs Weston and me. How’s that?’

Harry grinned with relief.

‘Oh, splendid, yes, certainly, thanks very much Mr Weston. Two o’clock be convenient? It’ll take me till then to get back from the hill and clean myself up and walk here.’

‘All right, lad. We’ll expect you at two on Saturday.’

As he left the bakery and made his way to the jetty with bouncing stride and jaunty whistle, Harry felt energy surging in his veins. He swung his arms vigorously. If there had been no-one else around, he would have skipped like a child. Saturday, eh? Saturday!

He didn’t much mind, really, that Nellie’s parents would be coming with her as chaperones. It could even be quite
pleasant, linked like that to a family group. Here in Perth he’d been feeling the absence of his own mother and father. First time away from home, and the boarding house was a poor substitute. Perhaps the Westons, as they got to know him, would regard Harry as almost… But whoa! He was getting ahead of himself. The weekend would arrive soon enough. He needed to iron his best shirt and perhaps buy a more respectable hat.

Meanwhile there was his daily stint at the busy site on the bare hill. He was learning to be patient: he would come into his own soon enough, when the pieces of big equipment arrived, and until then there were plenty of ways of making himself useful around the place. Measurements and calculations needed to be checked and rechecked against the drawings. He could give a helping hand with the barbed wire fencing and with some of the cartage and unloading of building supplies. And Bill Flynn, the fussy old electrician, wanted to discuss every little detail of the transmitter arrangements with him.

Harry was impressed by the rate of progress. The aerial components had come earlier, before his arrival in Perth. By the time he turned up on the job the Public Works team had already laid the foundations, supervised by Schank and Larrson. He knew from the Pennant Hills project that these two worked together in unison, like Siamese twins, but seeing them again side by side made him smile. They could hardly have looked more different: Max Schank, the mast engineer, was a ruddy-cheeked bullock of a man; Sven Larrson, the rigger, a tall skinny streak with a pale pocked face. Evidently they’d wasted no time at this Applecross site: the three concrete towers were in position to anchor the
aerial, and further away the men had dug a ring of holes to take the smaller tethering blocks. Those restraints would be vital, he understood that. Some days the wind had startled him with its sudden ferocity, and a steel spar rising to 400 feet above the hilltop could hardly withstand such gusting unless it had several strongly fastened copper guy wires to secure it. Schank told him it would stand on large glass insulators and weigh 50 tons. Its base could take that burden comfortably: solid and enormous, with part of it buried deep below the surface. An amazing contraption, this mast, thought Harry. It would be the tallest structure in Western Australia. No man-made thing of comparable height for thousands of miles north, south, east or west. Nothing quite like it anywhere in the whole country except the prototype back in Sydney.

On his first day there, Harry had stood beside Schank in the shadow of one of the concrete towers, and looked out across the wide stretch of the Swan River. The weather was unusually still, and the glassy surface of the river gleamed beneath an unclouded sky. Schank pointed down to the water. ‘Calm as a milkpond!’ he exclaimed.

‘Millpond,’ said Harry.

‘Eh?’

‘Millpond, not milkpond.’

Max Schank crinkled his forehead at this obtuseness. ‘It’s just a saying,’ he explained, as if instructing a child.

Harry let it go, turned and gestured towards the structures rising behind them. ‘You’ve got a hell of a lot done here in a short time,’ he said.

Schank grunted and nodded. ‘Been verking like a Trojan horse,’ he declared. Harry hid a smile. He liked to hear big Max’s thick German accent and his frequently muddled phrases.
Both the main buildings were already completed apart from facings and fittings. Harry liked the look of them. One was the Engine House, where the huge diesel-driven generator and the transformer would sit; the other, the Operators’ Building, would contain transmitter, receiver, and switchboard. Water tanks were in place behind them, and a windmill to drive the pump for a well. A space was marked out for a third building, to store fuel and other supplies. Meanwhile the Public Works blokes were going to start work soon on the cottages near the foot of the hill, so that the station manager and telegraphists could take up residence with their families.

To be part of such a marvellously innovative project, at the forefront of technical knowledge! Harry could hardly believe his luck. They were laying a foundation stone for the modern world.

The river journey that brought Harry to Applecross each working day and took him back again at the end of the afternoon was always invigorating. He liked to stand at the rail, thinking fondly of Nellie, feeling on his face the warm air that was sometimes damp with spray, and watching the wake recede. Often, as the paddle steamer left the South Perth jetty behind, gathering pace and moving out into the channel beyond Mill Point, Harry would see that it was under playful escort: a pair of undulatory dolphins just a few yards away rose and arched and dived and rose again, as if in happy mimicry of the boat’s great wheel, their finny backs turning sleekly like serrated rotary discs. It seemed, at that stage, an omen of good fortune.