In the absence of any introduction this collection of critical essays leaves its readers to interpret its challenging title. This of course calls up D.H. Lawrence's pioneering collection of essays on American literature which set out to trace, through what became the main or canonical authors, the sources of its newness and vitality. It was part of Lawrence's restless quest to seek out and celebrate representations of those social and psychic forces representing the new and the vital as against the repressive and stagnant to which they were opposed. Wilding calls up this book not in emulation of its quality or approach but rather out of sympathy with this informing spirit. He wants to challenge readers' conventional conceptions of Australian literature and its criticism in two main ways. First, he wants to question modern or contemporary canons or mainstreams by his choice of subjects: Clarke, Lawson, Lane, Jack Lindsay, Furphy, Stead and White. These represent a mixture of those accepted as classic with authors who have been passed over if dutifully treated in historical surveys. Secondly, the mainstream authors, along with the others are treated in unconventional ways and not for the strengths hitherto attributed to them. This is accomplished by stressing the importance of the political, usually some form of socialistic thought, though Wilding is not doctrinaire about this, as a hitherto neglected part of these authors' strengths, and furthermore by demonstrating that instead of being aesthetic flaws or drawbacks these ideas and their embodiment are a main source of the works' power. For Wilding is not one to privilege craft and form over content or message but rather to see the two as reinforcing one another. In fact, an important and unfashionable part of Wilding's argument throughout is that institutionalised criticism brought with it the repressive and narrowing view that the discussion of ideas is improper in considering the novel as an art form. While Wilding mounts strong arguments for his case and cause he never forces them upon the reader but rather offers them as part of alternative readings which will enrich and enlarge our appreciation of fiction. Indeed he writes throughout in a generous spirit, preferring to celebrate and praise rather than to condemn. It is engaging, for instance, to see a critic expressing enthusiasm rather than reservation, as in expressions like, 'it is amazing that ...'; or...
Born in 1867 he is Australia's best known poet and fiction writer. His work contains themes of sadness and hardship inspired as they were by his own upbringing in poverty and bouts of alcoholism. Novelist of classic Australian works include Marcus Clarke (For the Term of His Natural Life), Miles Franklin (My Brilliant Career), Henry Handel Richardson (The Fortunes of Richard Mahony), Joseph Furphy (Such Is Life), Rolf Boldrewood (Robbery Under Arms) and Ruth Park (The Harp in the South). In terms of children's literature, Norman Lindsay (The Magic Pudding), Mem Fox (Possum Magic), and May Gibbs (Snugglepot and Cuddlepie) are among the Australian classics, while Melina Marchetta (Looking for Alibrandi) is a modern YA classic. Paul Jennings is a prolific writer of contemporary Australian fiction for young people whose career began with collections of short stories such as Unreal! (1985) and Unbelievable! For me, classic books need to be readable because I'm not studying literature at university these days. There are many important books published decades or even centuries ago that have great significance but I'm not going to recommend them for your reading enjoyment. The prime example is Moby Dick, which I have read and I will never recommend. Life's too short and that novel is too hard to read. The most challenging book on this list is The Seven Pillars of Wisdom because it's epic in length and contains great detail about the Arab rebellion against the Turks. This list cov