

openbook

Mirandi Riwoe
story

Shannon Burns
reflection

Sophie Cunningham
profile

Peter Kingston
art





Peter Kingston's original artwork from *Shark-net seahorses of Balmoral*, an artists' book by Robert Adamson and Peter Kingston. This image, which takes some geographic liberties, is also painted on the book's wooden box.



Openbook is designed and printed on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. The State Library of NSW offers our respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and future, and extends that respect to other First Nations people. We celebrate the strength and diversity of NSW Aboriginal cultures, languages and stories.



Scene from the stage musical *All Aboard!* Photo by Robert Catto

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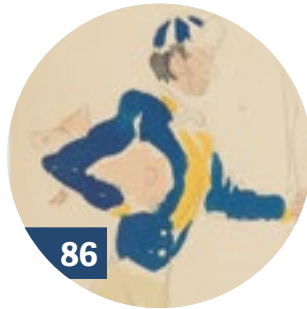
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Self-portrait by Dr John Vallance

It's well known that librarians have nightmares.

The hardest thing in life is to choose. The choice of what to record — whether it's in a picture, a photograph or an essay — lies at the heart of art. The art of life is getting it right.

This same kind of choice lies at the heart of our great Library. The purpose of art — and our Library — is to help us navigate a path through life, to locate meaning in the chaotic run of fleeting images, sounds, tastes and smells in which we live. To borrow from St Peter (and Brahms), 'All Flesh is as Grass, and all the Glory of Man, as the Flower of Grass. The Grass withereth, and the Flower thereof falleth away.'

Choice may be difficult, but it gives meaning to our fleeting existence, and life would be a hollow nightmare without it.

It's well known that librarians have nightmares. Most people dread being savaged by sharks, bitten by snakes, murdered, boiled in acid and so on. Librarians have a dread of disorder, and the librarian's nightmare looks like chaos.

Order, taxonomy, cataloguing bring comfort, yet the contents of libraries — what people choose to put in them — aren't always comfortable. They break rules. They offend. They shock. Paradoxically, this is what makes libraries the infinitely wonderful places they are. The very greatest libraries are a raucous mess of divergent images and attitudes, opinions dressed as truth, suppositions dressed as science, fantasies dressed as analysis. Jonathan Swift's satirical 'Battle of the Books', set in London at the end of the seventeenth century, pits 'ancient' and 'modern' works fighting for supremacy in St James's Library. We don't get to know who won then, and it's the same today. Good libraries are eternal springs of dissent and argument. Move over sport. In truth, it's only the very best libraries that aren't about winning or losing, but playing the game.

Some library authorities find this troubling, and 'curate' their collections to make them accessible. This is fine — as long as curation is an open-ended commitment to bringing material into the public domain. But one major UK library I visited last year explains in its mission statement that it exists in order to 'create harmony between cultures and educate people in the importance of sustainability'. This strikes me as against the spirit of choice — and by extension the spirit of libraries.

Such goals may be laudable, but they limit the possibilities offered by great collections in truly open institutions. Readers don't always want someone else to stand as an interpreter between them and the material they are dealing with. There is sometimes a fine line between light curation — aimed simply at explaining what something is, where and how it was produced — and didactic curation which instructs readers and visitors, telling them what to think and giving the impression that there is only one correct answer. No one likes being told what to think, let alone feel.

In a few months the State Library of NSW will open its Photography Gallery and complete the job it began in 2018 of turning itself inside out to put samples of all the formats in its collection on public show. When you visit, you will see that this is being done wherever possible with descriptive rather than interpretative curation — take the salon hang in the picture galleries for example — so that the Library's 'choosers' can put before you the glorious jumble of contradictory ideas which you and your descendants will have to knock into the kind of shape which seems right to you.

You see, life would be a hollow nightmare without — libraries.

Dr John Vallance FAHA
State Librarian



Entrance to Jaipur Literature Festival in 2023, held at Hotel Clarks Amer, Jaipur.
Photo by Vivek Singh

Literature on stage

Library tourism, as we see on page 70, is illustrated best with sumptuous photographs of glorious buildings. Literary tourism is different. Especially devoted readers might wander down Martin Road at Centennial Park to look at the exterior of Patrick White's house or play on the swings in the park named after Ethel Turner in Paddington, nearby. (Stories about both these famous Australian writers appear in this issue.) But literary tourism mainly happens at writers' festivals and is perhaps best symbolised by a queue at the signing table. There, a fan might spell out her name, eyeball the writer, mutter blandishments and perhaps ask a question before being shuffled along.

Adelaide Writers' Week launches writers' festival season in Australia, which is at its most intense during the first half of the year. (Two festivals have a possessive apostrophe, but most don't.) An antipodean writers-fest crawl would have a reader bouncing between Newcastle, Bendigo, Melbourne, Brisbane and back to Sydney, via Auckland, before some quiet time ahead of the Byron Writers Festival in August. (See our 'What's on' section on pages 100–101 for dates.)

And for those for whom too many writers' festivals are never enough, there's always the one billed as 'the greatest literary show on earth', the Jaipur Literature Festival.

Phillipa McGuinness, *Openbook* Editor

Shirley Le

When Mẹ reminisces about my first birthday, she clucks her tongue and says, ‘That cake cost 80 dollars, can you believe it? It was your *thôi nôi* so we had to go all-out.’ She tells me that next to the pink and white, three-tiered Minnie Mouse cake was a bamboo tea tray that held four things: a Bic pen, our family doctor’s stethoscope, a handful of purple sticky rice and a five-dollar note. Mum sat me on the table next to the cake. It was 1992. Ba was the first to be let go from an engineering company during ‘the recession we had to have’. He found a job behind the counter of a photo shop in Eastwood, developing film in the darkroom. Mẹ was sewing pillowcases after she came home from her job at Australia Post’s sorting facility in Clyde.

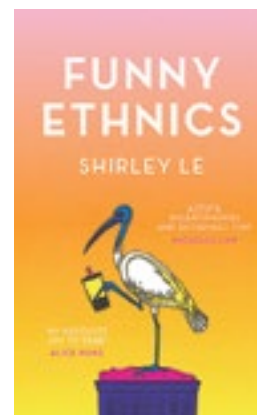
My birthday party was held in the backyard of my parents’ little red brick home in Yagoona. The Aussie family who lived across the street brought over their barbecue. Smoke wafted from the snags. Bryan, Mary and their son Scott huddled together, watching their new Viet neighbours celebrate a

thôi nôi the traditional way: If I seized the sticky rice, I could end up working in agriculture, like my great uncle in Adelaide who picked cherries for Australian farmers. If I fumbled towards the five-dollar note, I was probably starting my own business like my *Cô Sáu* in *Sài Gòn*, who once chased an American backpacker out of her restaurant with a broomstick because he tried to haggle. If I snapped up the stethoscope, I would be like Anh *Tùng*, basking in the community’s eternal reverence, but still driving a shit-box to avoid getting mugged in the dingy parking spot behind the medical centre in Fairfield. If I plucked the pen, I was destined to be a teacher. Just like my mother and her mother and her mother’s mother.

‘Can’t a pen also symbolise a writing career?’ I ask Mẹ. ‘What did I choose?’

She throws her head back, longan seed eyes crinkling, puffing out her cheeks as she exhales. ‘You were a very scared baby so you froze,’ she says. ‘Then Scott came over to the table and stuck out his can of VB and you grabbed it.’

It’s midnight. My fingers are numb. The MacBook on my lap wheezes like it’s got emphysema and heats up like an air fryer. The heat spreads to my legs, up my stomach, then to my armpits. Sweat drops sprint down the sides of my cheeks. I put my laptop on the couch, stand and walk to the fridge. Grab the can of VB that a friend left in there four months ago. Roll the cold cylinder of metal on either sides of my face and press it on my eyes, which are as dry as Weet-Bix. Then I return to the couch, pull the computer back onto my lap and type ‘Funny ethnics and beer breath Aussies’.



Shirley Le’s debut novel *Funny Ethnics* is published by Affirm Press



Shirley Le at Phước Huệ Temple, Wetherill Park.
Photo by Joy Lai



Sandie Barrie and Max Dupain, 13 May 1991.
Photo by Lucien Samaha

Daguerreotype to digital

Sydney's first photograph was taken on 13 May 1841, using a daguerreotype camera, like the one shown here. It was brought to Australia by visiting French sea captain Augustin Lucas, who conducted a public demonstration of the camera in the hope of selling it. The image produced was reported to be 'an astonishingly minute and beautiful sketch ... of Bridge-street and part of George-street, as it appeared from the Fountain in Macquarie-place'. This digital photograph of Sandie Barrie and Max Dupain was shot at the same spot on 13 May 1991, by pioneering digital photographer Lucien Samaha, to mark the 150th anniversary of that event, using a prototype Kodak Digital Camera System.



Street photographer, c 1939, watercolour attributed to Roland Wakelin

Street-snapped

This painting, from around 1940 and attributed to artist Roland Wakelin, depicts a street photographer in action. Once a common sight in Australian towns and cities between the 1930s and the late 1950s, street photography emerged when personal camera ownership was still rare. Few people would have escaped being snapped by a street photographer at

some time or another. These roving photographers, armed with small portable cameras and positioned in key locations, took hundreds of photos of pedestrians each day, trying to elicit a sale by placing themselves in people's paths. Potential customers were handed a numbered card with the address of the company where prints could be ordered. At the height of their popularity, over 10,000 people in NSW were buying photos from street photography companies each week.



Adelle Hurley: guest photographer, *PIX*, 7 August 1948

Candid camera

This photo is part of the series ‘Sydney Town Street Portraits’ shot by documentary photographer Jon Lewis (1950–2020) in homage to street photographers of the past. The boy in this 2014 image, taken at Circular Quay, has a now-familiar stance: he holds Lewis’s Samsung NX 300 digital camera at arm’s length — rather than up to one eye — to frame the shot through the screen on the back.

When digital cameras first hit the shelves in 1995, photographers could capture and view images without the need for film, negatives or physical prints. Digital technology’s automated point-and-shoot functions and easy editing, ensure near-perfect pictures as photographers check the quality of their shot immediately. The arrival of the smartphone with its integrated camera has brought digital photography to the masses.



Boy with camera: street portrait 8, Circular Quay, Sydney, 20 July 2014.
Photo by Jon Lewis

Front page

Adelie Hurley (1919–2010), pictured at left with her favourite Pacemaker Speed Graphic press camera on the 7 August 1948 cover of *PIX* magazine, was one of Australia’s first female photojournalists. With attached bulb flash, sturdy hand-held construction and side-mounted rangefinder, Graflex cameras were the camera of choice for photojournalists and wartime correspondents. One of Antarctic explorer and photographer Captain Frank Hurley’s three daughters, Adelie Hurley began her career with *PIX* magazine in the late 1930s and worked on almost every paper in Sydney up until the 1960s. Because of her capacity to consistently bring back a great picture, alongside her experimentation with interesting angles, she became known as ‘Front Page Hurley’.



Jon Lewis with Polaroid camera, c 1976.
Photo by William Yang

Polaroid moment

The Polaroid story began more than 70 years ago when Edwin H Land invented instant film. First available commercially in the late 1940s, by the 1960s almost half of all American households owned a Polaroid camera. The Polaroid SX-70 Land Camera, like the one held here by Jon Lewis in this c 1976 photograph by William Yang, was the culmination of Land’s all-in-one instant development system. Launched in 1972, it was the world’s first instant camera to use integral film (containing negative, developer and fixer) and the first folding SLR camera. Polaroid’s top-of-the-line camera, with its velvety chrome finish and elegant shape, was fully collapsible, automatic and motorised. The instant colour prints it produced in minutes seemed like absolute magic. By 1973, Polaroid was producing 5000 of these cameras a day.



A STUDIO
THAT
SOMEONE
HAPPENS
TO SLEEP

WORDS Elizabeth Fortescue

The remarkable home of the late Sydney artist Peter Kingston will live on in a State Library of NSW photographic project.

The feeling of entering a magical realm begins before you even get to Peter Kingston's former home in Lavender Bay. You leave the street on the hillside above the house and take the steeply sloping stairs towards the harbour. Not wanting to miss your footing, you try to ignore the cobalt seductiveness of Sydney Harbour glinting through a frame of trees way below.

Ginger Meggs zooming downhill in a billycart — or at least, a small wooden figurine of the old-time cartoon character — comes into view on the fence line outside Kingston's place. You open the gate, cross a kind of rickety gangplank above a tangled garden, and enter the artist's romantically tumbledown home. It resembles, as his sister Fairlie Kingston puts it, 'a studio that someone happens to sleep in'.

Kingston lived here for almost 50 years in a state of unwavering creative immersion. He bought the atmospheric old house in 1974 with inheritances from his father and from an elderly family friend and neighbour called Olly Eyles. (He speaks fondly about Mrs Eyles in an oral history interview with Margaret Leask, available on the Library's website.) Kingston died in his house on 29 September 2022, aged 79, after a cancer diagnosis in November 2019.

Kingston's art encompassed everything from ephemeral pavement drawings to oil paintings so large they had to be taken out over the balcony for his posthumous exhibition at Australian Galleries last December.

Lavender Bay without Kingston feels like a vacuum, as his long-time friend and neighbour Jan Allen puts it. Signs of his absence are painfully abundant. The MV *Anytime*, Kingston's little wooden boat, that he used as a floating studio, bobs idly in the bay. Luna Park, so close to his heart although shot through with pain because of the tragic Ghost Train fire in 1979, can be seen along the shore.

Statuettes of May Gibbs's Mrs Kookaburra and Dorothy Wall's Blinky Bill peek out from native bushes on the officially named Peter Kingston Walkway that runs along the shore below the house. Ferries criss-cross the bay in a flurry of churning froth.

View towards
Sydney Harbour
Bridge from
Peter Kingston's
bedroom



“These little ferries — every time I see them come in I think, “Oh, I haven’t got it quite right yet,”” the artist told the author in 2001, before his beloved ferries stopped running.

Now that Kingston is gone, the future of his former home isn’t clear. Fairlie says it will probably be sold. But whatever happens, there is one sense in which the house will always remain as it was when a great artist lived and worked here. Shortly after Kingston’s death, Fairlie agreed to the Library’s proposal to photographically document the house as a site of lasting historic and artistic significance.

Future generations might not be able to visit ‘Kingo’s’ house, but they will be able to see virtually every inch of it, inside and out, thanks to the almost forensic rigour with which Library photographers Joy Lai and Russell Perkins recorded it.

Using Heritage Office guidelines, Lai and Perkins photographed the house and its contents in obsessive detail. This project took place just days before the art removalists were due to take away Kingston’s final pictures for the 6 December 2022 exhibition at Australian Galleries in Paddington. *Openbook* editor Phillipa McGuinness walked around the house recording Fairlie’s voice as she explained the provenance of many works and told stories about various items being photographed, creating an invaluable archival record that will sit alongside the photographic rendering of the house.

In due course, the photographs of Kingston’s home and studio will appear on the State Library’s website, providing a unique and lasting resource long after the house becomes someone else’s home.



The Australian Galleries’ exhibition was titled ‘Peter Kingston 08.05.43 – 29.09.22’ and was as close as Kingston came to a memorial, the artist having left Fairlie with strict instructions that his passing not be marked by speeches or fanfare of any kind, let alone a funeral.

Bottom: Linocut print from *Shark-net seahorses of Balmoral* of Kingston’s dog Denton on board the MV *Anytime*. In the accompanying poem, Robert Adamson writes, ‘The deep greens of Middle Harbour, our boat moving smoothly across a glossy surface.’

Top left and right: Ferry linocut prints from Kingston’s artists’ book *Sydney Deckie*, 2004



Top, and bottom left: View towards Sydney Harbour Bridge from Kingston's linocut workroom. Note the figure of cartoon character Boofhead, in profile. Photos by Joy Lai

Bottom right: Kingston's painting equipment. The colour he perhaps used most often was called 'Kelp'. Photo by Joy Lai



facility, and in the 1980s he became known for his pictures of Sydney Harbour and, particularly, Luna Park.

Anne Ryan, Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, was among the throng at the opening of the exhibition at Australian Galleries in December. ‘Peter’s paintings are lovely and they are quintessentially Sydney,’ Ryan told me. ‘But for me, his drawings have that authenticity and rawness.’ Kingston himself used to say that drawing was at the heart of everything he did.

One of Kingston’s endearing characteristics was a guileless enthusiasm for his various heritage and environmental causes, mixed with varying levels of confidence about his artwork. ‘He was never sure. He was always questioning his decisions,’ Ryan said.

But Kingston was always so certain of the rightness of his causes that he attacked them constantly and fearlessly. A case in point was his campaign to help save the dugongs of Hinchinbrook Island when the peaceful sea creatures were under threat from over-development of their habitat on the Queensland coast. To bring the animals’ plight to the attention of politicians, Kingston made a papier-mâché dugong on pram wheels and pushed it into the path of then Prime Minister John Howard and his entourage during one of their morning power walks around Lavender Bay.

‘It could have had a bomb in it, you know? And he’d be lying there in wait,’ Fairlie said. ‘Or he’d have drawn something on the concrete and the minders would pour water over it as they walked past. I’m sure ASIO has a dossier on him.’

Fairlie Kingston is also an artist. Tall and athletic-looking with a tumble of curly hair, she is 11 years Kingston’s junior and was his soulmate ever since their idyllic childhood in harbourside Parsley Bay with their older sister, Caroline. Their father, Percy Kingston, had a decades-long career as the Sydney agent for 20th Century Fox, sparking his son’s lifelong fascination with film and vintage movie theatres. Their mother, Betty, was, in Fairlie’s words, ‘odd, imaginative and humorous’.

After leaving home, and living in an old stables with Jan Allen and others in Surry Hills, Kingston bought the Lavender Bay house next door to his friends Brett and Wendy Whiteley. The stability of home ownership and the freedom from rent payments allowed Kingston to become an artist, Fairlie says.

Kingston gained a degree in architecture but never practised. Although he never studied art formally, his natural abilities were amplified by his association with a wide circle of artist friends such as Brett Whiteley, Garry Shead and Martin Sharp. Kingston inherited his father’s drawing

Above left: Fairlie Kingston in her brother’s studio. Photo by Joy Lai

Above right: Linocut print of seahorses. From the artists’ book Peter Kingston did with Robert Adamson, *Shark-net seahorses of Balmoral*



Other notable Kingston-backed causes included the preservation of Luna Park, the Walsh Bay Wharves, May Gibbs's Neutral Bay home, Nutcote, and the Lady-class ferries. He made artworks about them all, from artists' books (many of which are held in the Library's collection) to linocut prints, drawings, paintings, custom chess sets, lampshades and assemblages.

Kingston said in 2001: 'As an artist, I'm attracted to things that are eccentric and bent and curved, and they're usually things that are old. So one's attracted to draw these sort of things, and not long after they're always pulled down.'

With his deep passion for preserving the best of Sydney's history, it's not surprising that Kingston was an inveterate email writer, spending huge amounts of time bombarding government ministers and other powerful figures. Kingston believed that Australian governments cared little for history.

Indefatigable, Kingston brought endless energy to his art production and was even working in the studio on the day of his death. On that day, a few close friends had gathered at the Lavender Bay house, sitting on the old cinema seats that were an essential part of what he called King's Theatre to watch the film *Out of Africa*, one of his favourites. As usual, he projected the film on a pull-down screen in the living room. 'After about a third of the film, he said "Oh, I'm not feeling great, I might have a bit of a lie down,"' Fairlie said. 'And so by the time the film ended I went in to see if he wanted some lunch, and he'd died.'

They had discussed death frankly, and Kingston had faced his illness without bitterness. He was enormously grateful to Fairlie, who lives in Watsons Bay, for spending so much time

living with him in Lavender Bay in his final months. 'Every day I'd make his bed and he'd behold it as though it was a work of art. He was just an absolute treasure,' Fairlie said.

Fairlie's recipes for smoothies and porridge are still stuck on the fridge in Lavender Bay. They were her sisterly reminder to Kingston to take some time out from his projects and causes to look after himself.

Kingston's death brought their long mateship full circle. 'I remember he did a wonderful thing for me when I was about six,' Fairlie said. 'For my birthday he made me a little puppet theatre and it was absolutely wonderful. It had a winding staircase and all the scenery and backdrops.' Fairlie believes the puppet theatre ignited her imagination. Among her ceramic artworks are little illuminated lighthouses and seaside cottages like the ones near their Parsley Bay childhood home.

Stuart Purves, who represents both siblings at his Australian Galleries, is planning more exhibitions of Peter Kingston's work. 'He had so many things on the go at the same time,' Purves said. 'It's a matter of Fairlie, who's very much in charge of his legacy, categorising the things that are left and making a series [of exhibitions] going on for many years.'

No more artworks will be made in the magical old house in Lavender Bay. But the house will live forever, just as Kingston left it, through the State Library photographers' lenses.

Elizabeth Fortescue is a freelance journalist and regular *Openbook* contributor.

Top left and right: Ferry linocut prints from Kingston's artists' book *Sydney Deckie*, 2004

In focus

We spotlight a range of contemporary photographers from the Library's collection whose work will appear in the new Photography Gallery.

As a bonus, each photographer shares a few words to accompany their photo.

And the crowd goes wild, 2022. Photo by Liz Ham

This image is taken from a larger body of work titled 'Grumble and Moan', which is framed around the changing seasons. For six years now, Sydney performance artist Betty Grumble and my daughter Ramona have been playing and dancing and celebrating life, energy and earth together. These portrait sessions tend to be more performative than formal, as Betty and Ramona playfully and intuitively act out their improvised dialogue with the Earth, and each other.

Betty and I sat down this year and chose nine special images, including this one, and created posters with affirming words on them from the mouths — and pencils — of Grumble and Moan. My role as a photographer shifts to documentary observation — I feel in my element when I'm connecting with people in a photographic way. I just have to stand back and let it happen. It's magical.





The Crowd
GOES WILD!

Girl with a selfie stick, 2016.
Photo by John Janson-Moore

I was photographing the summer storms in 2016, precariously perched up on the cliffs at the north end of Coogee Beach in Sydney, when a girl stepped into the frame to take a photo of herself. She was seemingly oblivious to the clouds gathering behind her. I snapped this image just as a gust of wind caught her dress and before the heavens opened, sending everyone scurrying for cover.







**Bangarra Dance Theatre,
Blak, 6 January 2013.
Photo by Wendell Levi Teodoro**

This photo was taken during a media call — that was also a dress rehearsal — for *Blak*, ahead of its opening night at The Studio at the Sydney Opera House. The production, directed by Bangarra's then Artistic Director Stephen Page and choreographed by Daniel Riley McKinley (who also performed), and with music by David Page and Paul Mac, was about the collision of cultures, old and new. It explored some tough social issues for Indigenous people, but I love the beauty and strength you see in this image.

I used a Nikon D3X. Shooting dancers in low light has always been a challenge, so back in 2013 I invested in the best low-light-capable cameras to capture the sheer beauty of Bangarra Dance and other contemporary dance arts productions.



**Rollergirl, Newtown, 2010.
Photo by Fiona Wolf**

Rollergirl is part of a series I shot around Sydney's Inner West. I could already sense a change in the air, one that affected those buildings that were so characteristic of the area. I wanted to highlight some of these retro-style buildings, but here I also added a person to the scene. This way I preserved what, to me, was so characteristic about the area, and about Sydney in general. All images in this series were taken on a Hasselblad 500 C film camera.



Maria-Louise SALON







**Chinese New Year,
Sze Yup Temple, 2020.
Photo by Joy Lai**

I've been to this temple a few times for Chinese New Year – it's always fun to kick off the year with a celebratory vibe. I took this shot one evening at the start of 2020, Year of the Rat, just as we were hearing murmurings about Wuhan and the bat incident at the wet markets that would change our world. On this day, the temple was packed. When I went back a year later it was much quieter, with signs about social distancing everywhere.

I don't know who the man in the shot is, but he knew I was there. He directed prayers to the north, south and to the centre of the altar. Health, happiness and prosperity for the coming year.

I like going to the Sze Yup Temple because I used to live around the corner in Glebe, and I'd often walk by. It's quite old – it was built in 1898 by Chinese immigrants. It's nostalgic for me, reminiscent of when I lived in Singapore, visiting family there and in Malaysia. I wasn't brought up Buddhist, but the temple experience is so evocative. Especially the incense – my camera gear smelt of incense for days, and so did I.

The Library's new Photography Gallery, opening mid-year, gives a curator — and a conservator — the opportunity to look at the Library's extraordinary image collection with fresh eyes.

400 PHOTO-
GRAPHS.

200 PHOTO-
GRAPHERS.

3 CENTURIES.

IN CONVERSATION WITH Geoff Barker

The scope of this exhibition gives us an opportunity to look at the Library's treasure trove of Australian photography – with close to 2 million photos it is one of the country's largest collections, if not the largest. There are so many photos, we could re-mount this exhibition with completely new photographs every single year and it wouldn't lose any of its significance. There's no doubt that visitors would keep coming back too.

I've been working on this exhibition for more than a year. There is always lots of work across the entire curatorial team with acquisitions, events and so on, but getting the ok to focus entirely on the new Photography Gallery was the most wonderful thing for me. We're always diving into the collection, finding something and thinking 'oh wow', before putting it back, hoping to find a use for it one day. So being given the time and being told 'off you go' is fabulous.

Our team's remit was to stage the first extensive survey of the Library's renowned photographic collection. It's a grid-based, open display, which means there will be no visible captioning. Instead, visitors will view captions on digital kiosks. But with such a large collection, the immediate challenge is not what to use, but what not to use. So, we had to set parameters.

At first, we thought we could divide it by format or by subject area. But it soon became clear that this approach didn't give an overview of the collection; we were just selecting things and putting them into pots. So, we decided to set rules to make us less subjective about our choices.



The oldest photo in the collection: Dr William Bland, 1845, daguerreotype. Photo by George Baron Goodman

It would be chronological.

We would try and find a photograph for every year between the earliest-known photograph to survive in Australia, taken in 1845 and held in the Library, through to 2022. This approach has worked. There are some periods where it drops off, around the 1880s, for example. But having set the condition where we had a photograph for every year meant that particular photographers – or collections – won't dominate the exhibition as they might have otherwise.

Something I hadn't really appreciated until we'd put it all together was that we had created a strange pictorial history of Australia, which evolves in what feels like real time. With the building of the Sydney Opera House, for example, over 10 years or so you see photographs showing various stages of completion and each one feels fresh.

It would include as many photographers as possible.

We didn't want to just focus on the famous photos but tried to include as many as we could, and be as gender diverse as possible. Not easy in the early years, but towards the latter part, perhaps surprisingly, a diverse range of photographers emerged that we didn't even realise we had in the collection. Of course, we had to have some iconic ones — there are some things in the collection we just had to have. *The Sunbaker* by Max Dupain is one example (see right).



Clockwise from top left:

The Sunbaker, 1937, Max Dupain, photo-mechanical print made in 1989

The Sunbaker, Culburra Beach, NSW, 1937. Film negative taken by Max Dupain

The envelope with the photographer's print instructions. All purchased from Jill White, 2015

Different iterations of Max Dupain's *The Sunbaker*

The original print of Dupain's friend, the eponymous sunbaker Harold Salvage, is from 1937. Dupain took a number of photographs of Salvage sunbathing at Culburra beach that year. The negative of his preferred original version has been lost but we are displaying a rare vintage print found in an album of photographs donated to the Library by Dupain's friend, Chris Vandyke.

The Sunbaker image we are most familiar with was made from a

second negative taken at the same time which became hugely popular when it was printed in 1975 as part of a major exhibition. The negative for this version is quite different, and we are displaying it along with its original envelope with Dupain's instructions for how to print it. Looking at both, you can see how much darkroom work Dupain did to prepare the print for exhibition.

Also, we've got a 1989 contemporary print signed by Dupain that was

published to raise funds for the Royal Blind Society. When visitors look at everything chronologically, they'll see *The Sunbaker* in 1989, where you would expect it to be. But as you walk through the exhibition going back in time, you'll see *The Sunbaker* appear again in the 1930s because that's when it was taken. It's a nice way of showing how photographs aren't just made in one moment and aren't always about one particular time.

We would try and include contemporary photographers' own stories about the photos in captions when we could.

I find that a photographer's words can connect me to the photo. Sometimes a photo can be like a window, and you feel yourself being objective as you peer through it. But hearing the photographer's voice as well adds another more emotive dimension.

Kangaroo in front of a burning house,
Lake Conjola, 24 December 2019.
Photo by Matthew Abbott

Award-winning photographer Matthew Abbott's iconic image of a kangaroo running from the bushfires at Lake Conjola, for example, prompted him to write:

... when I approached Conjola, I saw unmatched mayhem. I drove towards where they were fleeing. On the first road I came across, every house was burning. Further down the hill a little after 1 pm, I saw a group of kangaroos coming up the middle of the road, obviously running from another fire. One kangaroo ran right between myself and the burning house. I was able to make several frames of the frightened animal as it dashed past and then hopped away, safe at least for the moment.



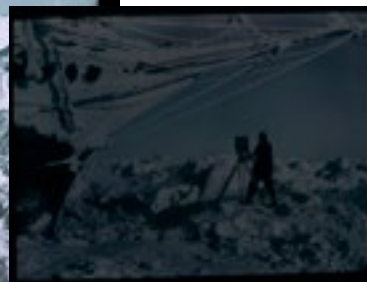
We tried to include as many formats as we could.

Some of the Library's larger collections are made up entirely of photographic negatives. You obviously can't display photographic negatives easily. So, the solution we've come up with is to include a few examples of negatives with their own illumination to give viewers an idea of what they're seeing, as with the Frank Hurley Paget plates from Antarctica (see below). But most will be exhibited as prints. It's the same with digital-born material, which we didn't want to display on a screen, so we'll be printing these as well. Everything will be displayed in a big open-plan grid style, broken into decades.

So it's not about formats, it's not about a subject, it's not about a photographer — it could be anything. This allows the collection to tell its own complex story.



Bugler William Mulready, Romani, Egypt, 1916, gelatin silver print. Photo by JF Smith



Left: Frank Hurley's illuminated Paget plate, and above, the same plate without illumination



Panorama of the 3rd Australian General Hospital, Lemnos, Greece, 1915, gelatin silver prints. Photo by Private Albert William Savage

Until you get all the images together, you're working on each item one by one. As curators, we're lucky to work with objects. If you're a researcher, you tend to approach from the subject. In other words, 'I'm going to write about this thing,' and then you find the material to do that. We find the objects, write about them and, as we put them all together, we start to get a broader perspective.

We've tried to vary the captions as much as possible. With so many objects to display, we can allocate only about 80–100 words for each photo. By the time we finished, we had 40,000 words describing this eclectic pictorial history of Australia.

At this scale you start to see themes repeat. One is First Nations content. We talked through portrayals of First Nations people with our Indigenous Engagement team, hoping to select images that don't project a consistently negative view. While we found suitable material from most decades, it became more difficult as we went back in time. Most nineteenth-century photos are clearly lacking in empathy, but I guess this is a statement in itself. So, visitors to the exhibition will see First Nations people all the way through, but not grouped together.

The theme of war recurs often in the exhibition. The first example is from 1899, when NSW troops left for the Boer War. Moving to World War I, we have an amazing booklet by Frederick Burnell. It's just a little exercise book but it is full

of photographs he took when the first Australian troops went to seize German New Guinea. Burnell, a journalist, ended up writing a book about the episode, Australia's first engagement in the war. This little booklet includes photographs of William Williams, the first soldier from the Australian forces to die during World War I.

We've also got photographs from the Gallipoli landing at Anzac Cove. I guess people were more preoccupied with other things, so there are not many photos of the dawn landing on 25 April 1915. The picture we have selected is a slightly blurry action shot showing the troops landing that first morning. Also, we've got a wonderful album of photos documenting the work of the doctors and nurses looking after the wounded at the Australian army hospital on the island of Lemnos, across from Gallipoli. It is an example of how the breadth of our collection offers different views of the war.

There's a rare photograph of William Mulready, the youngest Australian to leave with the first contingent of the Light Horse Regiment in December 1914, sitting down after the Battle of Romani in Egypt in 1916. In his diaries, which the Library holds, he describes his engagement at Romani almost like a Boys' Own story. In the exhibition — and this relates to presenting images in their original formats — people may be surprised to see the original print is a tiny little thing. The importance of something doesn't necessarily equate to size or scale.

Lt. Koff - Lt. Hayer 77



Bringing the wounded as prisoners on board the Benina



Private Wilkin Captain Parkley

The wounded from Saigon



Above left: Wounded soldiers, Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force, New Guinea, 1914, gelatin silver prints. Photo by FS Burnell

Above: Linda Malden, Spring Ridge Station, 1944. Photo by Norman Herfort for ACP Magazines Ltd

The years 1938 and 1945 had an abundance of great photos, but even in lean years, there was usually something. There were some years during the 1970s where we seemed to acquire lots of photos of public figures opening schools and other institutions. They're kind of interesting, but having accumulated a body of photographs, you have to match the standard that they set when you're looking for more. That spurred us on.

We had a few challenges with the 1890s, but of course the really big problem area was the 1840s because there isn't a lot of photography that has survived from then. Although the Library has some really great 1840s images — including the earliest surviving photograph, an 1845 portrait — we worried that putting too many portraits around it might undersell the first one. So we've just left that one as representative of 1845.

Chauvel father and son photographs

During 1919 and 1920, the Library put out a call for World War I soldiers' diaries and acquired albums of photographs as well. So our collections around soldiers in World War I are strong, but rather than being official war photos, they're photos taken by the soldiers themselves. One of these albums was taken by James Allen Chauvel, the brother of General Sir Henry George (Harry) Chauvel, AIF commander of the Desert Mounted Corps in Palestine. James was working on logistics so wasn't always on the frontlines, but the album is full of wonderful photos, including a series about Turkish prisoners.

There's a striking picture in the exhibition of Australian soldiers and Turkish prisoners working together to prepare a meal in big 44-gallon drums over open fires. The pictures have lots of interesting details: some of the soldiers have bare feet and the minimal number of Australian soldiers suggests things were pretty relaxed.

James Chauvel survived the war. In 1940 his son Charles Chauvel made the film *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, about the Australian Light Horse Brigade in Palestine, filmed on the sand dunes at Cronulla. The Library has Charles Chauvel's stills from the film and among them is an image of Turkish soldiers being fed on the film set. He must have recreated a scene reminiscent of his father's original photograph. I find this kind of juxtaposition interesting. That notion between what's real and what's not with photos ... we tend to assume that what's in a photo is real. What's really on display here is the comparison between a father's real-life experiences and his son's recreation of that event.

Top: Turkish prisoners being fed in Palestine. Photo by James Allen Chauvel
Bottom: Film still from *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, directed by Charles Chauvel



I guess I have a few sentimental favourites.

The exhibition will be up for a year. Usually we would do a changeover during that period, but we're putting our best foot forward and showing everything we can, so we want as many people as possible to see it.

The centrepiece of the new gallery will be the original glass-plate negatives of the Holtermann Panorama of Sydney, from 1875, 9 metres in length and one of the treasures of the Library. These mammoth negatives will be displayed for the first time. Each big plate will be built into a large perspex display case that our conservation department has developed with specialised lighting, so they can be on display for the entirety of the exhibition. We looked at doing copies, but the actual negatives themselves are so amazing. We'll have a kiosk alongside it so people can see the panorama in positive and will be able to zoom into it. The plates are really big, about 50 by 48 centimetres each, so if you compare it to a scan of a modern 35mm photographic negative, you can imagine the incredible level of detail held in these nineteenth century plates.

Most of the Library's photographs have been acquired for their documentary value rather than for their artistic or aesthetic value, but this exhibition acknowledges and celebrates the artistry of many commercial, amateur and street photographers. When visitors look at these photographs they will realise that often there's not much between them and art photography. This rationale informed our decision to show originals; exhibition prints are often done at a larger size and framed to look a particular way, but in this exhibition you'll be seeing the prints as they were made. Sometimes they're just contact prints, reference prints or prints put into albums to share with family members.

That's another reason we decided to move away from the idea of framing all the pictures for an 'art hang'. The exhibition's grids are very much about showing the pictures as they are.

If they're negatives, we print them as positives but we're not trying to make them look like artworks. We're not doing extra work on them. So, if they've got visible sprocket holes, for example, that's how we reproduce them. Sometimes there is a little bit of touching up, but as a general rule we're trying to leave it as an inversion of the negative as much as we can.

Our 3D exhibition designer Jemima Woo has done a fantastic job to create interest and variation in all of these grids, so visitors can get an idea of the diversity of formats and subjects.

The majority of photographs are black and white, but arranging things chronologically means there are some surprises. Colour starts in earnest from the 1980s and now almost everything is colour. There are sporadic bits of colour going back to the 1950s, but then it goes to black and white, although some prints are sepia-toned. Going further back into the early period of photography, colour makes a surprising appearance with a variety of hand-coloured ambrotypes and prints.

I guess I have a few sentimental favourites. I've been overwhelmed by ACP photographers Norman Herfort, Alec Iverson and Ray Olson. They are consummate press photographers and many of their photographs are gobsmacking. So, for example, there's a 1944 photo of Linda Malden working on a windmill at Spring Ridge (see page 34) and a 1945 photo of painter Stan Giddens walking up the Harbour Bridge (opposite). The photographers were sent along to cover those events as part of their everyday jobs. They produced stunning images, partly because they were given access to extraordinary people and circumstances.

This exhibition launches the Library's first dedicated photographic gallery. It's an important addition to Sydney's cultural spaces because there are very few institutional galleries devoted to photography that have the scope of this one.

Geoff Barker is a senior curator.



Stan Giddens, painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1945. Photo by Alec Iverson for ACP Magazines Ltd

BEHIND THE SCENES

with senior conservator Helen Casey

A conservator's job is to advocate for all cultural material, throughout the whole exhibition process. We are responsible for caring for each item and facilitating access through display.

We work with the creative producer, curator and designer to deliver an exhibition's story and vision, coordinating treatment of collection material where required, and working out how to mount each item in a way that's both supportive and reversible, using archival materials only. We must ensure that environmental conditions are right for the long-term care of an item while it's on display: an inert, pollutant-free display enclosure; stable relative humidity and temperature; and controlled lighting.

The scope of the Photography Gallery's inaugural exhibition – all types of photographs from the 1840s through to the present day – offered a unique challenge: to display this vast array of historical formats in a similar manner, floating within a transparent contemporary structure.

One third of the 200 original images required some form of treatment. The priority is always to ensure an item's structural stability. For works on paper, this might mean repairing a tear or hole, reducing cockling (rippled paper) or flattening curled or folded edges. We also consider when aesthetic intervention is appropriate; this might mean surface cleaning, stain reduction, or possible re-touching of missing imagery due to surface loss. In consultation with the curator, we might tone down these areas to blend in with the surrounding original surface, so the losses are not visually distracting.

If time allows, we carry out more complex treatments directed at long-term preservation, such as removing a photo from a non-original support or backing that is acidic and degraded. Our specialist conservators work across all photographic types, not just those on paper: daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, opalotypes and glass-plate and cellulose-based negatives.

Many items already have their own display history. Historical photos were often adhered into albums, or onto a board with a window mount overlay, and then framed. Over a photo's journey, its display format and use may change depending on its owners. By the time it reaches us, it may have become separated from its original window mount and frame, it may have a degraded or damaged non-original mount, or it may have been adhered to a backing board as part of an old restoration or an outdated Library storage system.

Before they are displayed, where applicable, photos are usually fitted with a new window mount to retain the original intent or historical use, or to cover an old support board that is visually distracting. A window mount focuses the eye on the image. For this exhibition, however, curator Geoff Barker wants to give the viewer a different experience – one like walking through a 3D version of the Library's catalogue, where photos float in a transparent acrylic grid without any interpretive window mounting or framing. We affectionately came to refer to the display as 'warts and all'! This different approach across such a range of photographs challenged us to re-evaluate our thinking around the presentation of historic material.

A good example of displaying an item as it exists in the collection, without interpretation, is this World War I image (see right), taken from the deck of HMAS *Australia*, of warships in line formation. It was produced in the 1920s by Colarts Studio in Melbourne. They would blow up small photos – often taken by frontline soldiers – into larger-scale works that were then subtly coloured by air brushing, a new technique that had been recently developed in the United States. Colarts toured a collection of these photos around Australia. They were first adhered to repurposed standard boards and then window-mounted in black before being framed. This process is well documented, and we have several photos in the collection with original mounts.

In previous displays at the Library, we re-mounted the photos with black windows to recreate Colarts' original aesthetic intention. The photo selected for the new Photography Gallery exhibition, however, no longer has an original window, but remains adhered to the original 'scrap' piece of mount board with an old standard border that is not properly aligned because it was not intended to be seen but, rather, covered with a window mount. The support board has tears from where the adhered window was removed. So, while the mount board support is part of the original photo's display, it was never meant to be visible. In our exhibition, the photo will be presented as it currently exists in the collection without a window mount to cover the old backing board and focus the eye. Who can say which is more authentic?



Colarts' air-brushed photos of warships. The image on the left is adhered to a standard board, while that on the right is window mounted in black.

We conservators collaborate with the designer, in this case Jemima Woo, to come up with mounting and support solutions within the overall exhibition vision. Items with different formats and materials, naturally enough, have different needs, so mounting everything in a relatively uniform manner can be a challenge. But we came up with a solution that will work for most photos. Each will be hinged to a white conservation mount board using conservation-grade adhesive and Japanese tissue hinges. The mount board is adhered to a thin piece of aluminium veneer which has a strip of L-shaped acrylic stapled to the top edge. The acrylic ledge has two holes that hook over two pins fixed into a 20 mm thick acrylic block that has been screwed to the wall. For some photos adhered to heavier board, such as the Colarts photo, an extra supportive edge is fixed to the bottom of the aluminium to provide a shelf. We also have custom-made acrylic supports to display cased miniatures and open albums.

Mounting glass-plate and cellulose-based negatives that require back lighting for the image to be clearly

visible — in other words, illuminating a negative — within this floating structure, required extra planning. Electroluminescent phosphor sheets are ideal for this as they are thin, can be cut to size and emit light. The phosphor does not generate heat and can be put on a timer to turn it off during closing hours. The plastic sheet is part of a layering system to reduce the light exposure behind the negative, which is placed within a custom-made acrylic support attached to the wall. The wire and transformer box can be hidden in the wall behind the item.

A good example of backlighting is with iconic photographer Frank Hurley's Paget plates, the only colour plates from the Shackleton Antarctic expedition, 1914–1916 (see page 32). We're familiar with lots of pictures of Shackleton's expedition, but they're reproduced contemporarily, through scanning or printing. There aren't many that Hurley made himself, in part because he didn't hold copyright: Shackleton did.

Because the Library holds the diaries that relate to Shackleton's expedition, we can display the page where Shackleton records making

Hurley break all the glass negatives, except for 120, the number he can carry with him on the boat back to Elephant Island and safety. When the *Endurance* got crushed by ice, Hurley had to dive into the water to rescue a container, soldered tight, containing his glass plates. He brought it back to Shackleton and they sat there one afternoon breaking all but the 120 plates, because Shackleton knew that Hurley would have tried to put extra plates where he wasn't supposed to.

As challenging as it is, visitors will see why we wanted to show the Paget plates. Here we see Frank Hurley taking photographs under the bows of the *Endurance* during the Shackleton expedition.

This early method of colour photography has its own unique beauty when seen in glass-plate form. In the image on the right on page 32, with no light, the plate looks almost black. With the addition of light on the left, the plate reveals its hidden treasure.

The Photography Gallery will open in the middle of 2023.

THIS DEVASTATING FEVER

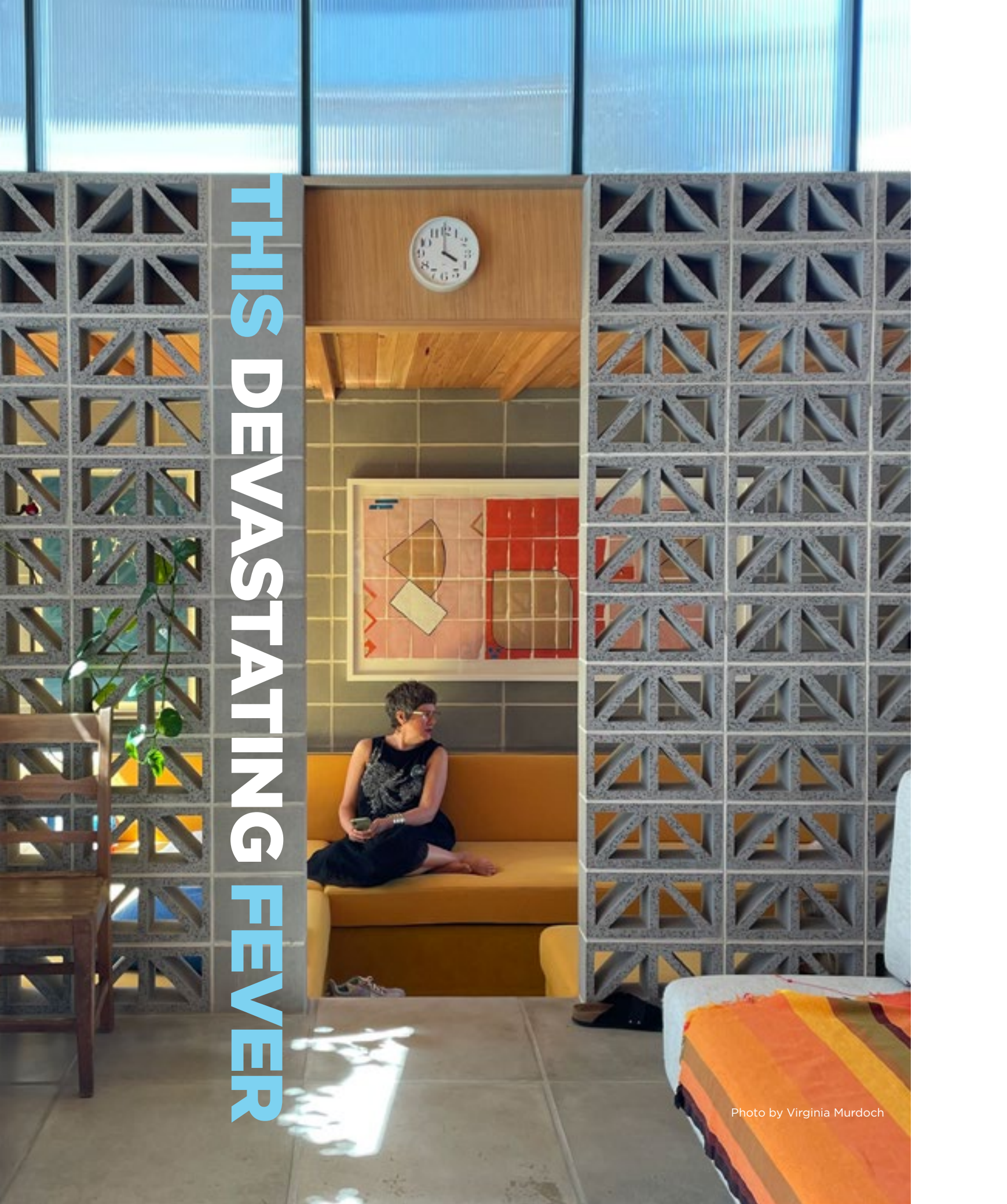


Photo by Virginia Murdoch



Sophie Cunningham
— novelist, essayist,
tree-lover and
writers' advocate —
finds that everything
is connected.



Sophie Cunningham photographed under a Moreton Bay fig in the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria for *Gardening Australia*. Photo by Rachel Coffey

Sophie Cunningham in Sydney. Photo by Rachel Knepper

When I meet Sophie Cunningham at a Brunswick East bakery cafe, it is the beginning of a strange Melbourne summer — howling winds, grey skies, sporadic, violent downpours of rain. It's the kind of weird weather that preoccupies much of the writer's work, which magnifies the problems of climate change and the ever-changing physical world.

These concerns make their way into Cunningham's third and most recent novel, *This Devastating Fever*, which took more than 15 years to complete and, over many iterations, became a channel for her own evolution, as a writer and as a human being. 'It was a project that almost became like a mirror or a friend — it kept morphing as the years went on so, to some extent, it became a reflection of myself and my preoccupations,' the author says. 'It reflected my changing thinking ... I quite like the challenge of having started a project with one idea, and

then there being so much change in the world, and probably in me as I got older. It kept bending and twisting and changing.'

In the novel, it is 2020 and a Melbourne writer, Alice Fox, is struggling to complete her manuscript — also titled *This Devastating Fever* — which is about the Bloomsbury group of writers, in particular Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia. There are mirrors between Alice and Leonard: the Woolfs lived through another pandemic — the Spanish flu — and Leonard was a carer for Virginia, as Alice is for her neighbour, Hen. Cunningham's novel was always titled *This Devastating Fever*, after a phrase Leonard himself wrote to describe lust, but as the world changed and Melbourne found itself deep in lockdown, it took on many new meanings.

The physical world is always changing, and it has changed immeasurably in the time since the Woolfs were alive, as Cunningham saw first-hand in her research. 'Landscapes are changing more rapidly than human culture,' she says. 'A lot of sections in the novel are set on the South Downs (on the south-eastern coast of England), and I walked the South Downs in 2010. When I sat down almost eight years later to write a whole lot of those scenes, I suddenly realised that I should check if it's still like I remember it. I also checked if the South Downs

that I walked in 2010 had any relationship to the landscape that Virginia and Leonard walked every day — and I realised, no.’

The many branches of Cunningham’s thinking are apparent in her cerebral, non-linear novel, which asks big-picture questions through Alice’s process of writing and unwriting, and through Leonard and Virginia, who appear both as real people in their own timeline, and as apparitions who commune with the writer as she grapples with her manuscript. This latter approach was a way for Cunningham to work through some of the ethical questions around animating complex historical figures in fiction, as her character, Alice, does the same thing.

‘I was aware of the complications — it is not quite exactly unethical, but doing it well is really complicated,’ she says. ‘That’s one of the reasons why I went more meta, so that the Alice character could be having those discussions with herself.

‘It’s very boring to have a character who is really awful all the time, or really fabulous all the time. Neither of those are interesting, and I wanted to be critical of the colonial practices that Leonard Woolf engaged in, but I also wanted to critique the assumption that he’d just been patriarchal and awful in his relationship with Virginia.’

Cunningham’s fascination with Leonard Woolf began during a visit to Sri Lanka in 2004 when, on the recommendation of her friend and fellow author Michelle de Kretser, she sought out his writings on the country. But Woolf was a colonial administrator, and the decade-plus Cunningham spent working on the novel teased out her own complicity in colonialism, trickling down to the character of Alice, who undertakes a similar mental journey. ‘My understanding of my own role changed over the writing of the book — I went into the book with a clear sense of the politics of colonisation and I’d thought a lot about it, but I hadn’t thought a lot about my own role, and that’s what changed,’ she says.

‘Over the years, I’ve become aware that a White person critiquing colonialism is very different to someone who’s *experienced* colonialism critiquing it. I didn’t want to not write about it for that reason, but it did mean that I had a much stronger sense of trying to stay in my lane.’

We discuss another recent Australian novel, Michelle Cahill’s *Daisy and Woolf*, which places its writer protagonist, Mina, in dialogue with minor character Daisy Simmons, a woman of colour who appears fleetingly in Virginia Woolf’s 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway*, as Mina similarly wrestles with

a manuscript. It’s an interesting — and serendipitous — juxtaposition to *This Devastating Fever*. ‘I was so pleased that Michelle had written about that time and that world from the point of view of a woman of colour,’ Cunningham says.*

While Alice and Cunningham may seem to have a lot in common, including being the author of a book-in-progress named *This Devastating Fever*, the writer stresses that the character is not an avatar of herself, writerly or otherwise. She seems fatigued by the very suggestion. ‘Good creative writing, fiction or nonfiction, is about making things feel real,’ she says. ‘Leonard and Virginia really existed, but they’re fictional creations as well — the whole thing is a fictional creation and with them, similarly, I drew on some real things that happened in their life, but twisted or moulded them for the purposes of the novel.’

When Cunningham uses the first-person perspective across her body of work — and she does, often — it is largely a narrative technique, rather than a personal admission. ‘Even in my non-fiction, the “me” is a kind of fixed character — she’s a

character that draws on me and is useful to create a narrative,’ she says, citing her 2011 book *Melbourne*, in which the Sophie character goes on walks to uncover parts of the city’s history against the droughts and bushfires that were ravaging it.

The exception is the deeply personal essay collection *City of Trees* (2019), which draws on the memoir genre more overtly, combining it with travel and nature writing. Cunningham was dealing with grief and loss in her private life during this book’s creation, and while much of that material didn’t make it into the final version, the echoes of personal struggle are intimately felt. Juxtaposing this with the devastation of climate, she weaves an ode to the world around and inside her.

The writer’s love for trees, in particular, is overwhelmingly evident in the tender way she writes about them, and the ways in which they are ever-present in her work. ‘A tree is never just a tree,’ she writes in *City of Trees*. ‘It speaks of the history of the place where it has grown or been planted ... Trees speak ... of the endless lust of governments (small and large) to control places and the ways in which trees should or should not grow, the ways in which humans should or should not live.’

In 2021, Cunningham co-authored *Wonder*, a coffee table book celebrating 175 years of Melbourne’s Royal Botanic Gardens. ‘Trees have almost become my guide,’ she says. ‘I’ve made trees my thing because in the way I filter my

‘Trees have almost become my guide.’

'I feel this strongly: things are both random and connected, all the time.'

information and how I'm trying to write, I'm very interested in not putting humans at the centre of everything.'

One part of de-centring humans is putting a spotlight on the animal experience, as Cunningham lovingly does in *This Devastating Fever* through a host of non-human characters. In the last few years, the author has ventured into writing books for children. Her picture books *Tippy and Jellybean* (2020) and *Flipper and Finnegan* (2022) platform animals' plights and rights by telling stories — about koalas surviving a bushfire and penguins surviving an oil spill thanks to the generosity of hand-knitted jumpers — in ways that are simple enough for young children to understand. Proceeds from *Tippy and Jellybean* went to the Bushfire Wildlife Emergency Fund.

Of all Cunningham's projects, one of my favourites is @sophtreeofday, an Instagram account to which she has posted a photo of a tree every day since 2016. The images are a mixture of Cunningham's own, and photos that others have sent her from around the world. There's something incredibly peaceful in its simplicity — a feeling of relief when doomscrolling to see a lone, still photo of a tree among Instagram's busy and demanding reels and advertisements.

'It's kind of like a meditation — every morning I get up and I look at tree photos,' she says. 'Things are very bad, particularly environmentally, and so you can get into a very bad habit of looking at things and going, "oh my god, that tree is dying" or "that tree won't be around in 50 years," but sometimes you just have to look at something and think, "that's beautiful."' '

Cunningham has been in the writing and publishing industry for close to four decades now, having started out at the age of 21 with independent Melbourne publisher McPhee Gribble. She's something of a literary polymath: she has held many roles, from publisher at Allen & Unwin to magazine editor — she was at the helm of *Meanjin* from 2008 to 2011. She was also a co-founder of the Stella Prize, which launched in 2011, an experience she remembers as being 'a really wonderful exercise in realising that advocacy can be effective'. In 2019, she became a Member of the Order of Australia for her contributions to Australian literature. Most recently, Cunningham was appointed as Chair of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA), championing the rights of authors and illustrators around the country.

Despite some sporadic progress, there is still much to do to improve the state of affairs for writers in Australia. Cunningham laments that things have gotten harder for

authors — while there's more diversity in publishing and more voices are being heard, and adaptations create more ways through which writers' work can be experienced, the financial side still leaves much to be desired. A recent report found that the average annual income for authors is just \$18,200, meaning that most rely on other income streams and jobs. What's more, literature frequently receives the smallest slice of the arts budget pie, with the majority of funds often going towards music, theatre and visual arts.

When we speak in December, Cunningham discusses the ASA's push for digital lending rights, which would see authors receive royalties for the borrowing of ebooks and audiobooks, in the same way they do for physical books held in public and educational libraries, through the government's Public Lending Rights scheme. 'People can't endlessly produce content for no income,' she says. In January 2023, it was announced that from July, this change will come into effect under the Albanese government's new national cultural policy. It's the first step in what will hopefully be a significant shift for authors under a new government.

'It's good that Tony Burke, Minister for the Arts, is also the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, because that connection between writing and publishing as an industry with a workforce and labour issues is really important, rather than that romantic idea about the arts — you do it because you love it,' Cunningham says. 'Yes, you do do it because you love it, but you can't talk a lot about the need for diversity if there is no financial reward, because what you end up with is people who can afford to keep writing.'

Cunningham speaks with passion about this; the same determination and devotion reverberates through her writing. One of the author's great strengths is in tying together seemingly disparate threads to create a kaleidoscopic view of the ways in which all things collide. She said it best herself in an essay in *City of Trees*, drawing, again, on the man who reached through the decades to guide her latest work: 'I feel this strongly: things are both random and connected, all the time. Leonard Woolf used to say "nothing matters", by which he meant "everything matters". All of it. The lot.'

Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen is a Vietnamese-Australian writer and critic based in Naarm/Melbourne. Her work has appeared widely in both media and literary publications.

*Michelle Cahill was profiled in the Summer 2022 edition of *Openbook*.



Illustrations by Rosie Handley



Brink

One of the first things Tracy noticed was her heightened sense of smell. The metallic mineral base of her face cream, the limp slabs of raw fish at the supermarket even when she gave the counter a wide berth, the way John's post-run sweat took on the onion whiff of a Whopper. Even now, as she walks along the coastal path back towards her hotel, Tracy picks up the scent of incense, carried on the breeze from someone's apartment in Bronte.

Of course, the missed periods she put down to perimenopause. What else was a woman of forty-five going to think? In a way, the timing was lucky — or perhaps unlucky, depending on how she chose to think of it. She has only the one week to consider things before Dr Lee wants to see her again. Needs to see her again. Before it is too late and there is no choice in the matter.

Tracy knows the exact afternoon she became pregnant. It's in her diary. *Massage, 1.15 pm, 20 June*. The masseur had rubbed oil into her back with his warm hands, kneaded her buttocks through the towel, flicked his fingers along her inner thigh, and she'd gone home and tugged John, surprised yet willing, into the bedroom. Sex had become inexorably laconic over their fourteen years together, to the point that after John had participated in a men's health study, he had said coldly, late one night, 'I lied to them. I exaggerated. I said we had sex twenty-four times a year!' She still smiles when she thinks of it.

Stripping off her heavy coat, she slows as she approaches the sprawling cemetery perched atop the cliff, taking in row upon row of marble gravestones, statues, porticos, and the shiny whipped clouds that press low, beneath the blue sky. Grass clumps across neglected graves, peeks through the cement, and the paths between are well trodden. Turning, she gazes out on the ocean, the ripple of deep velvet water, creased with gentle frills of white. She will have to tell John soon. Perhaps tonight, after dinner. Or before dinner. Or maybe never.

At her birthday party, earlier in the year, a friend had announced she'd left her husband and three sons, had moved into a townhouse on her own, and behind Tracy's astonishment, her words of support and, yes, a barely hidden curiosity in the particulars, her inebriated mind knew she'd revisit this conversation at a more sober moment, would question her own — stagnant? comfortable? — relationship with John.

What was it, she sometimes wondered, that kept them together. A lack of imagination, the need for companionship, convenience? Or perhaps their marriage was actually good, a portrait of success and commitment, fortitude even. She had a difficult time gauging if their intimacies were enough, compared to other people's. Their united front at trivia nights, yet separate meals at home in front of their laptops. The sharing of expenses, yet division of laundry and exercise. Sometimes, she feels great gulps of affection for him but, also, there are the dips of disappointment, when he doesn't soak his dishes, or remains unmoved by a beautiful meal. How funny that it is in this moment when she is most tethered to him, that she feels as though a rupture might be tolerable.

A salty mist sprays her face as an older couple walks past, their shaggy labradoodle stinking of whatever offal he's found to snuffle his damp whiskers in. Tracy pulls her coat back on and admits to herself that she has been feeling a little disconnected since their own dog died six months beforehand. Perhaps it was Gussie, cheerful and a dreadful shedder, who had been their link through the previous years. Or maybe it's not so much distance between her and John, as quietness.

As she follows the coastal path again, her parents come to mind. Her father, who had believed a squirt of tomato sauce improved all dishes, be it a stir-fry or Sunday roast. Her mother, who donned a series of fabulous wigs — cropped and curled, shimmery and long, blonde and shaggy. Tracy was ten before she realised her mother slid a wig on each morning simply because she couldn't stop tweaking strands of hair from her scalp until her head resembled a weathered tennis ball.

How much her parents had argued, about when to pay bills, and young Mrs Robbins who worked at the newsagency (tweak tweak), and dust under the cabinets, and whether communism could work within ideal parameters ('humans will always be humans, Steven'). Yet, despite all this noise, and arch messages to each other via their children, there was something real about their relationship. Some sort of essence that grounded them into this world, leaving enough clamour and evidence to last into the next.

She glances back over her shoulder at the cemetery sprawled across the rise, wondering how long it will remain there, before some council relocates it to make way for lucrative land sales. Or before jelly bush and wattles reclaim the deserted clifftop after an apocalypse of fire or water or disease drives the living away. Years, she thinks, maybe hundreds of years. But even then, the gravestones, the fences, the road, the path, are all, in the end, temporary. Wasn't everything temporary?

Tracy strides along the headland into Coogee, eyes watering as she gazes out on the ocean, nostrils flaring at the scent of vinegary hot chips. The wind makes her ears ache, and she's a little sweaty and has to remove her coat again. She'd been worried that returning to Coogee would be challenging, would remind her too much of her life there with Kieran, the fiancé of her younger years (never to be promoted to spouse), but, actually, she is still quite taken with its familiar light, its sunny disposition.

When John, planning his attendance at a nearby conference, had booked them into the boutique hotel behind the Coogee pub (beer-soaked carpet, Kieran's delight that she knew the words to 'Khe Sanh', the scent of the Aramis he'd slapped across his jaw) she hadn't said anything, and all John had remarked, knowing she'd lived in Coogee in her early twenties, was, 'I suppose you're going to point out everything that has changed.' So she hadn't pointed out how the video shop had turned into a fried chicken takeaway, how the bakery where she had once seen a famous actress was now a Mexican restaurant, the way the steps that

Other memories rise, too, crusted to feelings of regret like barnacles on pumice, but she turns her back on them, returning to Beach Street.

led down to the beach, where she shared fish and chips with the seagulls, seemed to be the same.

She detours to the right to search for the unit she lived in with Kieran on Bream Street, but on reaching the block, she can't recall if the unit was the one on the left or the right. It was new when they moved in, cream with robin-blue trim, and even though its exterior has been buffeted by sea salt and neglect, she is still reminded of peppery vegetable soup, heavy on the potato and carrot, and tiny blond cockroaches that furtively scurried their way between the wall cavities, and the sound of thumping footsteps from the apartment above. Other memories rise, too, crusted to feelings of regret like barnacles on pumice, but she turns her back on them, returning to Beach Street.

She trots down towards the Pavilion, bright and fancy now, quite rough and ready back in her day. Their unit block was almost directly behind it, and at a certain time each Saturday evening the nightclub would boom its last song, 'Oh, What a Night', and Tracy would lie alone in bed, waiting for Kieran to return home from a work dinner or drinks or a late meeting and wonder if she should be down there instead, dancing.

She comes to a restaurant — The Betel Nut — which used to be a little pie shop, its waft of gravy and pastry hitting the yawning pit of her stomach every morning on her way to the bus stop. A sign outside the restaurant advertises a tea ceremony, only performed on weekend afternoons, at 3 pm. She imagines Japanese women in silk robes with flowing golden sleeves that they must gently lift out of the way. Glancing at her watch, she sees she has time, knowing John still has at least two hours left of lectures to sit through. She pulls the doors open and passes through a pleasant fug of curry sauce, burnt soy sauce, lemongrass, to reach the stairs the waitress directs her to, telling her the tea ceremony is on the next floor.



She enters a long room, honey-timbered with a low driftwood-style table, cushions neatly arranged on the floor. A young woman is seated in the middle, a tray of teapots and cups in front of her, and her back is to the plate glass window that overlooks startling blue and white layers of sand and ocean, sky and clouds, the neat bollards outside the Pavilion, the flickering navy flags atop their shiny poles. The woman has curly hair, wears a simple cotton shirt with Chinese buttons and beckons for Tracy to join the others already at the table. Tracy chooses a cushion to the left and, kneeling, she folds her coat and handbag on the polished floor behind her.

There are four people seated along the length of the table, and a young man at the end closest to her. The woman with curly hair tells them that her name is Zoe, and that she will be conducting the tea ceremony today. Her irises are blue, much clearer than the sea, with dark rims.

Zoe pauses and looks at each of them, making kindly eye contact, at leisure, a small smile lifting her lips. It becomes very quiet and Tracy hopes her tummy doesn't gurgle above the white noise of the ocean, the ambient music.

'Today, I want to share with you the practice of Zen while drinking tea,' Zoe says. 'I want you to think of your time here today, drinking tea with me, as a form of meditation.' She continues discussing

the merits of tea and her voice is calm, measured, like a teacher guiding a student through a maths problem, a kidnapper coaxing a child into a car.

She prepares the first pot of tea, naming its variety in Chinese. The steam rises cosily from the boiled water, and turning to the man on Tracy's left, she pours tea into his cup. 'We will continue around the circle, pouring tea for the person to our right.' Cradling the cup in both hands, she passes it to the man, saying, 'When you pass the cup to your neighbour, pass it with love.'

Tracy considers taking this idea home with her. She will think loving thoughts whenever she prepares John's coffee (not often), perhaps think positive things about him as she stirs in his one-and-a-half teaspoons of sugar.

When it comes time for the man to pour Tracy's tea, they smile awkwardly at each other. When it's her turn to pour for the woman on her other side, Tracy finds she's so preoccupied with not burning her fingers, with not over-filling the tiny ceramic cup, that she totally forgets to think loving thoughts when she passes it over.

She rests back on her haunches as the teapot continues down the table, the splashing tea reminding her that she should've gone to the ladies first. When the pouring is done, Zoe holds her cup aloft, urging them to find stillness in their thoughts as they sip.

It's as though she's been
lurching on the brink of
a crumbling bluff, swaying
between two obvious
courses of action.

Tracy lifts the cup to her lips — its aroma reminding her of wet weekends at her aunt's farm outside Stanthorpe — and stares at the palm tree outside, its shaggy fronds rustling in the wind. Her eyes flicker over the tiny yellow flowers in the shrubs that edge the park, and find the cement path on which she has just returned from Bondi. She's read of desire paths, accidental lines trodden into the ground by herds of cows or sheep, fishermen, elephants, surfers, lovers. She imagines the desire line of the path along the coast here was worn into the land long before the local council constructed the walkway.

'You will find the tea will taste grassy yet floral,' Zoe tells them. She teaches them how to slurp the tea, to steep the flavour from the heat, which Tracy can't quite bring herself to do. Looking around, she notices her cup is the only one with a smear of lipstick.

Zoe douses a clay teapot in swirls of boiling water, before filling its body. 'This is red tea. You will notice this tea is stronger, more strident. You might even find it tastes a little smoky. This is a very special tea. In Yunnan you will find the oldest tea tree of its kind. Over two thousand years old.'

Again, they go through the ritual of pouring and handing over the teacups, and again Tracy forgets to pass the teacup with love. She will probably forget to make John's coffee with love, too. As she sips her tea — this one coppery in colour, but with a milder fragrance — she peers out the window past Zoe, watching two young men strolling along the path holding takeaway coffees. A woman with a pram. A young couple in running gear. Tracy has always thought her own true desire line ran an alternate route, a life discarded, a time missed. That the path she lives is an accident of fate, a result of ambivalence. She's brought the attitude of living in

a rental property to her marriage, never painting the walls or hanging pictures.

Perhaps it was time for something as permanent, as adhesive, as a child. Something that is already the size of a plum, according to the website she looked at. Next week it would be the size of a peach. Maybe.

Downstairs, she pays, and spies a cacao tapioca pudding in the drinks fridge and, finding the tea has washed her stomach hollow, she buys it, spooning it into her mouth as soon as she's out the door.

By the time Tracy enters the hotel lobby — jasmine diffusers barely concealing the smell of the cleaning fluid that reminds her of the colour pink — she's feeling elated, from the brisk pace with which she swept up the hill, the raindrops that splattered her face, the caffeine, the sugar, the cocoa. It's as though she's been lurching on the brink of a crumbling bluff, swaying between two obvious courses of action.

In their room, John is peeling off his socks. He rests back in the armchair, asks her how her day was.

'Let's go for a walk,' she says.

'You've just come back from a walk.'

'It's beautiful down there, John. Let's go.'

'Is it raining?'

But she won't stand his remonstrations, not any, not today. She waits for him to pull his socks back on, slide his feet into his shoes, go to the toilet. He checks his back pocket for his wallet, returns to the bathroom to fetch his phone. Makes sure they each have a room key in case one gets lost. Her resolve teeters, but she shakes her head, rehearses what she will say to him.

By the time they make it back to the beach, silver clouds flare the dusky sky, and the musk of banked seaweed, low tide, and the salt on the

breeze rise to her, briny and intimate. She takes his hand, swings it as they stroll to the water's edge, says that she has something to tell him.

'Look!'

He's pointing out to sea, at something lumpy and black, and it takes her a few seconds to realise that it's not a shark or a dolphin or a seal they are staring at, but a person — a young person, perhaps a boy — who seems to be floating further away, even as they watch.

'Oh no,' she says, hand clasped over mouth, as the boy lifts his arm, waves. 'We have to help.'

'Someone will save him.' John looks about.

'The damned lifeguards are finished for the day.'

'You should swim out, John.'

'I'd just get us both into trouble,' he replies, frowning down at his phone as he presses in numbers.

Tracy knows she is not a strong enough swimmer, thinks of the time she was nearly swept from an estuary into the choppy, churning mouth of the ocean, but she should at least try, shouldn't she?

John grabs her arm as she prises off her left shoe. 'Tracy, don't be silly. See? There! I told you someone would help.'

They watch a woman, short hair, yoga pants and singlet, run across the sand, followed by two lifesavers, who peel off their yellow skivvies as they race towards the surf. They clamber into the sea, dive under the waves. Disappear from sight before bobbing up again, headed towards the floundering boy.

'He'll be fine now.' John turns to her.

'What were you going to tell me?'

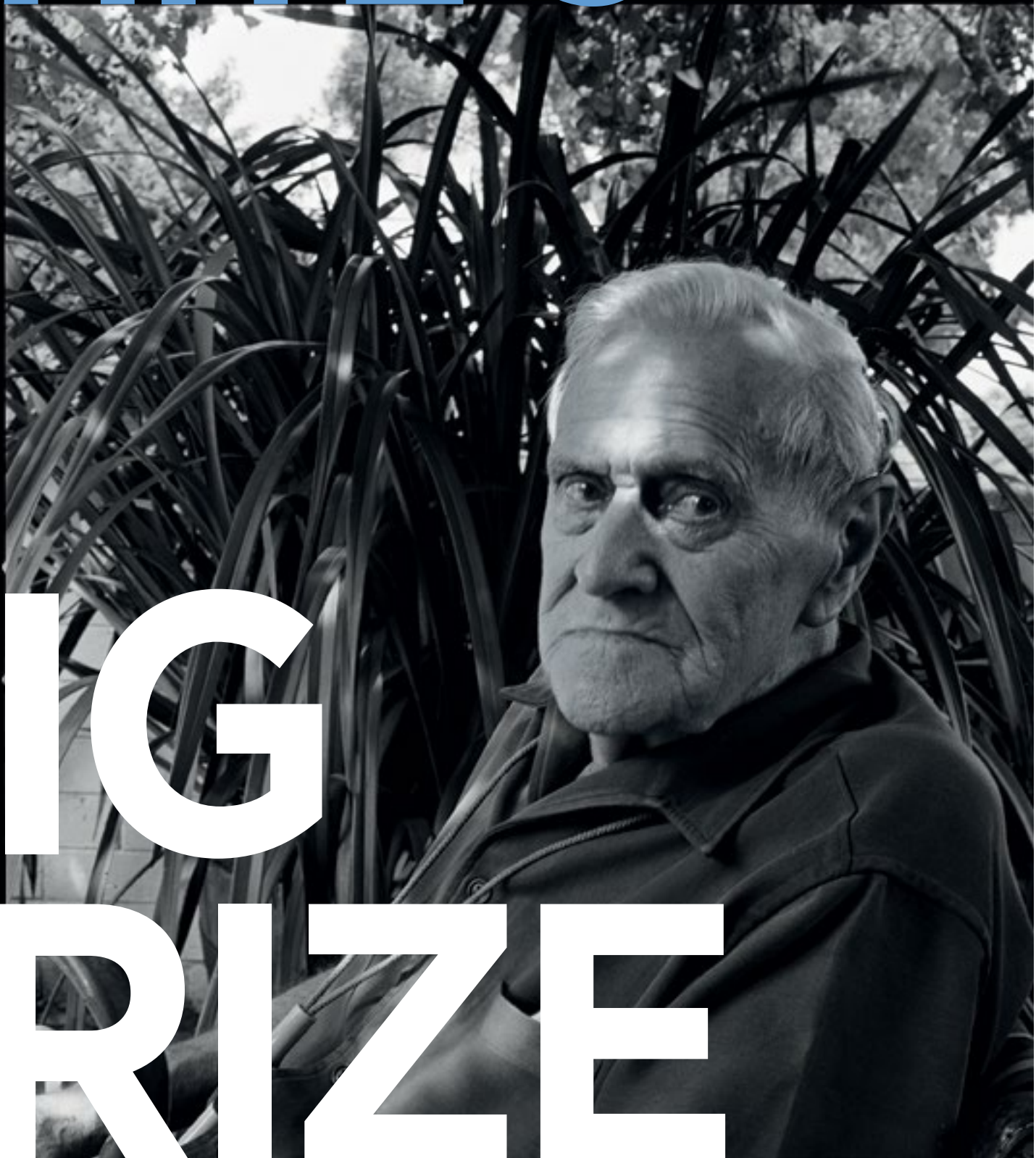
Tracy watches the woman in the surf, how her strong strokes cleave through the dark water. Head tucked, body rising with the swell, propelled by the tide. Swimming further and further from shore.

Mirandi Riwoe is the author of the award-winning novel *Stone Sky Gold Mountain* and the collection of short stories *The Burnished Sun*. Both are published by UQP.



PATRICK WHITE'S

KODAK TX 6043



BIG PRIZE

TX 6043

It is 50 years since the Australian won the Nobel Prize in Literature. How might we read his work now?

To visit Martin Road in Centennial Park today is to be confronted with some of Sydney's most opulent and imposing real estate.

Number 20, known as 'Highbury', where Patrick White lived with his partner Manoly Lascaris from 1964 until the author's death in 1990, is among the more modest properties along this road. Surrounding it are mansions of garish scale — the house immediately next door is a veritable castle. It was at Highbury, on the night of 18 October 1973, that Sydney's media converged en masse after the announcement that White had won that year's Nobel Prize in Literature.

For reasons I can't quite explain, I'm interested in what the weather was like that night — perhaps to build an impression of the atmosphere in and around that famous house on that famous night as White and Lascaris grappled with this strange experience. Or perhaps it's because if White were writing this scene himself, the conditions and ambience of the moment might play a part in feeding and revealing the psychological states of those involved. It was a warm, dry, slightly windy, typical spring day that reached a high of 26 degrees. At 9 pm, when journalists converged on 20 Martin Road trying to raise White after the Swedish Academy had made its announcement, it was still

21 degrees — possibly a sticky evening for members of the press, who were having a busy week: not only was Australia winning its first Nobel Prize in Literature, but the Queen would officially open the Sydney Opera House two days later, on 20 October.

White, in bed by 9 pm having taken a sleeping pill, was initially oblivious to the Nobel news. He had not been informed directly because the Swedish Ambassador to Australia could not get hold of his phone number. Requests to members of White's circle yielded nothing, as they were instructed never to share it. So White and Lascaris learned the news thanks to journalists thumping on doors and rapping on windows — the intensifying din of voices, activity and equipment awakened the rather nonplussed author. 'They rampaged round the house,' he later wrote in a letter to his British publisher, 'ringing bells, pounding doors and making the dogs bark for at least an hour and a half. Once when I looked down there were about 20 people camped on the lawn, and others on the terrace at the back.' It was, to be sure, a surreal evening for all concerned.

The Nobel announcement came as White was on the verge of publishing two new books. His novel *The Eye of the Storm* was in the final proofing stage (advance copies were sent to the Swedish Academy for review), and his short story collection *The Cockatoos* was also not far from publication. His most recent novel was *The Vivisector* (1970), the

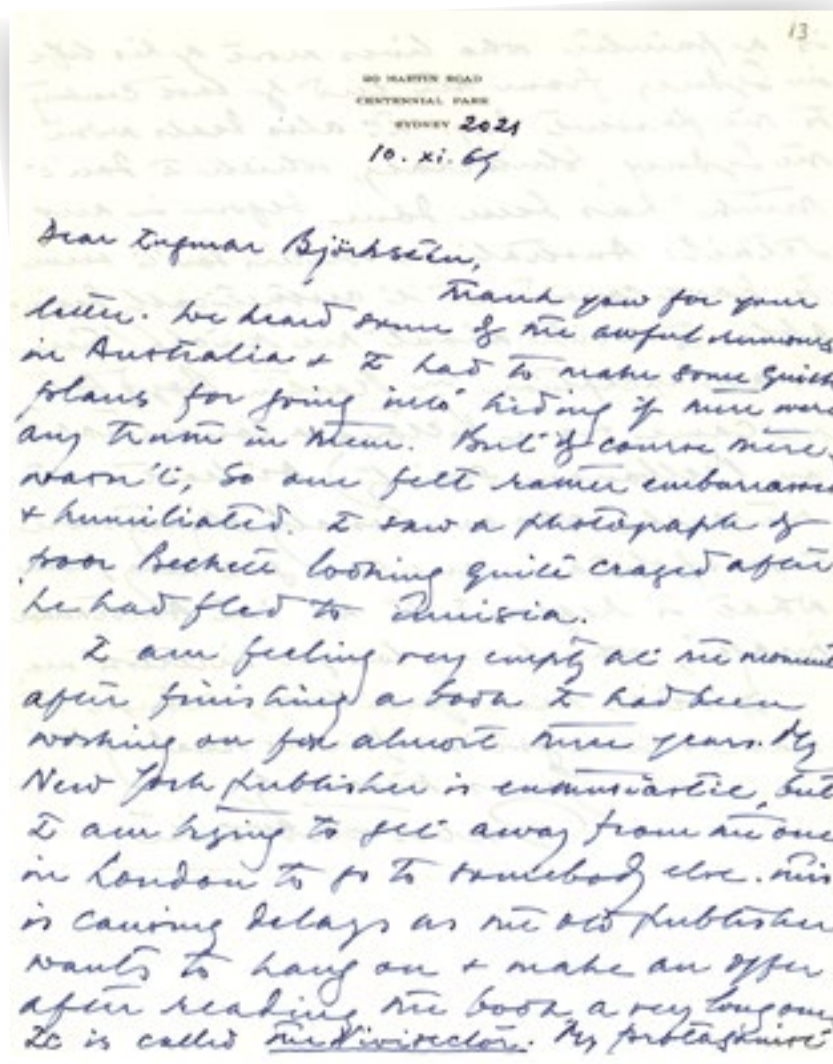
Portrait of Patrick White in 1986 by Max Dupain

searing, torrid and extraordinary portrayal of the fictional artist Hurtle Duffield, who exploits others and abuses himself in the name of the creative process.

White had been on the radar of the Swedish Academy since the late 1960s, thanks largely to the efforts of one of its members, Artur Lundkvist, who found he had a passionate, even fevered connection with White's prose (is there any other response?), after reading *The Tree of Man* in the early 1960s. In the early 1970s, one of the world's most notable scholars of White was another Swede, Ingmar Björkstén, who published his seminal study *Patrick White: A general introduction* in 1973. Thus, some important White cheerleaders were in close proximity to the Swedish Academy's Stockholm headquarters.

As David Marr details in his regal biography, *Patrick White: A life*, White appeared in the Nobel conversation for the first time in 1969, only to lose out to Samuel Beckett. He was shortlisted in 1970, the year the prize went to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In 1971, Pablo Neruda's win was reportedly a fait accompli; in 1972, to White's chagrin, the German writer Heinrich Böll — of whom he was not a fan — was the winner. In a disappointing lack of imagination from the Academy, White was passed over during these years partly because *The Vivisector*, as Björkstén writes, 'elaborates on the not at all attractive conclusion that the artist steps over dead bodies in order to give free sway to his vision of life; that he consumes people as the raw material of his art'.

When he finally won in 1973 (Saul Bellow and Nadine Gordimer were also on the list that year, among others), the prize appeared to be awarded as much for where White was writing from, and about, as for his literary achievements. Marr quotes one of the Academy members as saying, 'Why not award the prize to the new land of Australia?' This



thinking is echoed in the statement given by the Academy, inscribed in the certificate now held by the State Library of NSW, which describes White's 'epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature'.

This statement has not aged well; any description of Australia as a 'new continent' must surely prompt unease. 'That is very much a product of its time,' says Jeanine Leane, a Wiradjuri scholar, writer and educator, 'feeding into the idea that literature in this country must come from the British settler canon. I know it was referring to Australia being less than 100 years federated, but also dangerously and quite chauvinistically to the idea literature is only a Western idea.'

Letter from White to Ingmar Björkstén, 1969. Years later, on 6 January 1974, he wrote, 'Between ourselves, the Nobel is a terrifying and destructive experience ...'

After the kerfuffle at Martin Road on that balmy night, White settled into an attitude of humble, if reticent, gratitude for the award.

Over the last two decades at least, Leane has been one of the most prominent literary critics to question and reposition the legacy of canonical writers such as White, particularly his depictions of First Nations characters. The 50th anniversary of him winning literature's most prestigious prize (even if the Nobel is, as Leane puts it, a 'cog in the theo-capitalist wheel that is the literary economy') is an opportunity to reconsider White's work. Perhaps the time is ripe to forge a model for reading him that takes pleasure and inspiration from his breathtaking style, while placing some elements of his writing in historical context and acknowledging their dissonance from a 21st-century standpoint.

'Several of his really important works — *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot* and *A Fringe of Leaves* — particularly rely on an Aboriginal presence and settler consciousness of Aboriginality,' says Leane. She adds that White's settler perspective would draw on a 'body of story' from Indigenous culture, without a deep or intimate knowledge of it. Leane identifies *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) as particularly problematic in this way — one scene of cannibalism is a 'complete fabrication', and that leaves a lasting legacy on First Nations people.

Reading *Fringe*, *Voss* and *Riders* from a First Nations perspective, you do see those First Nations people very much as plot devices in White's greater scheme of national narrative. He said he was dealing with works of greater consciousness, but in that greater consciousness is deeply embedded his own psyche, and settler consciousness of First Nations people as mystical and highly admirable in one way, but very much passé and savage in another way.

Leane notes that White always sought to 'distance himself from the colonial picture' and acknowledges his commitment to Indigenous causes in the last two decades of his life. She also adds that compared to many of his forebears in Australian literature, he presented 'a quite skilful portrayal of Aboriginal people'. She advocates for more First Nations critiques of White's work in the coming years.

'If you take the Aboriginal character, Alf Dubbo, out of *Riders*, the Aboriginal characters out of *Voss* and the tribe out of *Fringe*, he doesn't have a story. People whose appropriation these stories hinge on should have a voice in the conversation.'

An understanding of the colonial values that are often embedded in White's work, and the ways in which they have reinforced racial division within a 'national narrative', is perhaps an important tool in reading White today.

The novelist Andrea Goldsmith, an ardent White fan, agrees that historical knowledge is required to read him now. This context, hopefully, will leave the reader still able to bask in what is consistently magical about White: his grasp of style, his peculiar massaging of language, and his psychological insight.

'He has a deep and unsentimental gaze into what makes us humane,' says Goldsmith, who counts White as a profound influence on her novels, including the Miles Franklin-shortlisted *The Prosperous Thief* (2002).

He is a writer who deals with the spiritual without battering or waving crucifixes or Magen Davids — he does it in a way where the spiritual becomes part of what makes a moral person.

And stylistically he is beyond compare, his use of language is just extraordinary. He disrupts English grammar — he writes whole sentences without verbs.

For Goldsmith, like Leane, White's legacy is also muddied, though for different reasons. Indeed, when I asked my own parents about their memories of White as a public figure in the 1980s, they described a scowling, curmudgeonly, elderly man.

'He is unequivocally the outstanding Australian fiction writer,' Goldsmith says. 'And I don't think this is recognised; I think it's partly because we insist our artists be good guys, nice and sweet, terribly presentable. Patrick just wasn't that, and I think it's gone against him. Often people will know next to nothing about Patrick except that he was a nasty, cantankerous old man.'

The other thing is that in this day and age, people can't read longer than a couple of pages — who's going to sit with Patrick? Only somebody who really wants to know how to write, I think.

Among the writers I know there are the devoted readers and re-readers of White, and there are those who don't touch him. He polarises people. But [with the Nobel] he showed that Australia could be part of world literature.

And White *is* part of world literature.

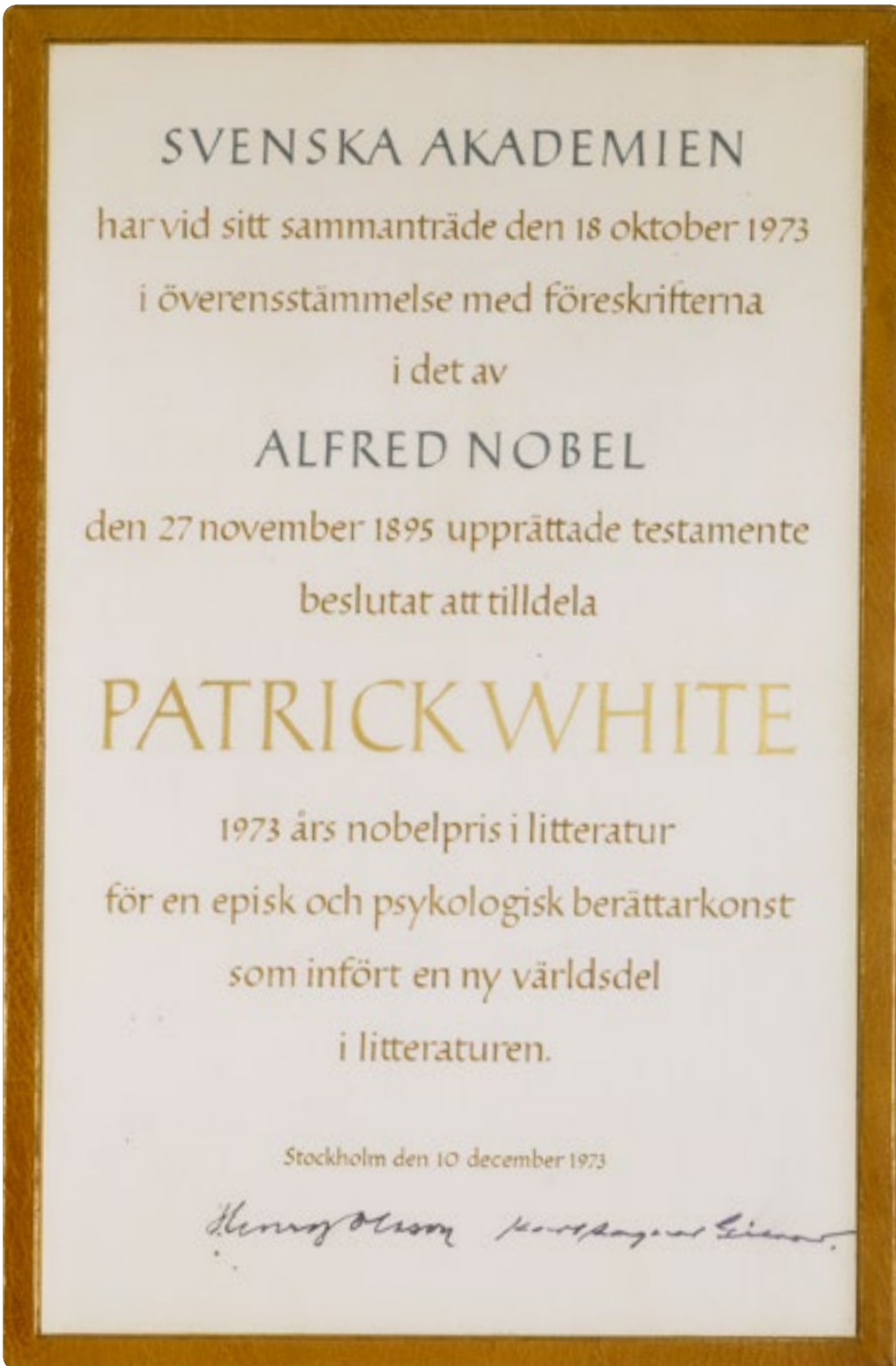
So, 50 years on from the Nobel, how is White viewed internationally? Nicholas Birns, an American scholar of Australian literature and former editor of *Antipodes* literary journal, puts the establishment of that journal — and the formation of the American Association of Australian Literary Studies — down to White winning the Nobel, and the international focus that subsequently fell on Australian writing.

'I think there was a lot of resentment of Patrick White within Australia, and part of that is because he could behave snobbishly, especially in his later years, and a lot of Australians resented that he got so much attention,' he says. 'This, of course, is absent globally, and is why a global perspective on Australian literature is always needed.'

Birns cites a Chinese academic, Hong Chen, as someone who brings particularly innovative new insights to White scholarship. Leane believes India and France are countries where White is studied with imagination and freshness today.

Any mention of White in the mainstream media is often accompanied by the phrase 'Australia's only winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature'. With each passing year, and every new winner, the question is asked who our next laureate might be. Multiple authors are bandied about — Twitter was abuzz with names in the lead-up to the 2022 announcement of the prize, which went to French writer Annie Ernaux. But two names appear consistently. The first is Gerald Murnane, the Victorian author best known for his novel *The Plains*. Such is Murnane's stature that in 2018, the *New York Times* sent a journalist to find him in the small Victorian town





Patrick White's Nobel Prize certificate, held by the Library in a leather folder. Courtesy of the Norwegian Nobel Committee. Artwork by Gunnar Brusewitz

of Goroke. The result was a long profile with the headline, 'Is the Next Nobel Laureate Tending Bar in a Dusty Australian Town?' Murnane himself told the ABC in 2019 that he has been on the Academy's radar for over a decade.

The other name that comes up is Alexis Wright, author of novels *The Swan Book* and *Carpentaria*, among other works. Leane is an advocate for Wright, describing the Waanyi author's 'brilliant literary mind ... that is faithful to the First Nations philosophy of time and place and connection, but also that makes brilliant use of Western literary devices'. Wright is also the second name Birns mentions, after Murnane, when asked about Australian literature's next Nobel. He also suggests novelists Kim Scott, Peter Carey, Michelle de Kretser, Charlotte Wood and Alex Miller, and poet John Kinsella, as possible contenders.

After the kerfuffle at Martin Road on that balmy night, White settled into an attitude of humble, if reticent, gratitude for the award. While he was also irritated at the demands made of him and the attention he received, Marr writes that White 'enjoyed being a great man'. White refused to travel to Stockholm to accept the medal, sending close friend, the artist Sidney Nolan, in his place. He also turned down a rare invitation to receive congratulations in Parliament. When he was announced as Australian of the Year in January 1974, he used the platform to rail against Australia Day and pay tribute to three Australian 'mavericks' he admired: historian Manning Clark, performer Barry Humphries and unionist Jack Munday.

As for the prize money of \$81,862 (approximately \$900,000 today), White made the perhaps foolhardy decision to publicly announce that he would not keep it, which precipitated a barrage of requests from across the globe. He used the money to establish the Patrick White Award, an annual prize that recognises older Australian writers who have not received due acclaim.

Murnane won that prize in 1999. If the Victorian ever does win the Nobel, one hopes his phone number is at hand.

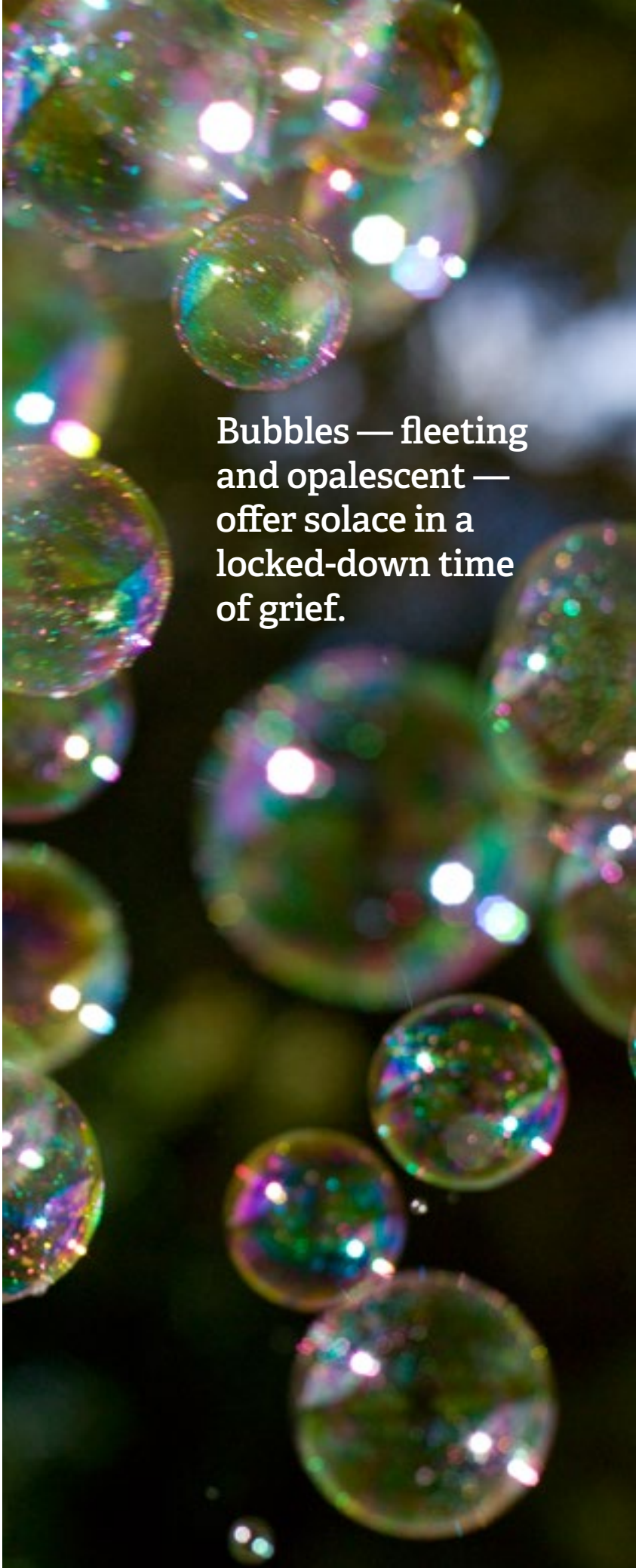
Barnaby Smith is a freelance writer.

A HUNDRED DAYS OF BUBBLES



Photo by Bruce York

WORDS Sandra Leigh Price



Bubbles — fleeting
and opalescent —
offer solace in a
locked-down time
of grief.

My Accomplice and I find our place,
settle beneath the outstretched
fans of the Moreton Bay figs and make
a wonder.

With the hoop of the wand, some slippery mixture and the subtle kiss of breath — sometimes ours, sometimes the wind — we release from the mandala-like opening the silken slip of opalescent bubble. I try and catch it in the prism of my eye with a lens, often not knowing what I've captured until after, surprised at the startling colours and shapes, the bubbles quicker than my eye, swifter than my finger, like looking at a spirit trapped on film.

How do you catch a breath, pin it with a camera? In recent times, the breath of strangers became as dangerous as a noxious cloud. A ventilation expert on television shows how breath can move by sending a rolling plume through a room, tentacles of smoke like the ghost of the kraken, lit by subterranean light. It is strange and beautiful, like the ephemeral 'sculptures' of cloud by Dutch artist Berndnaut Smilde. In a cathedral or chandelier-lit ballroom, Smilde photographs 'ungraspable' clouds made in a damp room by an exhalation of smoke before hastily trapping them on film. How Smilde makes his works reminds me of the winged faces at the corner of ancient maps, that blow with all their might to bring cloud into being, representations of

Right: *Nimbus* by Berndnaut Smilde

Far right: *Death Blowing Bubbles* by Johann Georg Leinberger, at Holy Grave Chapel, Michaelsberg Abbey, Bamberg, Germany. Courtesy Alamy



Aeolus, Ruler of the Winds. When my Accomplice blows our bubbles, he looks like the deity made miniature. This park is our map, we are in our corner, lips poised, blowing bubbles instead of cloud, ready to snare their momentary spirit with a camera.

On the ceiling of Holy Grave Chapel at Michaelsberg Abbey in Bamberg, Germany, is a plaster work by Johann Georg Leinberger. Created between 1729 and 1731, a series of skeletons participate in various activities, but the strangest of all is *Death Blowing Bubbles*. Partially draped in his billowing shroud, Death rests a while on a plaster cornice, elbows on his weary knees, a shovel beneath his foot. With bent spine and craned neck, he leans forward. In one hand he holds a shell with soapy water, in the other a tube. Between them hover three perfectly blown white, dense plaster bubbles. It is an unsettling depiction, for the bubbles show no light.

My mother was the first person to show us the alchemy of soap, keyhole and breath, and it is she who comes to us, in this between time, this bridge between the rushing waters of our normal life and the world closing down — so close yet so far away. I think of Odysseus trying to embrace his mother

in the Underworld: ‘Thrice I sprang towards her, and my heart bade me clasp her, and thrice she flitted from my arms like a shadow or a dream ...’ I know not to try and embrace her; to do so would be to suffer the abrasion of grief anew. Instead, I sense her near, in the park, just out of my field of vision. In this pandemic she is with us, our third.

We come into life in this world, unaware of the length of our given days, knowing they will never be enough, until we burst into a transcendent vanishing act — part shimmer, droplet, sigh — with our loved ones left wondering how to carry on. Life goes on my mother always said, and she was right. But it goes on altered, the absence a reverse presence, like looking at the world through a convex mirror and finding everything has shifted. Like looking out from the inside of a bubble.

Here in the green of the park we are removed from the world, our bubbles unfettered, outside of news reports, health regulations, time. Our bubbles meet their ends on tree branches, grass blades, lamp posts or bursts of breeze. Sometimes the bubbles exert themselves, off on their own eddies, as if they have a mind of their own. A curious

In trying to photograph bubbles I too am trying to halt time, to resist transience ...

wave of bubbles flock to a woman's window where she sits at her computer, working from home. Their sun-struck swoop at her window forces her to stop and watch this flotilla of light, snapping colour before her eyes. And then, it is gone.

In trying to photograph bubbles I too am trying to halt time, to resist transience, trying to make them last longer, which is like willing a rainbow not to disperse, or a shooting star not to disappear. Together we watch the bubbles bloom with colour, shape and form, dimming as they thin, not knowing the moment they will pop. In the air they sometimes leave a ghost of themselves, a cometary tail of golden sun-struck droplets or, sometimes, a soapy skein my Accomplice calls silk but that reminds me of the ectoplasm of spirit photography.

Photographing the bubbles is like photographing ghosts; things appear in the image that were not visible to the naked eye. The bubbles act like mirrors to the viewer's imagination. When I post the images online, people see different things. Some see Edgar Allan Poe and his nevermore raven, Chinese characters, faces, waterlilies in Monet's garden. I begin to see them too, unsure if it's my eyes making sense of fragments that aren't there, or something else. Strange eyes look out of the photograph at me, sometimes a face caught in the corners of the blowing of the bubble — a man in a helmet, a figure, phantoms of the imagination, pareidolia — the eye catching something random that the mind tries to make sense of. Sometimes it is our own little silhouettes reflected back in the bubble, my Accomplice's and mine. I recognise his ears and the mess of my hair, head to head in our reflection, the bubble turned cat's eye.

Before we are born we are held in a bubble-like space, embraced in our mother's womb — she is us and we are her — linked together through cells, blood, breath. Our fingerprints are formed while reaching towards her, the limits of our world; through this touch, the pads of our fingers

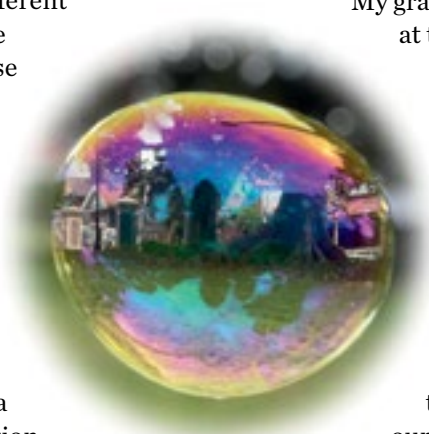
swirled with their lines, our constant contact with her interior. This is not the only marker of our life inside the bubble of our mother, for when we are born we leave part of us behind in her body, little jettisoned parts of our foetus-self that travel the slipstream of her blood, arriving at her heart, her liver, her mind before being absorbed back into her body. This leaving of our cells, this microchimerism, is thought to benefit the mother's recovery after birth, her immunity, her healing; to my mind possible proof of a mother's intuition. Some scientists also propose that cells from prior generations inhabit women's bodies, so aside from pregnancy being a great confluence of genetic swell, it is also a meeting *within* the family tree. A female foetus develops her ovaries at four months; so we are carried in the bodies of our grandmothers, flesh and blood links to a living chain.

There is something about our daily bubbles that brings my mother and grandmothers back to me.

My grandmothers would have been children at the time of the upheaval of the last great influenza pandemic: schools closed, hospitals stretched, the faces of the loved ones obscured with masks. The pandemic runs to the fault lines, stings at our fragile points. It rides roughshod over everyone's movements, hopes and plans. Our planned trip to Scotland, in honour of my late mother, was the first thing that vanished from our horizon. I had wanted to follow

the footsteps of my foremothers. As I watch the bubbles, I run my mind over the rosary of the unbroken links of their Scottish names. It comforts me as surely as a warm hand across my brow.

On some days the bubbles are so large that they appear like swooping cartoon ghosts, and my Accomplice and I watch them until their conclusion. A lady with two little children comes up to us from the street. They tilt their heads backwards and take the bubbles in. 'This is where the bubble must have come from,' the lady says. While driving, they had seen a bubble pass them, kilometres down the road,





swept along on its own current. We watch as they try to pop them, gleefully moving with abandon as children should, the park suddenly alive as children try to catch the bubbles descending to the grass. They may as well try and erase the northern lights with a tissue. Afterwards a silly puppy drinks from the tray of our bubble mixture — we half expect bubbles to zip out of his mouth in cartoon hiccups.

On colder mornings, the grass dew-tipped, the sky an intoxicating blue, my Accomplice goes into a reverie, as we marvel at the colours that materialise from his wand. He becomes a magician, reminding me of Manet's painting of a boy frozen in between the blowing and the burst, between childhood and manhood. The bubble is like the boy hanging in between, his eyes fixed on the glittering prize. Children painted with bubbles were a popular motif in the early eighteenth century.

Artists were playing with the idea of *Homo bulla est* (man is a bubble), a term coined by the Roman philosopher Varro in his first-century book, *De Re Rustica*, as an example of the fleetingness of life.

Édouard Manet painted his son several times, as a young child holding a cardboard sword, a youth blowing a bubble and, later, a man with a straw boater hat. It is no coincidence that Manet chose

the shimmering moment poised between child and adulthood, the transient in-between moment. Against an inky background, the boy is framed by a wall, dressed in a shirt and a loose linen coat with three buttons — the first and third are buttoned, the middle one is not, symbolising his in-between state. He holds a blue-and-white porcelain dish with one hand, a pipe in the other, the tip held to his lips like an angel's thin trumpet. His eyes are on the curve of the bubble as if he has given birth to a planet or a star. With his clipped auburn hair, there is a softness to his face, a fragility to his fine cheek bones. This boy is a conduit between us and the darkness. We are all but bubbles.

John Everett Millais' painted his five-year-old grandson in a laced collar and green velvet suit, blowing bubbles. It became one of the most reproduced images of the nineteenth century. Named *A Child's World*, it is known as *Bubbles*. Controversially, the image was used to advertise Pears soap without Millais' consent. Millais' grandson, William Milbourne James, could not throw off the association and the name followed him into adulthood. When he became an admiral in the Royal Navy, he was known by his peers as 'Bubbles'. Later when he was knighted, he was

Above: *Boy blowing bubbles* by Édouard Manet. Courtesy Alamy

Above right: *Bubbles* by Sir John Everett Millais, used to advertise Pears soap around the world. Courtesy V&A Images



referred to as ‘Sir Bubbles’. His childhood pastime, tenderly immortalised by his grandfather, even overshadowed his crowning achievement, which was saving 200,000 lives at Dunkirk.

My Accomplice and I have observed that a bubble’s skin is thinner than a piece of paper. Mysterious, errant and disobedient, they follow their own gods, of breath, wind and light. Sir Isaac Newton, in his groundbreaking work on optics, developed a theory of light by observing the surface of a soap bubble. A bubble is made from a thin film of water that is protected on either side by

the soap. Light reflects off both walls of the bubble, lending it colour. In *Opticks: or, A Treatise of the Reflexions, Refractions, Inflexions and Colours of Light*, Newton mused on the phenomena of the ‘inflexion’ of light and, in doing so, discovered that light is not pure, as claimed by Aristotle but, rather, full of colour, divided into a spectrum translated to the mind’s eye. That this colossus formed his momentous theory of light by blowing soap bubbles is curious and joyous, somehow childlike. Not everyone was impressed with this neat and tidy categorising of light. Keats later accused Newton of ‘un-weaving the rainbow’, by allowing science to explain away the mysteries of nature. But Newton’s *Opticks* did not frighten all poets. It inspired Alexander Pope, who wrote:

they are clothed in pure light, but when they descend to earth, light is refracted: Loose to the Wind their airy Garments flew, Thin glitt’ring Textures of the filmy Dew; Dipt in the richest Tinctures of the Skies...

The bubbles that we launch remind me of a famous Swedish painting from 1535, *Vädersolstavlan* or ‘Weather sun’, named for the ‘sundogs’ that slice through the atmosphere of the top half of the painting, boundaries of light intersecting, glistening,

overlapping. The borders of these sundogs, angel-sized bubbles, are pinned with sequins of light. One can only imagine what the citizens of Stockholm thought upon seeing such atmospheric marvels — no doubt the word ‘miracle’ came to their lips. The same word comes to my mind, even though we are simply conjuring with soap; the miracle is that we are alive, we breathe, we are safe. Our bubbles too are fixed with sequins of light. We see tiny suns, caught in the reflection of the bubble’s skin.

Bubbles are made of water droplets and irisation, but the same water-droplet phenomena can occur across the surface of cloud, sun or moon with a corona. This optical phenomenon is known as a ‘glory’. In ancient times, a corona was a thing of wonder — a crown, a halo, a miracle. In 1992, after 15 years in the wilderness of space, Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 returned to Earth with the answer to a mystery: a celestial bubble surrounds our solar system. The heliosphere, a bubble blown by the sun’s solar winds, holds us in a cosmic teardrop.

In recent times, we all lived in a bubble, removed from the workings of the world, floating on the margins. Thinking back, this time feels sealed, separate from the ebb and flow of life and coated in something like a dream. How did we live apart from our friends and our extended families in government-mandated bubbles — border bubbles, singles bubbles, children’s friends bubbles? How did we do it without bursting?

My Accomplice and I marked this time by trying to catch it, hold it and see its preciousness by launching thousands of bubbles. We may have been confined, but we felt lofty and free, beguiled by colliding colour, the bubbles as large as planets, bending in our sight, before bursting. It is bittersweet to leave it behind.

We have been suspended, held, floating in time.

We have been light painting.

We have become iridescent, my Accomplice and I.

We take a breath.

We hold hands, step through and let go.

Trusting life to hold us.

Sandra Leigh Price is the author of two novels, *The Bird’s Child* and *The River Sings*, both published by HarperCollins Australia. Her bubble images can be seen on Instagram @sandraleighpricewriter

Jacob Elbfas,
*Olaus Petri Och
Vädersolstavlan
I Storkyrkan,
Stockholm, 1535.*



Cathedral Gums

After Cathedral — Gums at Twilight by Brian Purcell, 2022

We arrive slowly, each of us, surrounded by an invisible bubble,
our eyes hooded but lit under lids by the soft fire of twilight, a stand
of gums rising en masse, spectral, fed by a single root system, mother.

Identical from a distance, up close, the trunks scarred by lines of insect
and vine, peeling bark, and amber jewels, shaking in the evening
breeze, whispering leaf fall and creak, a secret language like code

created in childhood, shared between siblings, before we became
old and lost, pilgrimage, finding one another in wordless sound,
a cathedral, where we fall, knees to dirt, eyes to the light, praying.

No one speaks but we understand, communicate, our own limbs touch
lightly, fingers shaking, eyes wet with a memory that feels like
a dream from which we have yet to wake.

Magdalena Ball

Magdalena Ball is a novelist, poet, reviewer and interviewer who grew up on the lands of the Lenape in the United States, and currently lives and writes on Awabakal land. She is Managing Editor of *Compulsive Reader*, and her work has been widely published in literary journals such as *Meanjin*, *Cordite* and *Westerly*. Her most recent book is *Bobish*, a historical verse-memoir from Puncher & Wattmann.

Painting by Brian Purcell





Detail from 'Delicatessen',
Illustration from *Alphabetical
Sydney* by Antonia Pesenti

WORDS Hilary Bell and Antonia Pesenti

The remarkable life of **ALPHABETICAL SYDNEY**

Two friends work on a picture book. It becomes a bestseller, inspiring Instagram scavenger hunts, Book Week costumes, a museum exhibition, a musical theatre adaptation and more books. Creators Hilary Bell and Antonia Pesenti reflect on the book's journey and their collaboration, in — what else? — alphabetical order.

A is for anniversary! 2023 marks 10 years since the publication of our first picture book, *Alphabetical Sydney*. Labelled 'an instant classic' by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, it has continued to astonish us with everything it's led to, including two more books, *Numerical Street* and *Summer Time*.

B is for bus. The latest chapter in our creative collaboration has been the stage musical *All Aboard!*, based on *Alphabetical Sydney*. Featuring a plywood Sydney express bus, characters embark on an alphabetical tour along Parramatta Road that stops off in Hyde Park and ends as the sun sets over the harbour, when the bus magically transforms into a ferry.

C is for collaboration. We were friends long before we began working together, and our joint projects have felt like a natural extension of the lively, ideas-filled conversations we've been having for nearly 30 years.

D is for determination, which, along with energy, has been an essential ingredient in our journey, not only in the long and complex process of making our books but, most recently, in conceiving, pitching, writing, designing and, with Critical Stages Touring, co-producing a musical.

E is for exhibition. In 2017, we worked with the Museum of Sydney to develop a family exhibition inspired by *Alphabetical Sydney*. A giant Mr Whippy van welcomed kids into the Creative Lab, where they could explore the idea of place and home.

F is for frangipanis. The ritual of collecting these beautiful creamy flowers, so emblematic of Sydney, from footpaths was something we had to include. So much of the book came from our own experience of returning home after many years living in Paris (Antonia) and New York (Hilary) — both inspiring but very urban places. Sydney, in comparison, felt like a city invaded by nature, with Moreton Bay Fig roots cracking footpaths, iridescent carpets of jacaranda flowers and the soundtrack of birdsong.



Bin chickens, or the ubiquitous ibis, rightly celebrated.
Illustration by Antonia Pesenti from *Alphabetical Sydney*

G is for Greta Gertler Gold, the wonderful composer who wrote the music for *All Aboard!* Exploring various facets of Sydney, Hilary and Greta’s songs range from ‘Feed Me’, a wild grunge-metal celebration of chaos sung by an ibis, to ‘The Magic Hour’, a melancholic exploration of the moment between dusk and nightfall, evoking warm sandstone, the slap of harbour water and the lonely hoot of a mopoke.

H is for history. We drew on our Sydney childhoods as much as what we observed around us in the present. And our friendship. Having known each other for so long before embarking on our first book, our ease with each other, shared viewpoint, sense of humour and respect for each other’s skills imbue every page.



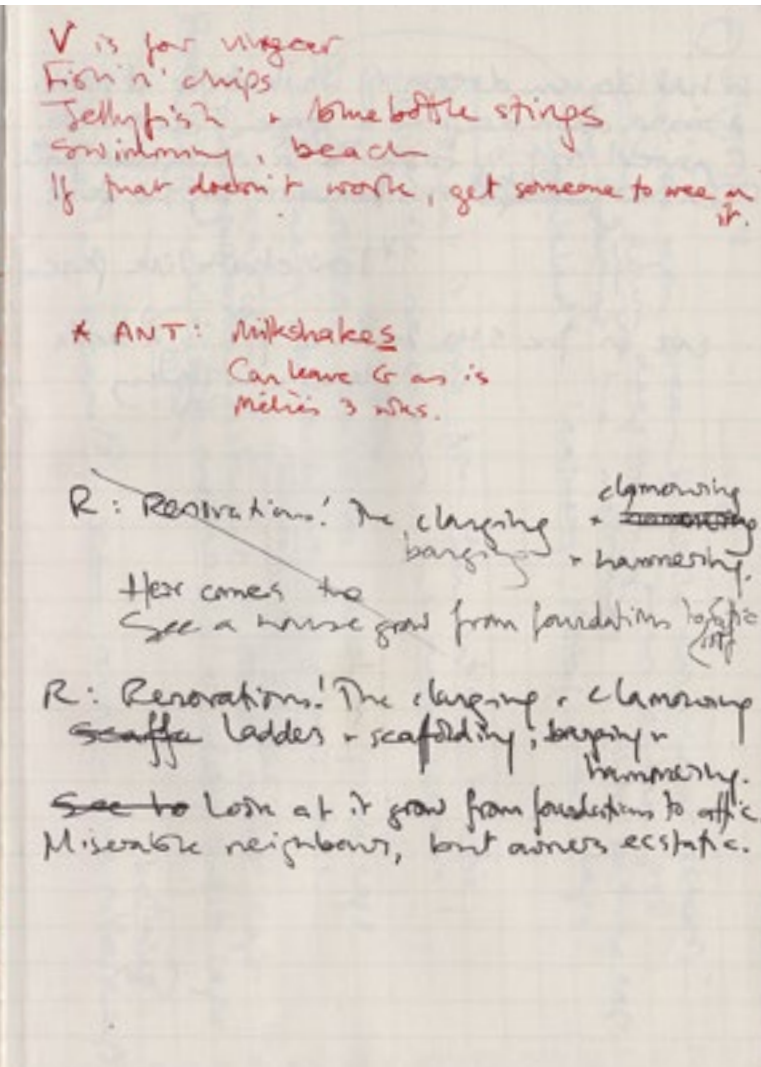
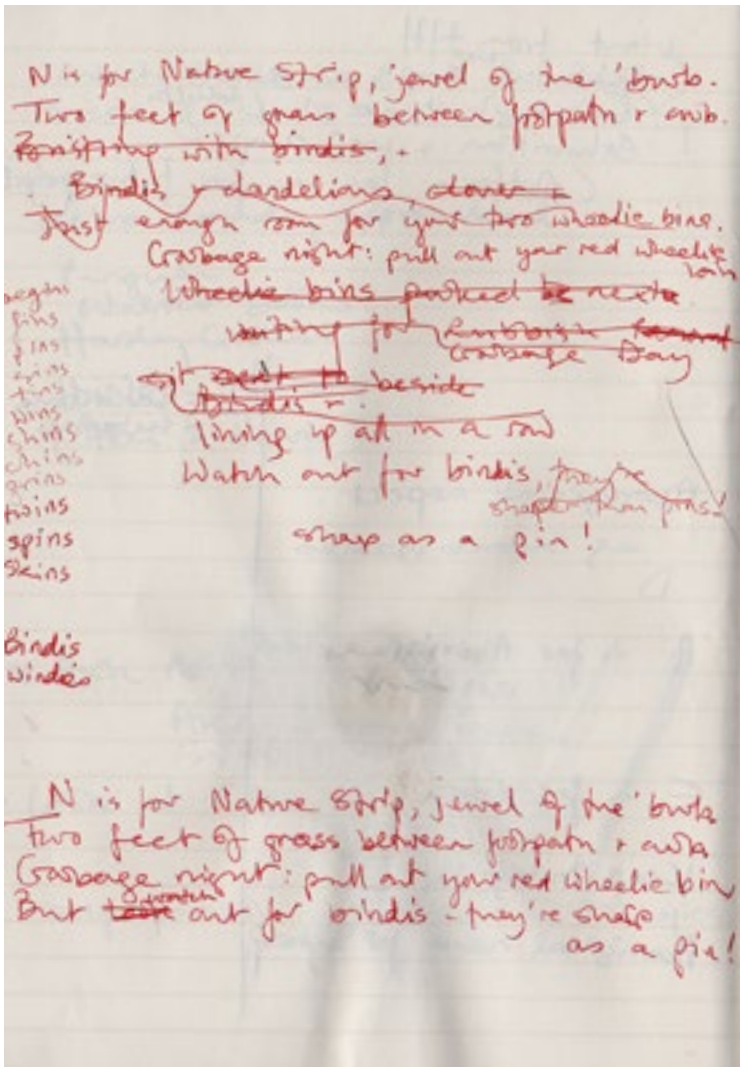
Hilary Bell and Antonia Pesenti in Katz’s Delicatessen, NYC, 1999

I is for ibis. When we came back to Sydney, we were really struck by the presence of these large, grimy, prehistoric-looking birds stalking around the CBD. I for Ibis was one of the first letters we completed, and our fondness for these creatures has only grown. In *All Aboard!*, the characters Ibis and Nanna drive the tour bus around town. Ibis celebrates Sydney’s filth and chaos, while Nanna extols the virtues of tidy lawns and spare cardigans. Their relationship underlies the show’s thematic journey between order and disorder, reflecting the essence of Sydney’s dichotomy — nature’s wild beauty and the urban environment.

J is for jubilation! After years of submitting the book to one publisher after another, only to receive a series of regretful rejections (‘Who’s going to buy a picture book about Sydney?’), we were thrilled when NewSouth Publishing accepted the manuscript. That makes NewSouth an outlier too (see ‘O’), this being their first picture book. Together we’ve gone on to publish two more, while *Alphabetical Sydney* continues to sell well.



Scene from the stage musical *All Aboard!*
Photo by Robert Catto



K is for kids. Our books are for them, but at the same time we work hard to connect with adults — reading a picture book is a shared experience, and it needs to engage on many levels. Hilary’s verses are sophisticated and funny, and Antonia’s illustrations are playful and layered, experimenting with collage and photography.

L is for *Le Bouillon Chartier*. This is the restaurant in Paris where we met in our early twenties at the beginning of our adventures abroad. We connected over escargots (Antonia) and fromage (Hilary). With the time and space for new friendships, we established a lasting connection based on curiosity and a sense of play.

M is for moonlighting. This is how we have always managed to create our books, squeezing work in around our primary occupations (see ‘Outliers’).

N is for nostalgia. Our joint projects are fed by childhood memories, which in turn have been nourished by our experiences of raising our own families. Whether it’s the neapolitan ice-cream’s neglected strawberry stripe, or the recollection of green hair after a summer of swimming in chlorine pools, our books speak to both old and young as they read together.

O is for outliers. We are an architect and a playwright let loose in the world of picture books! Being outsiders has allowed us to stay fresh, open to possibilities. *Alphabetical Sydney* was not restrained by traditional formats or commercial formulas. We adapted our architectural and playwrighting skills to make the kind of picture book that we hadn’t seen before.

P is for Prime Minister’s pick. The book made Malcolm Turnbull’s Christmas booklist not once, but twice. Either he has a short memory, or else he really loves it.

Q is for question. What next? After more than a decade of creating together we're thinking about where to apply our combined energies. Will we make another book, or explore new territory? We have a virtual cabinet crammed full of crazy ideas and plans we've hatched over the years – perhaps it's time to open it up and examine its contents.

R is for revisions. While a few pages of the book emerged from our brains fully formed, most involved several drafts. Clarity and simplicity require crossings-out, throwings-out and startings-again.

S is for space. We have experimented with different formats and treatments in each book, and we like to explore various ways of occupying a page. Antonia's background in architecture gives her a sense of composition, weight and space. Our books feel calm and uncluttered, with the exception of *Numerical Street*, which is deliberately dense and stimulating, just like walking down a busy shopping street.

T is for tone, the most important element to get right. Aimed at both adults and children, we needed to find a tone that was poetic, playful, funny and accessible. Once we nailed it, everything else fell into place.

U is for unusual. One quality that distinguishes our books is their celebration of the quiet poetry in the everyday and the overlooked. In *Alphabetical Sydney*, our gaze takes in everything from renovations to nature strips, lawn bowls to garage sales, focusing on the details as seen from a child's-eye view.

V is for verse. Hilary finds the limitations of verse liberating. The search for a rhyme provokes ideas that otherwise might never arise. Children find pleasure in verse, with its rhythm, wordplay and rhymes, and reading it aloud is like playing a game.

W is for words and images, and their interplay. We're interested in what we call a 'third space', where rather than an illustration reiterating text, there's a loose fit between the words and images, leaving room for conversation, memories and connection. We spend a long time developing our book ideas and frameworks, mapping out the pages and developing the content together. Once we have a clear sense of the whole, Antonia starts working on the illustrations, making rough maquettes of the book to test. She then creates the illustrations one by one. Hilary responds to the image after only a quick glance, letting her first impression guide the verse.

X is for kiss. Making this book was a labour of love. We weren't under commission, there was no deadline, we didn't have anything to prove. We did it because we wanted to.

Y is for years in the making. We started work on the book in 2007, and it was published in 2013. This was partly due to our own schedules (see 'moonlighting'), and partly because it took a while to find a publisher (see 'determination' and 'jubilation'). But we were in no hurry, we loved the process of making it and we wanted to ensure it was as good as possible before releasing it into the world.

Z is for, you guessed it, zoo. Taronga Zoo is the spectacular ending of *All Aboard!*, complete with song, puppetry and a scenic *coup de théâtre*.

As well as being renowned children's book authors of *Numerical Street* and *Summer Time*, Hilary Bell is a playwright and librettist and Antonia Pesenti an architect and designer. The tenth anniversary edition of *Alphabetical Sydney* is available now.

Jump on the bus when their show *All Aboard!* comes to a theatre near you in the second half of 2023, starting at the Concourse Theatre Chatswood, the Sydney Opera House Playhouse and the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith, with more shows en route during 2024.



Rose Main Reading Room, New York Public Library. Photo by Clarence Holmes Photography, courtesy Alamy

One way to get a sense of a country's cultural touchstones is to visit its libraries — both the famous and lesser-known ones.

LIBRARY TOURISM

Some years ago I was at a conference of international thriller writers

(no, I hadn't known they were a thing either) when a fellow Australian author suggested we visit the New York Public Library in Midtown Manhattan. We had already been to see Grand Central Station and Yankee Stadium, so I had started to wonder if my tour guide wasn't some kind of weird public-infrastructure buff.

But the New York Public Library Main Branch, a Beaux-Arts marble palace of books, is one of the most impressive sights on Fifth Avenue. Opened in 1911, it boasts a majestic marble stairway, grand historic fountains, allegorical sculptures, guardian lions and (of course) six Corinthian columns.

The colossal building holds 2.5 million books, shelved among and beneath commanding murals, celestial frescoes and a barrel-vaulted rotunda. The setting makes the books appear votive, almost transcendent, as if writing were a gift to the gods.

Although not, perhaps, international thriller writing.

It turns out that my friend and I were engaging in library tourism, although I hadn't known that was a thing either.

The virtual hub of international library tourism is the website Library Planet, a 'crowdsourced travel guide for libraries', which features posts with wonderful titles such as 'The dok Library Concept Center of Delft, The Netherlands — Makes me want to hang out all day'; 'Ulyianovsk Regional Scientific Library, Russia — A library with a ballroom'; 'Roving robots, kitchens and creativity at Tampines Regional Library'; and, my favourite, 'Library of Songdo — No shoes in this pastel party of a library'.

Library Planet was founded by a Danish pair, Christian Lauersen and Marie Engberg Eiriksson, but recently they handed over the editorship to frequent

contributor Stuart Kells, a La Trobe University academic and author of the highly regarded *The Library: A catalogue of wonders*.

'If you're travelling as a library tourist, it's about libraries as spectacle,' says Kells. 'It's about the amazing architecture, the striking interiors, beautiful books in the right context — bindings that match the shelves that match the timberwork that match the ceilings.'

In 2017, Kells took off on a world tour of libraries with his wife, Fiona, and their two daughters, Charlotte, then aged one ('a lot of the time, we were carrying her around,' he says) and Thea, then aged five.

They visited libraries in Asia, Europe and the United States, and packed up again a year later to look at libraries in Tokyo. In 2019, they toured libraries in Western Australia, including Perth and the Kimberley.

Some of the libraries, such as the medieval Abbey Library of St Gall in St Gallen, Switzerland, are long-established mainstream tourist attractions. At St Gall, says Kells, 'People queue to get in — and not many of them are there to do research or to borrow books.'

The Kells family prized St Gall in part for its appeal as a 'cabinet of curiosities', which sets out to explore the richness of the world — and the breadth of human knowledge — through its exotic and eclectic collections.

'St Gall has a mummy in the main vaulted library and has incredible celestial globes and other artefacts from around the world,' says Kells. 'Those sorts of libraries are a bit like art galleries or scientific collections and museums.'

Kells particularly loved the British Library in London, the Houghton Library at Harvard University and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC. Little Thea, now 11, has affectionate memories of the New York Public

From top to bottom:

The tiled floor of the National Diet Library, Tokyo. Photo by Stuart Kells

Thea Kells playing dress-ups at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Photo by Stuart Kells

The Shakespeare Room at the State Library of NSW. Photo by Joy Lai



Library, with its collection of toys that inspired AA Milne to write *Winnie the Pooh*, and the children's floor at a branch of the National Diet Library in Tokyo, and the dress-up box at the Folger.

Kells says he learned from his travels that 'libraries are human places — they're places where people leave traces of themselves behind — and that libraries reflect human personalities, human interests, and that they serve a human and humane function.'

'And I think that's congruent with the fact that we travelled with children,' he says, 'and we used libraries as places to eat and things like that. You can't divorce the informational and conversational functions from people.'

Kells nominates Jane Cowell, CEO of Yarra Plenty Regional Library in Victoria, as 'one of my fellow travellers in the library world — in a non-literal travelling sense.'

Cowell confesses to being a library tourist for both business and pleasure. 'The first thing I do when I go anywhere is find out where the library is,' says Cowell. 'I've done four library tours, because I'm a librarian and I go overseas *only* to visit libraries.'

Kells says that more than half the contributors to Library Planet work in the industry. I ask Cowell if she has met any library tourists who aren't librarians. 'It's usually a well-meaning partner of a librarian,' she says. Architects are also attracted to libraries — they love civic buildings — along with photographers, historians and, of course, international thriller writers.

Cowell says the pandemic has shown that people need to be with other people. They get lonely at home and libraries can provide quiet, relaxed spaces with few social pressures and without the 'noise' of advertising.

'And where else can you go that also has really clean public toilets other than a public library?' she asks.

Cowell loves Toronto Reference Library in Canada: 'It has an amazing makerspace, where people can write and publish their own book,' she says. 'It has a book-publishing machine!'

She also recommends Aarhus Public Library in Denmark and Stockholm Public Library in Sweden. But perhaps the greatest of all Nordic libraries is the Helsinki Central Library



Vertical garden at the entrance to Woollahra Library, Double Bay, which opened in 2017. Photo by John Gollings

Oodi, in Finland, an astonishing facility that includes the world's only library sauna.

Perhaps the largest number of library tourists in one place in Australia can be found among the staff of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) in Canberra. 'I am a serial library visitor,' confesses Trish Hepworth, director of policy and education at ALIA. 'I must have visited about 60 libraries overseas. I often think there are two ways to really immerse yourself in a culture. One is to go down to either the local supermarket or the local market and see what people are buying every day. And the other is to go into a library space and see what people's cultural touchstone is.'

'I like going to different types of libraries,' says Hepworth. 'There's a lot to be said for dropping into local public libraries. When you're travelling, their offer of free wi-fi and somewhere to charge your phone is very useful, but it's also great just to see what information collections people care about. What does the local literature look like? What does the local publishing look like? What are their local programs? It's interesting to have a

look at the relative size of non-fiction collections compared to fiction collections or children's collections. Specialist libraries can be fascinating, too. A lot of university libraries have amazing architecture and often exhibitions highlighting some of their special collections — and it's those slightly more niche collections that really give you an insight into cultures.'

But Stuart Kells cautions against viewing libraries only as physical buildings. He says that he loves the State Library of NSW (and its Shakespeare Room in particular) but he disagrees with people who claim that it was the first library in Australia.

'That's not true,' says Kells. 'There was a library here before Europeans got here. The library was held differently — it was in people's heads, and it was conveyed orally, and there were physical records of it through artwork and other things. But there was a library, in the sense that there was a collection of texts and stories and science. The State Library of NSW might be the first European-style library, or it might be the first multistorey building that is a library, but it's not Australia's first library.'



Aarhus Public Library, Denmark

Courtesy Library Planet



Bargoonga Nganjin (North Fitzroy Library), Melbourne

Photo by Michael Gazzola

Some library tourists' favourites

Aarhus Public Library, Denmark

The Aarhus Library in the university city of Aarhus is built on 30,000 square metres of land that was once part of a working port. It is vast and spectacular, with a gorgeous outside deck and harbour views.

‘It has a beautiful deep gong that goes from ceiling to floor, which chimes whenever a baby is born in Aarhus – and everybody stops and claps,’ says Jane Cowell. ‘It also has a carpark that is managed by a robot. You plonk your car in, and the robot takes it and stacks it.’

Bargoonga Nganjin (North Fitzroy Library), Melbourne

Ground-breaking Bargoonga Nganjin (the name means ‘Gather Everybody’ in the language of the Wurundjeri people) opened in 2017.

‘The central, circular part of the building is meant to represent the spine of a book, and the brick walls are like the covers opening out from the road,’ says Jacqui Lucas, learning services coordinator at ALIA. ‘It has a rooftop

section with a kitchen that brings their multicultural community together weekly. It has the kitchen garden on the rooftop linked to their play area. People experiencing homelessness are very much welcome and the staff are caring and supportive. Also, there’s great youth spaces *and the best disability-friendly toilet in Australia!*’

Folger Shakespeare Library, New York, USA

Founded by Henry Clay Folger, the onetime chairman of Standard Oil, the Folger has ‘by far the best Shakespeare collection in the world,’ says Stuart Kells. ‘The share of First Folios is just nuts. There’s 235 in the world. If you’re a major library like the British Library, and you have a lot of First Folios, you might have five. The Folger has 82!’

Gladstone’s Library, Hawarden, North Wales

Gladstone’s Library was donated to the nation by former British prime minister William Gladstone. ‘It’s an absolutely drop-dead gorgeous Gothic-revival



**Gladstone's Library,
Hawarden,
North Wales**

Courtesy Library Planet



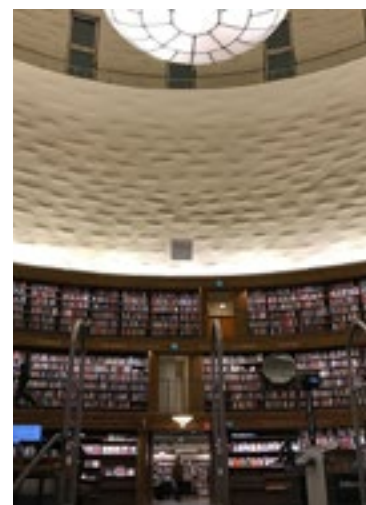
**Library of Congress,
Washington DC, USA**

Photo by Alan Novelli,
Courtesy Alamy



**National Library
of New Zealand,
Wellington, NZ**

Photo by Paul McCredie



**Stockholm Public
Library, Sweden**

Courtesy Library Planet

building, very photogenic,' says Phoebe Weston-Evans, program officer and researcher at ALIA. 'The public can peek in, and anybody can get a reader's card. I drove with my mum in a hire car to North Wales to see it.' Gladstone's styles itself as 'the UK's only residential library', with 26 hotel rooms for visitors. 'The rooms have a wallpaper with books,' says Weston-Evans. 'They're a bit kitsch. We decided to stay at an Airbnb instead.'

Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA

'The Library of Congress is amazing, incredible,' says Stuart Kells. 'It's the Americans trying to outdo Europe — and trying to outdo Rome, I guess. It's all marble and these incredible rooms of columns, and then the central dome, which is just vast, and it has a very strong ethos of access.'

'We went there with a one-year-old and a five-year-old, and the librarians were over the moon. They said, "Please come in! Here's the area where there's the puppet show! Here's the area where they can do craft!"'

National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, NZ

The National Library of New Zealand must be one of the friendliest libraries in the world, although you'd never guess that from the outside. 'It's a brutalist building, which is not necessarily my cup of tea, but it's really striking,' says Barbara Lemon, executive officer of National and State Libraries Australasia. 'There's a long-term exhibition, *He Tohu*, which includes a display of the original Treaty of Waitangi, as well as the original suffrage petition (New Zealand being the first country to award the vote to women) and the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand. The exhibition that has been built around those in a wooden cave-like space, which has a huge significance to Maori.

When I visited recently, the experience was deepened by joining a little primary-school tour from near Dunedin — a group of sheep-farming-family kids — who came to have a look inside this dark cave and fully participated. In the end, they were offered the chance to do a waiata

(a poem or farewell song) to recognise the space, and they did a haka on the spot. Which was pretty amazing in the dark. And the Home Café does a good cheese scone.'

Stockholm Public Library, Sweden

Stockholm Public Library opened in 1928 in a distinctive round building. 'You go in through dark marble,' says Jane Cowell, 'because the architect envisaged that you would walk into a circle of three storeys of stacks of books around the walls and go from the darkness and into the light.'

'Obviously, it isn't modern. You have to walk upstairs — there is no disability access; you wouldn't want it now — but it is an absolutely beautiful library, and we were serenaded by a virtuoso violinist who's also the librarian.'

Mark Dapin is a novelist, historian, true crime writer, journalist and screenwriter.

WORDS Shannon Burns

The library that made me

The first time he spent a Saturday afternoon surrounded by books, he was eleven or twelve years old and waiting for a girl who would never arrive.

She wrote him a letter and left it in his schoolbag the day before, informing him that she wanted to meet at the Parks Community Centre Library. He decided to look through some books as he waited, and he was so immersed in what he read that the hours went by quickly. Imagine the confusion and anguish he might have felt under different circumstances — if he had not been surrounded by hospitable and consoling worlds.

He was in love with a ninth-grade classmate two or three years later. He couldn't meet her eyes, or speak to her directly, even though he'd done both of those things without any trouble just a few weeks before. He'd dreamed about her one night and woke up a different person — the kind who couldn't look her in the eye. The boy saw that she spent her time browsing books from the poetry shelf during a weekly visit to the school library, so he searched the same shelf and selected several volumes for himself when the class was over.

He picked up those books because they promised to show him something he was too shy to explore directly. He hoped to gain insights into the girl's inner world. Poetry offered him the words and phrases that she had read, images and feelings that passed through her and now to him. That is what made it compelling at first. But as the boy continued to read, he came to feel that he was discovering unknown parts of himself in the process, that the poetry understood him but was also shaping him.

The boy's devotion to books and to love was brittle. He allowed a different girl to covertly stroke his thigh in the same school library just a few weeks later. He pretended to stare thoughtfully at a volume of poetry in his hands while the girl he adored focused on her work at another table. He did not have romantic feelings for the thigh-stroking girl, but her impulses surprised and thrilled him: the secret intimacy, her cool hands, a sense that they shared a sudden, powerful yearning that was wholly of the moment and would have no sequel. This was better than poetry, he knew — far better — but was it better than love?

His feeling for the girl who read poetry gradually faded. He looked her in the face and talked to her without nerves because she'd lost half of her meaning. The boy had fixed his eyes on poetry instead. He imagined that he was in the process of becoming an author of books that unknown girls or women would one day take from the shelves of unknown libraries. The knowledge that they were reading his books would resemble the feeling of being secretly stroked on the thigh by a mysterious companion while he pretended to read a volume of poetry.

In his middle teens he visited the West Lakes Public Library after a brief, self-inflicted illness and borrowed two large Russian novels. He went back a week later and borrowed more Russian novels. In the years after, the boy spent hours searching the shelves of the Port Adelaide Public Library and the Semaphore Public Library, in a manner that must have seemed compulsive to anyone who bothered to notice. He'd scan each shelf very carefully, then search the same shelves again from a different direction, moving back and forth, picking up a book and reading a sentence or paragraph, then putting it back or clutching it to his chest. He was looking for

something and was confident that he would find it because the library always provided what the boy needed, though he could never guess what that would be before he discovered it.

The boy knew that he was lucky. Other people his age needed money because their ideas of *experience*, *discovery* and *intimacy* involved travel and costly social events. If they had no money, they were deprived of those things. The boy had no money, but he knew that he was not wholly impoverished because he could discover parts of himself and experience foreign worlds and feel an intimate connection to the characters and narrators who lived in the books housed in the library. The boy did not feel that this was pathetic. Instead, he believed that he had access to an astonishing wealth that others did not appear to perceive, and because they couldn't see it they were forced to strive for other forms of enrichment.

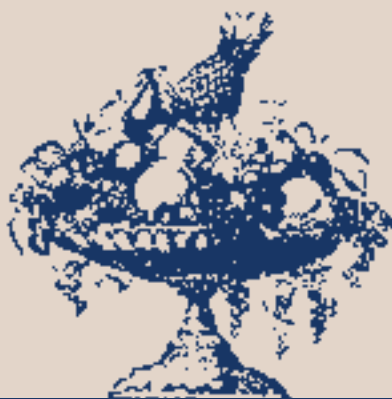
Perhaps the boy was occasionally homeless. Perhaps he ran out of food a few times. Perhaps he had no good reason to hope for a better future. Perhaps he was so alone that he was nearly sick with loneliness, and so untethered from normal feeling that he sometimes felt capable of almost anything. But when I think back to those years, which were difficult in almost every way, I think of all the promises fulfilled more than the deprivations endured. I remember searching for something I couldn't name and finding it again and again, in the Port Adelaide Public Library.

Shannon Burns is the author of *Childhood: A memoir*, published by Text.



Photo by Joseph Burns

WORDS Annie Tong



Stewed pears for autumn



Stewed pears

Pare, quarter, and core nice, ripe pears, and drop into cold water to keep from discolouring. Make a syrup, allowing two cups of water and a half cup of sugar to each quart of fruit. Boil the syrup for a few minutes, put in the fruit, and cook until clear and tender, being careful not to break the fruit through stirring. Three or four slices of lemon added to the syrup while boiling will improve the flavour of the pears. Remove the lemon before putting in the fruit.

When I think of autumn, I think of full-flavoured fruits. Plums, figs, persimmons, blackberries and, of course, pears! My first mission was to find an appropriately autumnal recipe in the Library's cookbook collection. As I wandered between shelves in our underground stacks, one spine in particular caught my eye with its warm and inviting title.

A Friend in the Kitchen, by Anna L Colcord, was published in Melbourne in 1898. The book contains 400 'choice recipes carefully tested' for the everyday home cook, as well as general advice and helpful tips. The Library's copy is a beautifully preserved second edition, clearly much used as it's filled with little scribbles and notes, as well as additional hand-written recipes. Scattered throughout the book are dainty illustrations of cooking utensils, staple ingredients and elegant dinner parties.

Good cooking does not consist in the preparation of highly seasoned foods to pamper a perverted appetite; but in cooking with simplicity, variety, and skill natural foods in a palatable and wholesome manner.

I started by peeling four ripe, medium-sized Packham pears. Instead of quartering them, I decided to keep them whole to maintain their beautiful organic shape. Now, I must admit the quart measurement left me a little stumped, but I let intuition lead the way. I used just enough water to cover the pears fully, which was 6 cups, with 1½ cups of brown sugar mixed in. The recipe didn't specify which sugar to use, but I figured that brown sugar would lend some colour and caramelisation to the dish, and indeed it did.

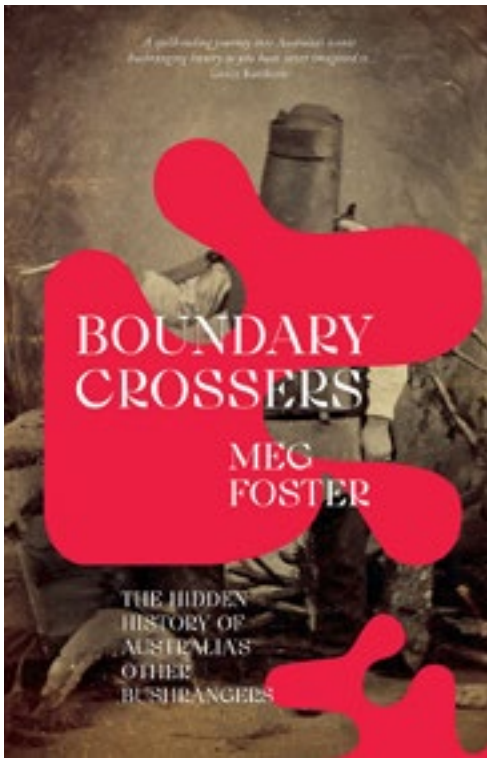
Pains have been taken to make the recipes plain and explicit, and yet as brief as possible ... It is hoped that this little work will be found to be a real friend in the kitchen. That it may be such, and that it may prove a blessing to thousands in many lands, is the sincere wish of the author.

Once the sugar syrup came to a boil, I reduced the heat to medium and carefully dropped my pears into the pot. I covered the saucepan and cooked the pears until they appeared golden brown and slightly translucent, which took around 50 minutes. I reduced the remaining syrup into a thicker consistency to pour over the pears, keeping them nice and juicy.

The final product was exactly how I'd expected it to be. Simple, sweet and super soft. If you're keen to amp up the autumn flavours, you might consider adding some aromatic spices, like the holy trinity of cinnamon, nutmeg and clove. For even more variety, you could serve these pears with a scoop of vanilla ice-cream or a bowl of warm oats — simply delicious!



Photo by Joy Lai



Boundary Crossers The hidden history of Australia's other bushrangers

by Meg Foster

NewSouth Publishing

Soon after Europeans first settled in New South Wales, the small cohort working to make the new colonial outpost a success became obsessed with stories about bushrangers.

The business of the day focused on law and order, which made sense in an environment that was essentially an open-air prison, but bushrangers offered something more than everyday petty crimes or heinous acts of violence. In a place where even the free persons felt that they were enduring a sentence of some sort, bushrangers highlighted what might be possible with freedom. Sure, bushrangers were crooks and scoundrels. Moreover, life as a self-directed felon was not always easy. Yet, these men, and the occasional woman, gave hope to those incarcerated by routine. (Although,

it must be said, victims of bushranger antics or bloodshed were not as tolerant as those who merely enjoyed swapping stories of bandits in the comparative safety of private homes or rowdy pubs.)

Authorities were overtly against bushrangers and their core activities. In a clear indication of how troublesome bushrangers could be, there is a special mention of this cohort in the first book printed in the colony. *The General Standing Orders: Selected from the general orders issued by former governors*, published by the Government Printer George Howe in 1802 is, essentially, a book of rules. For a nation that often prides itself on anti-authoritarianism, some of its headings are a tad startling. 'Bush-Rangers – Reward for Apprehending' and 'Convicts' make sense, but 'Extortion'



Limberlost

by Robbie Arnott

Text Publishing

Set in rural Tasmania during World War II, *Limberlost* is a poignant coming-of-age story. Ned is a teenager caught in his fractured family's grief-stricken inertia. He feels alone and can't understand the emotions swirling around the adult world. His way to make sense of it is to doggedly follow his dream and thus prove himself.

Arnott's beautifully descriptive language shows his love of the Tasmanian landscape, as he allows Ned to find deep solace in the nature that surrounds him. Ned dares to explore the mystery and terror of the wild, the love of which will affect him all his life. It is also about the importance of family connection, and the passing on of stories so you have a sense of where you belong. One long hot momentous summer is interspersed with chapters moving through Ned's adult life, each reverberating with an echo of that time.

Helena Poropat



Left Turn on Red Permitted after Stopping

Foreword by Emily Bitto

Brio Books

Even though this, the 36th edition of the UTS Writers Anthology, was produced in the middle, or perhaps at the end of the pandemic, curiously not one story dwells on Covid. Instead, the writers focus on eternal stories of love, hope, grief and

struggle, as if the pandemic serves as a reminder of the even stronger flows that exist in our lives, to which we can offer no resistance.

Recurring themes in this collection include the cycle of life and death and the blood associated with both, beautifully captured in 'Blood Harvest (Debts)' by Alex Eggerking, in which a pregnant woman writes about the death of her friend from cancer. Other stories explore the significance of mothers and motherhood: the joys of pregnancy and the grief and shock of miscarriage are rendered exquisitely in 'Her Name' by Angela Blake and 'Unnamed' by Verity Borthwick. In 'Songs of a Silent Partner', Pippi Cullinan writes of the legacy of a mother's love, 'a gift of nature and nurture, of solace and strength'. A poem by Lin Blythe names all the 'Other Mothers' in the narrator's life: grandmother, aunty, school friend's mum, mother-in-law. Avid short story readers will enjoy more gems like these in this year's offerings.

Renee Holman

and 'Hogs or Fresh Pork' reveal regulations that covered a variety of crimes, in addition to those that applied to most aspects of daily life.

Our national fascination with our early lawbreakers continues. As Meg Foster writes, we celebrate these renegades because they 'epitomise the underdog, the Aussie battler, the pioneer spirit and the noble bushman traditions that Australians hold dear'. The nobility of many bushrangers is questionable, even for their most ardent defenders, but there is something compelling about the capacity for initiative and the obvious resilience of these underdogs.

Most of us recognise the name Ned Kelly and the silhouette of his makeshift armour. Ben Hall is another famous name, and those interested in such stories

would be familiar with Michael Howe, Frank Gardiner and Frederick Ward. Nodding in acknowledgment is one thing, understanding complex histories is quite another. Foster has taken four bushrangers — William Douglas, Sam Poo, Mary Ann Bugg and Jimmy Governor — and interrogated their lives in ways that move beyond the traditional re-telling of bold exploits, fabulous robberies and heinous murders.

The bushranger presents a challenge to the historian. Such figures can polarise: the occasional admirable trait or eccentricity might appeal, but they had real victims. Some rich bloke being mugged of a few baubles might be overlooked, but raw brutality leading to murder is another matter. Indeed, bushrangers can earn

our rage and our sympathy; crime and the social contexts that may facilitate it are as difficult to comprehend as ever.

Foster's navigation of problematic terrain is compassionate and lucid. She has exploited a notoriously porous archive to tell these stories in new ways. As Foster explains, she wanted to see these people afresh, and for their stories to be 'told on their own terms — their voices salvaged, as far as possible, from the imperfect sources that remain'. She has succeeded.

If you have never read criminal biography before, or if you routinely devour these texts, then you will enjoy spending a few hours with Foster's four boundary crossers.

Dr Rachel Franks



Wildflowers

by Peggy Frew

Allen & Unwin

Wildflowers grabs you hard by the shoulders and doesn't let up. It is a captivating, emotionally intense portrait of the relationships between three sisters, and the havoc wreaked by addiction on a whole family. Seemingly defined by their childhood traits — Meg the diligent

one, absent-minded Nina and wild youngest child Amber — as adults they struggle with Amber's string of addictions while stuck in these personal dynamics. The novel is also a deft portrayal of a young woman's alienation from others and herself, as Nina withdraws from normal life after her part in Meg's disastrous attempt to cure Amber's addiction to prescription pills.

Frew's masterful weaving together of the past and present gradually reveals the tensions and tipping points from childhood onwards that have contributed to the sisters' current crisis. There could not be any fairy-tale ending, but glimmers of hope appear in Nina's fragile acceptance of nurture, and her ability to reach out with the same.

Jane Gibian



Who Does That Bitch Think She Is? Doris Fish and the rise of drag

by Craig Seligman

Hachette

History told through biography is perhaps my favourite genre, especially with scenes as vivid, entertaining and radical

as those shaped by Doris Fish, aka Philip Mills (1952–1991). Doris Fish emerged as a performer with the anarchic Sydney drag troupe Sylvia and the Synthetics. She moved to San Francisco in the mid-1970s, but her ties to Australia remained strong. She wrote a column for the gay magazine *Campaign*, kept up friendships and made frequent trips home, especially for Mardi Gras. But her star shone brightest in her adopted city where, in 1990, the mayor declared 'Doris Fish Day' to honour this entertainer, activist, artist and writer.

Brooklyn-based cultural critic Craig Seligman knew Doris Fish. His biography brings together decades of interviews and research. Happily there is no skimping on the Australian episodes. Both intimate and sociological, this highly readable biography illuminates the history of queer performance, satire and community-formation in two of the world's great gay metropolises, between Stonewall and AIDS.

Catherine Freyne

WORDS Sarah Morley

Ethel Turner gets personal

A new acquisition reveals the personal and professional lives of one of Australia's best-known authors.

Studio portrait of Ethel Turner



As I leaf through the pages of Ethel Turner's fragile diaries, it strikes me that we can never really know the creators of our favourite works of fiction. We devour their works without giving a second thought to the lives they lived, their loves and losses, or the responsibilities and personal challenges they juggled, all while racing towards their publisher's deadline.

Ethel Turner's name is synonymous with Australian literature. Her landmark first novel, *Seven Little Australians*, published by Ward, Lock and Bowden in 1894, was such a resounding success that she was soon referred to as the 'Louisa Alcott of Australia', Alcott, of course, being the author of the American classic *Little Women*.

In 1889, at the age of 19, Turner began keeping a diary. It became a near-daily practice for the next 62 years until 1951, seven years before her death. She recorded her daily activities, social interactions, special events and innermost



A selection of the 44 books Ethel Turner published in her lifetime.

thoughts and feelings with the frankness and creativity one would expect from a gifted writer. We see her future husband, Herbert Raine Curlewis, HRC, C or H, as she ultimately referred to him, slowly emerge on the page. He appears first as a contributor to the *Parthenon*, a magazine Turner established with her sister Lilian, and then, more frequently, as a source of frustration as he relentlessly pursued her affections. On 14 February 1891, Valentine's Day no less, a determined Turner wrote, 'I walked through Domain with C. and I was horrid to him, when he said he loved me, I told him I detested him with all my heart — and so I did. I don't like him an atom.'

Her diaries reflect a reluctance to commit, which may have been influenced by her own mother's volatile marriage to her third husband, Charles Cope. After witnessing one of their many arguments she wrote, 'I wonder do all married people have rows. I wouldn't be married for anything.' She certainly

took some convincing. At one stage, after some harsh words, Curlewis went so far as to return every single letter she had written to him. Turner received the parcel on 6 March 1891, along with two withered roses and a little verse book and card that she had given him at 'Xmas'. Whether because of indecision or simply playing hard to get, the courtship plays out in the diaries over seven years. Finally, on 9 May 1891, Turner and Curlewis were engaged, but in secret, and for five years she wore the unassuming gold engagement bracelet that Curlewis gave her in lieu of an engagement ring. Turner recorded in her diary, 'I am frightened at what I have done, and yet so happy ... I never really thought I cared for him till tonight.' After this somewhat feisty beginning, the couple were finally married in 1896 and would go on to have a long and warm relationship.

We know all this because the Library has recently acquired the final tranche of the Ethel Turner and Herbert Curlewis



papers from their family.

The collection, a veritable treasure trove, includes Turner's personal diaries from 1889 to 1951, her 'Pen Money Book' (where she recorded earnings from her writing), love letters sent from Curlewis to Turner during their courtship and,

endearingly, a series of dance cards with names of potential suitors — including her husband-to-be, more than once across an evening — scrawled in pencil. These delicate dance cards, some with their pencils still attached, are a glorious reminder of long-gone, nineteenth-century courtship rituals.

Herbert Curlewis's letters to Turner are full of adoration and affection in contrast, it must be said, to Turner's more matter-of-fact diary entries. In April 1893 he ended a letter with 'I love you I love you beyond all words my darling, darling Baby I love you I love you, Herbert'.

Turner's diaries were not written for general viewing although her granddaughter, Philippa Poole, published a compilation of excerpts in 1979. Their new home at the Library ensures that the unexpurgated diaries are available for public access for the first time, allowing researchers to read and engage with an intimate record of a life full of ambition and aspiration. The diaries document the challenging roles Turner juggled throughout her lifetime — lover, housewife, mother, grandmother, citizen and writer.

A diary entry from 10 January 1902 captures this balancing act:

there are too many 'departments' in life to be head of — probably as it is I am a bad manager. But there is the roll-top desk department, & the garden (a big matter at present) & the nursery, which mustn't be neglected, & Society — which is neglected — I've a 100 calls at least owing I believe — & the Clothes department & the House Linen & the Pantries, & the orders & the servants ... And then there is shopping. And the calls of one's family, — & the rights of one's husband to have me at leisure in an evening, & letters & accounts &&&&

Turner was an independent, career-driven, successful writer by the time she married Herbert Curlewis. She sought independence early in her career and writing was a respectable way to make an income. She quickly earned the respect of men in the literary fraternity, who soon realised she could be relied upon to deliver quality pieces for their publications. In November 1892 she took charge of 'The Children's Corner'

in the *Illustrated Sydney News*, under the pseudonym Dame Durden. For almost 40 years throughout her career, she edited several children's pages and supplements across four different newspapers.

Turner took her roles and responsibilities as a married woman very seriously, yet still managed to sustain her writing. In addition to her editorial roles, she wrote for newspapers and magazines including *The Bulletin*, *Illustrated Sydney News*, *Town and Country Journal*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, always careful to record every penny she earned. In 1894, the year *Seven Little Australians* was published, Turner recorded an income of £159, which grew to £377 the following year. She wrote steadily through the war years and, with her growing success as a writer and editor, by 1923 her earnings of £1543 exceeded her husband's judicial salary of £1500.

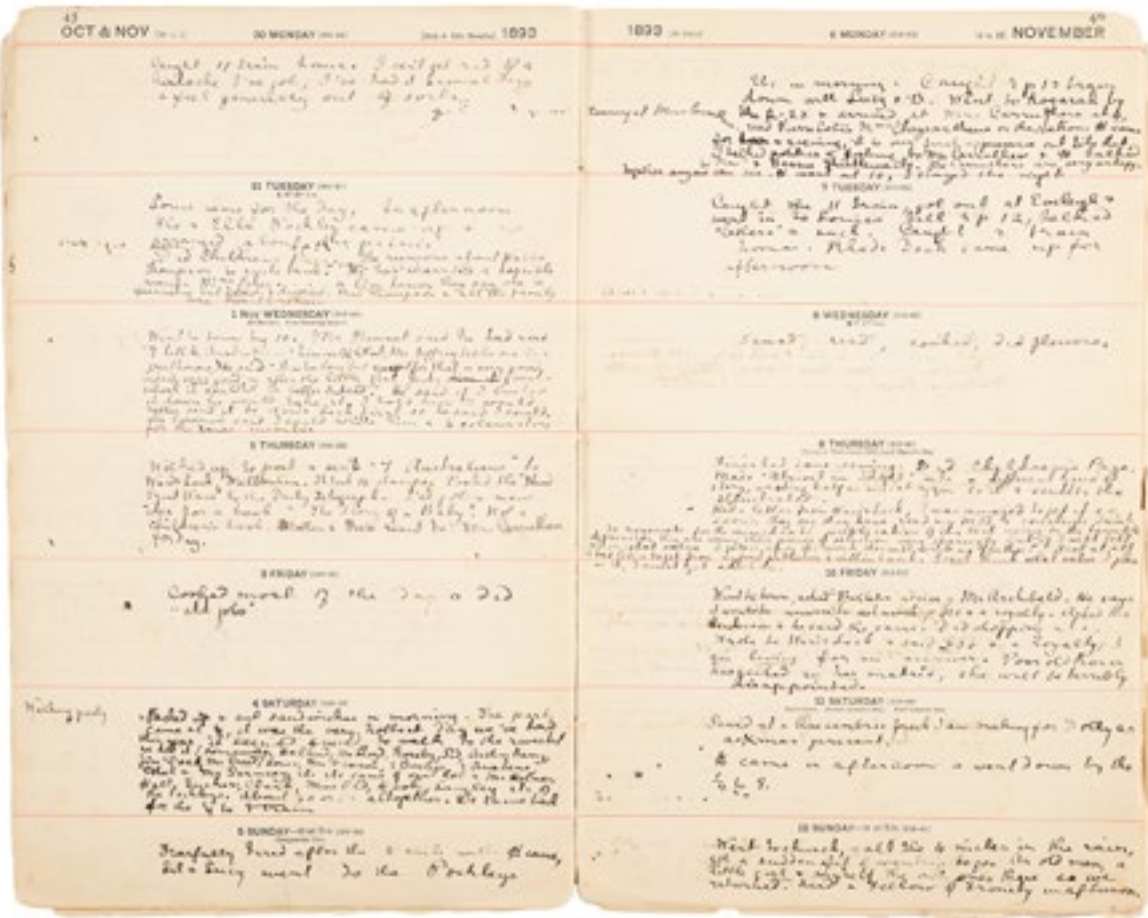
The diaries reveal her personal drive and determination as well. In December 1889 she wrote, 'I'll be a Millionairess soon.' In 1893, a week before sitting down to write the novel for which she would become famous, she wrote in her diary, 'I do want fame — and plenty of it!'

Yet, although she was gifted creatively, Turner was no free-spirited bohemian. She had a public persona, and perhaps being the wife of a judge dictated the social circles in which they moved. She regularly attended official functions and was comfortable in society.

Simultaneously, she threw herself wholeheartedly into domestic life and was determined to succeed as a homemaker and mother. In the early days of their marriage, the Curlewis, a tight-knit unit working to build a home together, were careful with their money and despite the flow of royalties from her books, they made the curtains and furniture for their Mosman home themselves.

Turner approached motherhood with confidence and passion. Her daughter, Jean, arrived in February 1898, followed by a son, Adrian, in January 1901. Despite the new additions to the family and requisite changes to routine, Turner didn't miss a beat, managing to deliver a book each year with *The Camp at Wandinong* in 1898 and *The Wonder-Child: An Australian story* in 1901, the year of Federation. Diary entries from these years are full of childhood achievements and happy accounts of regular family holidays to the Blue Mountains and Palm Beach. Jean, the apple of her mother's eye, had a gift for writing and produced four novels herself and articles for various magazines before her death from tuberculosis in 1930, at the age of 32. This tragedy greatly affected Turner who, in the remaining 28 years of her life, never completed another novel. Her son, Adrian, became a judge like his father and was very active in public life.

One of Ethel Turner's many dance cards, with pencil still attached



192

Jan 31 1895	91.0.0	Jan 7 1895	
Feb 30 R. S. Wardschell	4.4.0	May 2	
May 11 Ward's Lock Progs	915.16.3	(Apr)	
Apr. May June S. S. S. S. S.	91.0.0	Apr 27	
To end Jan	1105.0.3	Jan 28	
July 1895	91.0.0	Jan 29	
Dec 1895	10.10.0	Jan 30	
Nov 20 Ward's Lock Progs	240.3.0	Jan 31	
Sept 1896, Nov 1896	90.0.8	Feb 1	
	£ 1543.4.1	Feb 2	

His own children, Ian and Philippa, were a source of great joy for Turner and helped fill the void left by Jean's absence.

Turner's output was prodigious; in addition to her freelance writing, between 1894 and 1928 she averaged one novel per year, producing 44 books in her lifetime. She documented the moment she began working on each of these titles. The year 1893 was particularly momentous for Turner and it is exciting to watch *Seven Little Australians* unfold on the page, especially in her own handwriting. On 24 January, which happened to be her birthday, she scrawled in the margins: 'Seven L. Aust – Sketched it out', and made the life-changing decision to save the work for a book publisher, rather than a newspaper: 'I don't think I'll let it go to the *Illustrated*, if I can do without it there, I'll see if I can get it published in book form.' Later that year, on 18 October she records: 'Morning wrote chapter XX 7 Australians, killed Judy to slow music.' On 2 November she wrote, 'Walked up to post and sent 7 L. Australians to Ward Lock Melbourne. It took 18 stamps.' The reply came just one week later – they wished to negotiate for immediate publication.

She found time for writing as the opportunity arose, often working late into the night when inspiration struck. On occasion, Curlewis's mother would mind the children, which allowed bursts of creativity and up to ten hours of solid

writing time. At other times Turner sought refuge in the Blue Mountains, which offered peace and solitude in which to write her latest novel.

Her growing interest in social issues meant that when she wasn't writing, keeping house or performing motherly duties, Turner devoted time to a swathe of charitable causes. Jumping into action during times of national crisis, she formed committees, attended rallies and wrote newspaper and magazine articles to raise awareness for the latest cause. In November 1902, she penned an 'Appeal for Bush Sufferers' in the *Daily Telegraph* in support of those experiencing extreme hardship during the drought. In March the following year, she spent 11 hours fundraising on 'Drought Saturday' at Mosman Wharf.

Ethel Turner's diaries give us a candid account of her rich and busy life from when she was 19 through to her 81st year. During her lifetime it was unusual for a woman to continue working after marriage so Turner's ability to balance her public persona with her roles as mother, housewife and citizen, while finding time to produce writing from which she made a sizable income, is nothing short of amazing. Her achievement as perhaps Australia's greatest writer for children, and author of an Australian classic that has never been out of print is one thing; the incredible life she lived is altogether another.

Various pages from Ethel Turner's diaries and, bottom right, her 'Pen Money Book'

Sarah Morley, curator.



THE FLYING PIEMAN OF SYDNEY, EN POINTE

SCENE 2
MACQUARIE PLACE

ARRIVAL

WORDS Anna Corkhill

The 'Flying Pieman', William Francis King (1807–1873), was a legendary fixture on the streets of Sydney during the 1840s.

An actual pieman, King sold his pies around Hyde Park and Circular Quay, but became best known for his ambitious 'feats of pedestrianism'. These gave him his moniker 'Flying Pieman'. For anyone even vaguely familiar with Sydney's geography, it seems extraordinary that he was able to sell his pies to passengers boarding the Sydney to Parramatta ferry, and then run to Parramatta in time to sell any unsold ones to passengers as they disembarked.

A recent addition to the Library's collection has not only given us the opportunity to brush up on the Pieman's exploits but see how they might have been represented on stage. Costume and set designs — 21 watercolours in all — for 'The Flying Pieman — A Ballet Impression of Old Sydney' by artist Roderick Shaw, have been donated to the Library by his daughter, Christine Shaw.

Along with these colourful designs is an accompanying ballet storyline written by Roderick's wife, Frances Shaw. The drawings and story together were likely prepared as an entry for a 1942 competition instigated by ballet impresario Wassily de Basil, who brought the Ballet Russes to Australia. The music for the proposed ballet, which was never performed, was composed by Nancy Salas (1910–1990), a significant Sydney musician and music teacher, who performed with Sydney Symphony Orchestra throughout her career. Specialist librarian Meredith Lawn was able to track down the handwritten musical composition for the 'Flying Pieman' ballet from within the Library's Nancy Salas archive, bringing the various elements of this creative endeavour together. In the end, De Basil's competition was won by Donald Friend, for a ballet about Ned Kelly.

Sketch for 'The Flying Pieman — A Ballet Impression of Old Sydney', the ballet that never was, by Roderick Shaw

Born in 1807, William Francis King arrived in Sydney from London in 1829, and worked in various jobs before becoming a pie seller around 1834. From 1842, King's walking feats became increasingly ambitious, and his pie-selling was soon eclipsed by his athletic adventures. In 1847 the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* reported that King successfully walked 'one hundred and ninety-two miles in forty-six hours and a half, without resting for a single minute'. He was also known to have beaten the mail coach from Sydney to Windsor, and to have walked from one town to another carrying a goat or a dog, or a 45 kilogram wooden pole. And, of course, for beating the Sydney to Parramatta ferry on foot. These walks often concluded with speeches and proclamations. His exploits were perhaps not so lucrative however, because in 1873 he died destitute at the Liverpool Benevolent Asylum.

The Shaws' proposed ballet doesn't delve too deeply into King's life story or pedestrianism. Instead, it is a simple love story set on the streets of Sydney in 1835, that revolves around a young woman struggling to decide between a conventional romance with a red-coated soldier and the vivid and intriguing 'Pieman' who dances in and out of Sydney, living a life without responsibility or care. Roderick Shaw's designs include one scene set in Macquarie Place, animated with soldiers, sailors, street-nuisances, pickpockets and drunks, street hawkers and young girls, all mingling vibrantly. It is a hive of activity, not least as the square is the finishing point of the Flying Pieman's race on foot against the Windsor to Sydney mail coach. Shaw's lively costume designs show the Pieman in a bright blue and yellow suit jacket and striped blue and white hat – with a pig under one arm!

Artist Roderick Shaw was born at Drummoyne in 1915 and became best known as a social realist painter – he was a member of the Communist Party until 1956 – and a printer of quality, limited-edition books, particularly poetry, under the imprint Edwards and Shaw. He was also a political cartoonist. During World War II, Shaw was a 'camoufleur', or camouflage artist, with the RAAF. In 1938 he married Frances Cottingham, a JC Williamson actress, and they were together until her death in 1983.

Given the opportunity, they might have created one of Australia's most flamboyant, memorable ballets. We'll never know, but at least now we can see what might have been.

Anna Corkhill, Librarian.



Some of Shaw's sketches for the ballet costume designs.



THE FLYING PIEMAN



Artist Peter Kingston and poet
Robert Adamson at Taronga Zoo.
Photo by Juno Gemes

A poet, an artist and a photographer visit the zoo

I had been party to the magical collaboration between artist Peter Kingston and poet Robert Adamson on the brilliant *Shark-net seahorses of Balmoral* from the idea's inception, when Peter suggested it at our house on the Hawkesbury.

Examining their childhoods on either side of Sydney Harbour, through poems and linocuts, answering each other in their respective art forms, these two masters of their art collaborated for over a year in a creative dialogue, one that delighted them both.

We decided to go to Taronga Zoo together so I could create a portrait of my husband, Robert Adamson, and my dear old friend Peter Kingston for this rare artists' book.

Taronga Zoo, so vast and grand, had a special place in all our childhoods. I wanted this portrait to be as intimate as these two old friends were, having shared a lifetime in art and friendship.

That old boulder seat I found appealed to them. They sat down and immediately started discussing

notes for the book. I might have asked them to look up, to show their wise, beautiful faces, but this concentration on the work at hand was so typical of them both. They were always examining the created page together — artwork and poems — so I let it be.

There is such an ease between them, in their curiosity — examining, reflecting, creating — that was so essential to them both.

Also evident is an ease and trust with me as photographer. Their bodies are so relaxed, they're just getting on with it. That's the beautiful thing about photographing two masters who are also your friends. There is a mutual trust and an inner knowing which guides you.

Juno Gemes is a photographer whose work is held in the Library's collection. She wrote these words from her Hawkesbury River studio just days after the memorial service for her husband, Robert Adamson.

See images from *Shark-net seahorses of Balmoral* on the inside cover, and pages 14 & 16.

Ma Thida

A Burmese writer forced to live outside her country confronts her situation with questions that should have simple answers, but don't.

WHAT IS YOUR ADDRESS AT THE MOMENT?

What a challenge it is to fill in the blank space underneath this simple question. What is my address? It has been almost two years and I literally don't have a settled address. Doesn't every person need an address to identify who they are? Who am I — an exile? No! I never want to be an exile, I just want to be away from my permanent address for a certain period of time. When our home becomes an unsafe place, we simply lose our address.

So, how should I address myself? As homeless? As address-less? I never want to be country-less! I know my country is not a safe place but it is my country, my home, and my address. How can I easily give up addressing myself as a no-more-countryman of my own country? Yet, global society tries to identify me by my address. The idea of globalisation, paradoxically, has not helped with accepting the legitimacy of the global citizen. So, around the globe many writers who practise free speech are losing their chance to use their former identities or citizenship as a safe home, or settled address. What a world we live in!

DO YOU HAVE TO BLUR THE BACKGROUND WHEN YOU'RE HAVING A ZOOM MEETING WITH OTHER WRITERS?

This seems to be a new technique to make people safe because identifying where we are is risky for many writers in my country, Myanmar. Though we do keep in touch and have activities or meetings on digital platforms, even though we live in different parts of the world.

Some writers left for fighting fields inside the country, some are hidden in homes in small villages, some are in refugee houses on the Thai-Myanmar border and some are living in modest housing in asylum countries. Some, courageously, remain at their own home addresses. But no one wants to disclose where they are right now, so we are careful to give no identifying clues — background colour, hanging objects on the wall, room layout, lighting of the space. Any of those things can identify the place where the writer is. This cannot be allowed, or no one will feel safe. So we end up with blurred backgrounds in Zoom meetings.

Just as the idea of a global citizen hasn't really taken off, the idea of the 'netizen' is not yet helpful for Myanmar writers either. Cyber security and data privacy for us is never guaranteed.

A NEST OR A DUNGEON?

'This is the fifth nest for me. In fact, this is like a self-imposed dungeon.' This is how a well-known writer who was charged under defamation law explains his 'new address'. Since April 2021, he has been on the list of writers and artists charged with defaming the military. Security forces reached his own home when he was away, so he too lost his address and went underground to avoid being arrested. He moved from one safe house to another, experiencing insecurity, rejection and bullying because he often had to share places with other people also hiding from the secret police and soldiers. Thankfully, he has still not been arrested, but lives in a small room of a house, never going into the living room or kitchen where neighbours might come and go. He is there, but in secret, with no chance to live publicly.

This man has moved five times already so calls this 'new address' (which is unknown to him too because he was taken there late at night in a car's trunk) his fifth nest, or dungeon. His experience and living conditions reflect the current situation of an average revolutionary artist or activist in Myanmar.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO WRITERS IN MYANMAR NOW?

On 1 February 2021, the day of the coup, four writers and poets were arrested and charged under defamation law, which carries two to three years' imprisonment. All four of them [Maung Thar Cho, Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi, Than Myint Aung and Htin Lin Oo] have now been released.

But since then, more than 40 writers and over 100 journalists have been arrested. Some were released after a couple of months, but currently more than 40 writers, poets and journalists remain in prison. Two poets [K Za Win and Kyi Lin Aye] were killed during protests and one poet [Khet Thi] was killed during an investigation. Writer and activist Wai Moe Naing faces a potential prison term of almost 30 years on many serious charges, including high treason.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT, INCLUDING FOR WRITERS LIKE YOU WHO ARE OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY?

We hold on to our freedom to create our own art, even though we writers have lost our addresses and face all kinds of risks. It is not easy, but we must use our freedom to choose not to be silent. Some of us might not be vocal or articulate for the time being, but we keep writing or creating because we foresee a day of light sooner or later. Then we need to be ready with our work to heal our society from deep-seated wounds and pain.

We have witnessed the negative, terrible impact caused by irresponsible army men on our country's present and future. We know this is the dark time but we also know that there will still be a light.

Ma Thida is a Burmese surgeon, human rights activist and writer who has sometimes written under the pseudonym Suragamika. She was awarded the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award in 1996, in the course of her six years' imprisonment in Burma. Her most recent book in English translation is *Prisoner of Conscience*. She is currently chair of PEN's Writers in Prison Committee. This piece is published in association with Sydney PEN.



Illustration of Ma Thida
by Gianluca Costantini



Stars in the stacks

A rare books specialist finds that the State Library of NSW holds surprises beyond the natural history books and Australiana for which its collection is renowned.

STARS
IN THE
STACKS

In 2022, I joined the Library on a two-year secondment from Senate House Library, the central library of the University of London. There I look after an estimated 200,000 books printed before 1850, in addition to numerous modern named special collections. The British Library, one of the best libraries in the world, is a 10-minute walk down the road. Yet the State Library has its own power to amaze and delight. Here are a few examples of surprises I have encountered.

Charles Dickens regularly published his novels in monthly parts. Readers benefited economically by spreading the pound's outlay for a novel over 19 months instead of splurging at once. But the format exercised patience: read a few chapters, and you'd have to wait four long weeks for the next instalment. It also influenced the pattern of the narrative, as each part needed to end on a sufficient cliff-hanger to entice purchasers back for more.

The final part would be issued with a title page, with the expectation that readers would then have their parts bound together. Often they did, stripping out the extraneous material. Not always, and as a general thing, I am used to seeing Dickens parts. Indeed, at Senate House Library we have the original parts for *Little Dorrit*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Edwin Drood*, in addition to parts of novels by other popular Victorian writers. But the set of original parts of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836–1837) here at the State Library is something special. This was Dickens's first novel, and he was not yet famous when he began it. Initial sales were disappointing. Thus, the original parts of *Pickwick* are scarcer than those of his subsequent novels because there were fewer purchasers. Only as the novel progressed did it become a publishing sensation that gripped the nation.

The physical parts trace the rise of the author's popularity. The more popular an author or work, the more advertisements accompanied the narrative, just as these days more advertisements accompany a popular television program than an unpopular one. The first three parts of *Pickwick* limit advertisements to those of the publishers on the back cover. In Part Four, Sam Weller was introduced and sales began to rise.



Opposite: Doublures of watered silk that make up the binding of Andrew Kippis's *The Life of Captain James Cook*

Right: The Library's copy of the first part of Charles Dickens's first novel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*

Advertisements extended to the inside back wrapper and, in Part Six, to the inside of the front wrapper. By Part Seven, Pickwick was entrenched. The eight-page 'Pickwick Advertiser' was inserted, advertising such objects as ginger essence ('particularly recommended to all cold, phlegmatic, weak and nervous constitutions'), gentlemen's apparel, perfume, silver tea services, toiletry articles, and corn and unguent solvent. Advertisers paid anything from 7 shillings for up to 10 lines, to 2 pounds and 2 shillings for a full-page spread. In the novel's final issue, 'The Pickwick Advertiser' has trebled to 24 pages and advertisements account for 28 pages in all (discounting the covers), plus a small inserted leaflet cataloguing Mechi's cutlery establishment in Leadenhall Street.

A very different publication is the dissenting minister Andrew Kippis's *Life of Captain James Cook*, published in London in 1788. This is the first of several well-known biographies Kippis wrote. Having been published the year before Cook died, it is Cook's earliest published biography. The public embraced it. Seven English-language editions appeared by the end of 1792, while French and German translations were published in 1789. By an antiquarian definition, the book is by no means rare. Thirty-two copies from Australia and New Zealand alone are recorded on the main English-language catalogue of early printed books. Most copies, like the one under my care at the University of London, are visually unprepossessing. Two of the State Library's copies, however, are stunningly different.

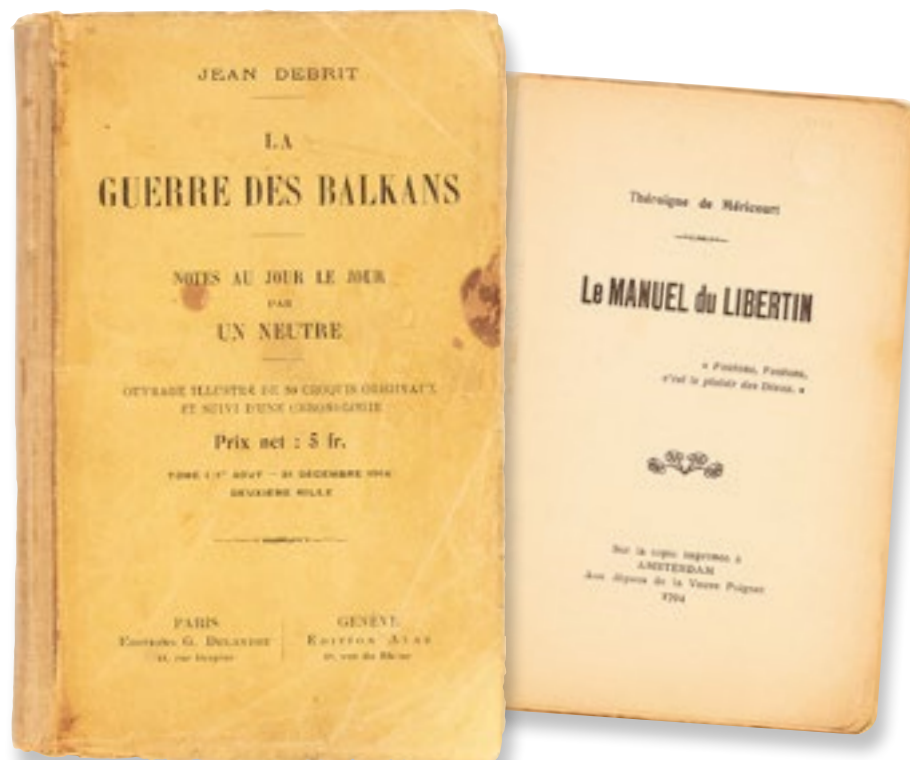
The immediate difference is their sumptuous West End designer bindings from the early twentieth century. The binder of both was Mudie's in New Oxford Street, best known as the circulating library which propped up the three-volume novel. The copies are bound in full Morocco leather, itself a

sign of high quality, with a geometric gilt design on the covers and gilt edges. They have watered silk doublures (a book cover's lining), a feature which adds to the sense of luxury. Most eye-catching is the painted miniature of Captain Cook in the centre of the upper board of each, their ultimate mark as collectors' items. The two pictures follow the same model, an engraving by the relatively obscure but talented engraver John Chapman, without being identical: definitely grey in one portrait, Cook's hair looks brown in some lights in the other, and the miniatures differ in size. Both copies have been extra-illustrated: that is, an owner has inserted additional relevant maps, scenes, manuscript letters, and especially portraits into each copy, following a fashion from the 1790s which remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, especially for topographies and biographies. Some of the pictures are the same in the two copies, some different, and they have been placed differently. Chapman's portrait of Cook appears in both copies, in different places — in black and white as it was produced in one copy, and coloured in the other.



Cover of Kippis's *The Life of Captain James Cook*

Two tatty paperbacks provided the next fascination. Both proclaim themselves to be from the second issue of *La Guerre des Balkans: notes au jour le jour par un neutre*, written by Jean Debrit and published simultaneously in Paris by G Delandre, and Geneva by Atar. At first sight there is nothing odd about that. French books about the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 were common and popular in the second decade of the twentieth century; one, by Gabriel Hanotaux, ran into six editions. Jean Debrit (1880–1956) was a Swiss journalist, from Geneva, who wrote *La Guerre de 1914: notes au jour le jour par un neutre* (Geneva: Atar, [1915 or 1916]). Delandre was a known Parisian imprint for publications issued during, and about, the Great War. But Debrit did not write a book entitled *La Guerre des Balkans*, and the covers disguise two separate pieces of erotica: Théroigne de Méricourt’s explicit sex manual *Le manuel du libertin*, first published in 1794, in the one instance, and *Journal d’un prêtre de Vénus*, a much later work sometimes ascribed to Edmond Dumoulin, in the other.



Camouflaging a racy or illicit work with a respectable binding is not in itself unusual, as the Soviet samizdat testifies. What struck me was that the same fictitious binding is used for two separate works. Both editions are very rare.

Permanent staff who have been curating such books for years often say, ‘oh, yes’, when I exclaim in wonder. Meanwhile, I continue my exciting journey of discovery.

Dr Karen Attar
Senior Librarian, Rare Books,
State Library of NSW

**Curator of Rare Books and
University Art, Senate House
Library, University of London**

The fake cover, left, for the real book, right

20 questions

- 1 What is considered to be the earliest surviving opera?
- 2 What part of human anatomy is named after the seahorse
- 3 International Women’s Day falls on 8 March. In Australia, the gender pay gap is calculated at: (a) 7.3% (b) 10.2% (c) 14.1%
- 4 Who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973?
- 5 What is celebrated in the annual German Spiel des Jahres awards?
- 6 Indigenous Australian rapper and activist Jacob Paulson is better known by what name?
- 7 What is the name of Ethel Turner’s first book?
- 8 The term ‘yuppies’ was coined in the early 80s to describe materialism in a certain demographic — how was the word formed?
- 9 Which extended poem, first published in 1923 by Leonard and Virginia Woolf, begins: ‘April is the cruellest month’?
- 10 What is the name of the fictional fast-food chain in the television series *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*?
- 11 In which musical film did Vanessa Redgrave sing about the ‘Lusty Month of May’?
- 12 Mageirocophobia is the fear of what?
- 13 Which library holds the world’s largest collection of Shakespeare First Folios?
- 14 The small, edible pieces of a pomegranate are known as what?
- 15 How many teams will compete in August for the FIFA Women’s World Cup?
- 16 The hard crystal mineral silicon dioxide is more commonly known as what?
- 17 From what is the alcoholic beverage tequila produced?
- 18 In which 1940 film did Charles Chauvel recreate a photograph his father had taken during World War I?
- 19 What was first grown by Maria Ann Smith in Eastwood, Sydney, in 1867?
- 20 Where does the name Easter come from?

Find the answers to this quiz at the bottom of page 99.



2



13



14



15



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1. *Euridice* by Jacopo Peri, performed at the marriage of Henry IV of France and Maria de Medici in 1600
2. A structure in the brain is called the hippocampus, from the Greek for seahorse, as it was thought to have a shape resembling the sea creature (c) 14.1% (The national gender pay gap is calculated by WGEA using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics) 4. Patrick White
5. World's best board games 6. JK-47 7. *Seven Little Australians* (1894) 8. From the acronym for young urban professionals 9. 'The Waste Land' by TS Eliot 10. Los Pollos Hermanos (chicken brothers) 11. *Camelot* 12. Cooking 13. The Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, has 82 14. Aris 15. 32 16. Quartz 17. Blue agave plants 18. *Forty Thousand Horsesmen* 19. The Granny Smith apple 20. Easter is thought to come from Eostre, a West Germanic spring goddess, whose name is also found in Old English. (Easter is celebrated after the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere.)

Quiz answers

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Giclée archival print

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Asian Pride, Chinese New Year Party



AMAZE GALLERY

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WILLIAM YANG
Sydneyphiles Revisited

GWEN PLUMB AND
THELMA SCOTT
Love, Me

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TAKE IT FROM US
9 MARCH 6.30 PM
The Gallery Room

IT'S LITERARY FESTIVAL SEASON



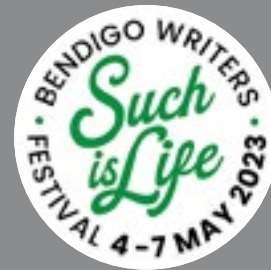
10-12 MARCH

Scone, NSW



31 MAR - 2 APR

Newcastle, NSW



4-7 MAY

Bendigo, VIC



4-7 MAY

Melbourne, VIC



10-14 MAY

Brisbane, QLD



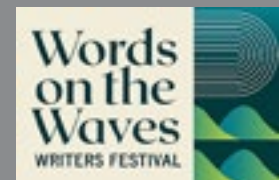
16-21 MAY

Auckland, NZ



22-28 MAY

Sydney, NSW



31 MAY - 5 JUNE

Central Coast, NSW

DREAMHOME

STORIES OF ART
AND SHELTER

UNTIL END 2023

Art Gallery of NSW



Samara Golden *Guts 2022* (detail),
Art Gallery of NSW © Samara Golden

DO NOT GO GENTLE

BY PATRICIA CORNELIUS

23 MAY - 17 JUNE

Sydney Theatre Company



Actors John Gaden, John Bell and Peter Carroll. Photo by Rene Vaile,
courtesy Sydney Theatre Company

Circular Quay, full of ferries and ships,
Glittering harbour and greasy hot chips,
Pigeons and didge-players (visitors love them),
Cars, trains and buses all stacked up above them.

From *Alphabetical Sydney*, by Hilary Bell and Antonia Pesenti,
tenth anniversary edition published by NewSouth





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SYDNEY FERRY
TICKETS →

4

LOTTE

“ Much more than accumulations of books, the best libraries are hotspots and organs of civilisation; magical places in which students, scholars, curators, philanthropists, artists, pranksters and flirts come together and make something marvellous. ”

Stuart Kells, The Library: A catalogue of wonders