

openbook

Omar Sakr
library that made me

Debra Dank
self-portrait

Dimitra Harvey
poem

Charmian Clift
centenary





Camille Bessing



Journey through the Studio.
Diptych by Elisabeth Cummings.

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.



Bottles in Elisabeth Cummings' studio window. Photo by Peter Morgan

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Illustration by Rosie Handley



Or you can gaze at the birds

Deepfakes, misinformation, post-truth, AI. Our digital age has invited or co-opted us to connect in new ways, given us eye-blinkingly rapid dispersal of information and has saturated us with visual marvels and images we wish we could unsee. It has also unfurled new forms of falsehood and reality subversion so sophisticated that we sometimes don't think to question — let alone dismiss — them. Rest assured you won't find any of that trickery or skewing of the truth in *Openbook*.

Or will you? Photoshopping, filters and digital manipulation are in every designer's and photographer's toolkit. It's no secret that editors shape and reorder words to tweak emotion and clarify meaning. A writer will choose one example over another to bolster their argument or shut another one down. Extraneous detail to one reader might be essential fact to another. What do we become, as Dimitra Harvey's poem 'Feral' on page 24 reminds us, if we are not able to overlay our own perspectives on a mythic tale or an outmoded worldview, so we might see it differently?

Of course, manipulation, disbelief and exaggeration are nothing new. Enlightenment artwork of a black swan, like the one Margot Riley writes about on page 76, by an anonymous European among the first to ever see such a creature, could easily have been dismissed as unbelievable, a preposterous invention.

Any researcher worth her salt, whether historian, curator, writer or librarian, will tell you that any library, archive or collection of objects reflects its time. A collection that seems stunted or dishonest by not being representative or inclusive

isn't fake, but we need to acknowledge its deficiencies. And address them.

Which is one of the intentions of this magazine: to uncover what we don't know, revisit what we think we do know and celebrate new discoveries. But *Openbook* does so within boundaries of knowledge, research and expertise. With research and writing of the highest order. And with beautiful art, photography and design.

In this year of the Voice referendum, Andrew Trigg's reflective piece on page 84 about historical referenda ephemera collected by the Library across decades (and representing many failed national votes) throws fresh light on current debates. Our photo essay of stills from films to be screened at the Library as part of a forthcoming documentary conference, presents images that while stunningly beautiful, often seek to tell uncomfortable truths.

Mark Mordue profiles cineaste and writer Sam Twyford-Moore, whose work recasts the history of Australian actors in Hollywood. Elizabeth Fortescue's essay on Elisabeth Cummings reminds us that no one sees the natural and material worlds like a painter. And writers Debra Dank and Omar Sakr tell truths that are both deeply personal and bigger than any of us.

Or you can gaze at the birds, either real ones flying around or those captured in words and images in these pages. We have Lorne Johnson's piece on the abundant birdlife of Sydney Park on page 12, Astred Hicks' bird-themed book covers on page 78, plus all the feathered imagery and fun avian facts I could squeeze in.

Phillipa McGuinness
Editor, *Openbook*

Quiz answers page 88 1. Duran Duran, *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* 2. Paul Robeson in 1960. He climbed the scaffolding and sang 'O! Man River' to construction workers as they ate lunch 3. Ruby and sapphires are both corundum 4. The quote 'By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes' is from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene 1 5. c) We have more than 1000 in Australia and there are more than 1300 worldwide 6. a) human anatomy — they are collections of dilated blood vessels that resemble spider webs and are visible on the skin, often the nose 7. Stephanie Gilmore is the eight-time world champion. Her most recent win was the 2022 WSL World Title 8. Leek and potato 9. Kazakhstan 10. They all died on Halloween (31 October) 11. November 12. Hans Zimmer 13. Tulip bulbs 14. Charming Cliff 15. *We Come with This Place* by Debra Dank 16. Lewin's Rail 17. Melbourne, originally in the Supreme Court of Victoria 18. Watsons Creek, near Tamworth 19. *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy 20. Fantales

openbook *obsessions*



Leila Jeffreys, *Red-tail*, 2022, photograph on archival fibre based cotton paper. Courtesy the artist and OLSEN Gallery, Sydney



Leila Jeffreys with 'Mythras', a Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. Photo by Nigel Lough, Newspix

Birds of a feather

Another national, if less consequential, vote this year is the biennial *Guardian Australia* / Birdlife Australia Bird of the Year poll. Will the Tawny Frogmouth win this time around? Nocturnal and carnivorous — but *not* an owl — the Tawny Frogmouth lost out to the Superb Fairywren in 2021 and to the Black-throated Finch in 2019. But perhaps the bigger story is about human–bird relationships.

Libby Robin's most recent book, *What Birdo is That?* is subtitled *A Field Guide to Bird-people* (Melbourne University Press, 2023). But even those of us who don't see ourselves as bird nerds, birdos or twitchers might feel reassured by birdsong or experience joy when we see a flock sweep across the sky.

And then there's bird art. Brilliant photographic and video artist Leila Jeffreys is a bird photographer with a difference — she doesn't go to them in their natural habitat, they come to her. Or, at least, to her Sydney studio. Aesthetically arresting, her art is compelling for the way she interrogates our relationship with wild — and not so wild — birds. As we look at her photographs, we're forced to wonder what they make of us.

Debra Dank

Our GudANJI kujiga grew here with GudANJI Country about the same time as our stories, and it was long before paper and words learned to yarn together.

I hadn't ever thought I would write stories to contribute to the Australian canon. I certainly imagined a time when this writing would be done by Aboriginal people who just needed those stories to be told – but not for our sake. I knew it had to be us because we were the ones who had lived these stories. We had that big history of listening–hearing with this Country. Since the arrival of Cook, the listening–hearing has been lost in a consistent and systematic process of brutality inflicted on people and on Country.

As a child of the 1960s I read constantly, and remember reading those then-recent Australian books and writings that positioned Aboriginal people in ways I did not recognise. I think I was already aware, thanks to the attendance of my parents, that this was not who we were.

Despite dispossession and too many other horrific events since the arrival of Cook, we had the privilege of knowing our mob through narrative, practised since the Dreaming, a time that Western research suggests was about 65,000 years ago. It is such an easy thing to imagine and reframe the relationship between Aboriginal Australians and Country through concepts of linear time, all neatly encompassed in five numerals – 6 5 0 0 0. Of course, our relationship was not ever easy, but the significant danger within that quick, casual number is the intimation that only by some happy accident of fate, despite nomadic walkabouts, did we achieve that longevity. That number, in its almost tossed-off awareness, ignores the significant work of making and maintaining relationships with Country.

Growing up in remote places was a gift. I sometimes wonder what I'd change if I had the opportunity to live that life again, and the answer is always the same: I would listen better, and I would work harder at hearing. I would listen better than I knew I needed to back then, in the hope of hearing more stories of living sustainably in relation with Country. I have come to realise that the act of listening–hearing is integral to being a considerate co-occupant, a respectful guest, and an active protector of futures in this geographic place that, for the short moment of our life span, offers us hospitality.

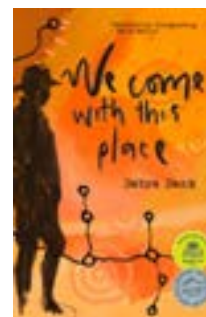
There are many stories told of this place and its evolution into what it is now. But too many of those stories are not the

stories that tell us, Aboriginal or other Australians, about our place in this newer country. I saw my parents and other Aboriginal people work hard with little reward, and even less recognition. My mob was not named in the photographs, nor were their contributions to what has become contemporary Australia recorded and celebrated. The efforts of Aboriginal Australians in protecting our place – of Aboriginal men who saved and guided the explorers, of Aboriginal women who were literally wet nurses to our new Australians, of people who worked in the industries that established this new-look country – all failed to be represented in the national discourse. That lack of representation perpetuates the notion of terra nullius in a most insidious manner.

Terra nullius was overturned in 1992, with the Mabo decision. Despite that important moment in the newer history of this country, our concern was around the continued and seemingly unchallengeable claiming of this place by and for the British Crown. In that moment, we Australians lost an opportunity to have a better conversation. It required our ability and willingness to suspend ideas of ownership and rights. It needed us to be listening–hearing. It was, I think, a good opportunity to reflect on the illogical imagining that positioned Aboriginal people as nomadic people indulging in simple, inadvertent walkabout. Done, no less, by people who had genuinely participated in nomadic walkabout and wandered from one side of the world to arrive here.

Positioning human bodies as guests on Country, with responsibilities to our non-human kin, and living in ways that require relationships saturated with reciprocity and obligation, have allowed Aboriginal Australians to survive well since the Dreaming–65,000 years. Terra nullius failed to recognise the deep-thinking processes through which Aboriginal communities have lived – and continue to live – sustainably, and it indulged the race to consume the natural resources of our place at an unimaginable rate.

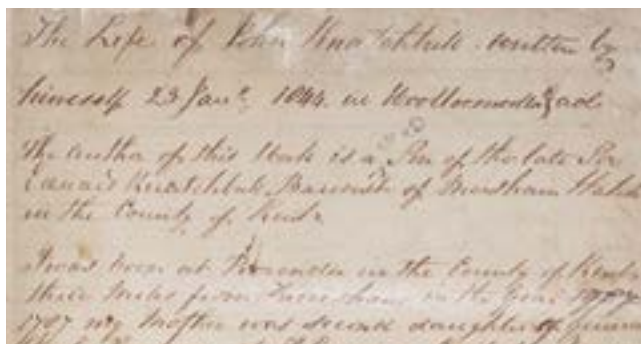
It saddens me deeply to imagine what our children's children, and their children, will say of our excesses. None of it will be good and their blame will be justified.



Debra Dank is a GudANJI/Wakaja woman. Her book, *We Come With This Place*, published by Echo, won four awards at the 2023 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, including Book of the Year, and was shortlisted for the 2023 Stella Prize and won the 2023 ALS Gold Medal.



Photo of Debra Dank in the Library's Shakespeare Room by Joy Lai



John Knatchbull

John Knatchbull was born into a noble family in England in the early 1790s. Charged with stealing in 1824 and transported to NSW, he committed increasingly serious crimes over two decades. In 1844, newspapers clamoured to share details of how Knatchbull brutally killed widowed shopkeeper and mother of two, Ellen Jamieson, with a tomahawk. Knatchbull's controversial lawyer Robert Lowe made a case for moral insanity, arguing his client was not responsible for his crime. Lowe failed, and the former officer of the Royal Navy was hanged on 13 February 1844. Knatchbull's handwritten autobiography — made possible by Gaol Governor Henry Keck, who supplied the killer with paper and ink — begins with a plea for sympathy: 'I will open to the eyes of the world [to] such persecutions and deprivations that the hardest of hearts would bleed and commiserate with me in my sufferings.'



Ben Hall

One of our more recognisable bushrangers, Ben Hall, was born in Maitland, NSW, on 9 May 1837, to ex-convicts Benjamin and Elizabeth Hall. After a short career in crime, he was killed in an aggressive police ambush on 5 May 1865, just days before what would have been his 28th birthday. The dramatic end to Hall's life — a good-looking man gunned down in a rush of adrenaline, fear and bullets — has kept him alive in the popular imagination. His death near Goobang Creek, northwest of Forbes, was very different to the sombre ceremony that a judicial hanging would have provided if he had been captured and found guilty in a courtroom. This violent end has generated some sympathy for a felon who committed numerous property crimes, but who was also widely considered to be a gentleman bushranger.



Mary Ann Bugg

Bushranging in colonial Australia was a distinctly masculine enterprise, but some women disrupted this pattern. One of the more famous examples of a female bushranger is Mary Ann Bugg (1834–1905). The daughter of an Aboriginal woman and a convict, Bugg became the consort of Frederick Ward, better known as Captain Thunderbolt. While perhaps not emblematic of Aboriginal resistance to colonisation, she flouted the gendered stereotypes and legal systems imposed by the colonists. Bushrangers, male and female, were traditionally feared; yet, for a few women, regardless of race, Bugg was a role model because she was strong and independent. A song from the musical *The Man Called Thunderbolt*, published by Vivien Arnold in 2016, highlights this admiration with its title: 'I'd Like to be More Like Mary'.



Ned Kelly

In a line-up of Australian crooks, nobody stands taller than Edward 'Ned' Kelly. Born in Beveridge, rural Victoria, probably in December 1854, Kelly formed a gang with his younger brother Dan, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart. This wanted poster, dated 13 December 1878, captures the drama of the day. A reward for information leading to the capture of the Kelly Gang's leader was an extraordinary £1000 (around \$100,000 today) with his subordinates worth £500 each. An enticing sum for anyone wanting to improve their cash flow or with a desire to etch their name into the history books by bringing down Australia's most notorious bushrangers. A siege at Glenrowan in late June 1880 saw the junior gang members killed. Their leader was captured and hanged, after a high-profile trial, at the Old Melbourne Gaol on 11 November the same year.



Kate Leigh

Kate Leigh (1881–1964) survived a rough upbringing in her hometown of Dubbo to become one of the more successful Australian crooks of the early twentieth century. Establishing herself in Surry Hills, Leigh ran a business that specialised in diversification (including drugs, sly grog and stolen goods). Leigh is known for her role in Sydney's 'Razor Wars', when gangs, in response to the *Pistol License Act 1927* (NSW), started carrying razors instead of firearms during the 1920s and 1930s. Feisty and fearless, Leigh was very good at being mostly bad. This photograph, probably by Vic Johnstone, was taken in 1951 when Leigh was 70. Despite her business collapsing after a fight with the Australian Tax Office and changes to drinking regulations, she holds a special power in this image: she still owns her celebrity.

BIRDING AT SYDNEY PARK



Sydney Park in
the early morning.
Photo by Joy Lai

An inner-city park on a reclaimed industrial site has become an unlikely birding mecca.

The Lewin's Rail is a small, shy and secretive wetland bird. It is the colour of milk chocolate, aniseed humbugs and Jaffas. It has a range of peculiar calls: one sounds like a growling fox terrier; another reminds me of a galloping stallion. According to an older birding veteran I know, the Lewin's Rail is possibly our most difficult wetland bird to see. Typically, you might get a five-second glimpse of the bird dashing between tussocks and reeds.

At Sydney Park, a 41-hectare oasis 6 kilometres south of Sydney's CBD, wedged between St Peters, Erskineville and Alexandria, I have been lucky enough to see this uncommon bird on many occasions. I have had sustained views of individual rails foraging, calling and flying, as well as a pair mating – a four-second feat – and preening one another. I have seen a chick, reminiscent of an animated black-ink blot, skulking in the half-light at the base of reeds. I have even got to the stage where some birds respond to my clunky imitations of their calls. (Unsurprisingly, I do this when other people aren't around!) This is all remarkable. I feel privileged to have developed such a connection with the species.

The Lewin's Rail is one of 107 bird species I have now recorded at Sydney Park. This figure is roughly one-eighth of Australia's entire number of bird species. According to the online birding database eBird Australia, no other birder has seen as many birds there as I have. Since people began birding in Sydney Park in 1998, 135 species have been recorded. This is an impressive tally for a rewilded place that was formerly the site of a brickworks and a municipal waste tip. It was converted into a park with treed areas and wetlands in 2000. I have no doubt that the Gadigal people, the original inhabitants of the area, would have been aware of many more species prior to the arrival of white people.

Thanks to the efforts of all those who had a vision for a better planet, Sydney Park is now a thriving ecosystem with a network of ponds and



bioretention swales that hold recycled stormwater. Water levels are controlled so that natural flooding and drying cycles can be replicated. There is a range of flora surrounding these ponds, including swamp banksias, coastal wattles, kangaroo grasses, king ferns, rushes and sedges. Long-necked turtles breed in the waterways and sunbathe on fallen logs. Common eastern froglets, Peron's tree frogs and eastern sedge-frogs call through the warmer months. Brushtail and ringtail possums nest and forage in the gum coppices close to the ponds.

Sydney Park is encircled by roadways, heavy industry, commercial buildings, apartment blocks and the WestConnex motorway. It is a much-loved spot for young families, dog walkers, picnickers, joggers, skaters and kids learning to ride on the park's bike track. Running events are often held there. Dub-reggae enthusiasts and punk rockers

Powerful Owl
(*Ninox strenua*), 1967
from *A Portfolio
of Australian Birds,
1967-1968*
by William Cooper



Lewin's Rail
(*Rallus Lewini*)
from *Ornithology of
Australia*, volume 4,
c 1863-1875,
by Silvester Diggles

turn up for specialist music nights by the park's old chimneys, a remnant from the old brickworks. There's even an annual event celebrating Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights' that takes place on the park's main hill, where red-clad devotees dance.

Perhaps Sydney Park doesn't exactly scream birding mecca. Repeated visits to the park — and great patience — have proven worthwhile though. I have become addicted to unearthing as many bird species there as possible. I'm not sure why, really. When I look at this objectively, it seems peculiar — when you think about it, choosing to count birds seems surreal.

Australia's natural world, and birding in particular, has been my passion since 1985, when I received a hardback edition of Simpson & Day's *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* from my grandparents. It led me to explore the wet sclerophyll forests of the NSW Central Coast, crossing my fingers for Regent Bowerbirds, Green Catbirds and Brown Cuckoo-doves. I guess most men my age watch the footy, rewatch *Game of Thrones* or visit Bunnings ritualistically so they have a project in their shed to pour themselves into.

I chase birds with a brand new pair of 10 x 40 Nikon Prostaff binoculars. (My last pair of bins broke earlier this year when they fell off the roof of my Skoda and shattered while I was searching for emus near Belanglo State Forest.)

It is pleasing to see younger birders at Sydney Park, many in their 20s and early 30s. I have been inspired by their passion and their urgency to document and conserve. They have pointed birds out to me; I have guided them to birds they wanted to find. Sydney Bird Club, a Sydney-based group established in 2016 with some 500 members who are mainly in their mid-30s, recently held a walk in the park that attracted dozens of people. When I began birding seriously way back in 1986, and became a member of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club, based in Sydney's Castle Hill, the average age of members was much older, but over time, birding has attracted younger people. Perhaps this is as we are all more affected by the perils of the Anthropocene.

My birding obsession is driven by curiosity, wonderment and an endless thirst for discovery. It is an obsession that will never be understood or appreciated by most Australians, who see the hobby not only as weird, uncool and boring but, ultimately, as incomprehensible. About 10 years ago, when I was living in the NSW Southern Highlands, an elderly woman came up to me while I was watching a group of Hardheads at Bundanoon's Wastewater Treatment Plant. She asked me whether I was a birdwatcher. When I replied that I was, she exclaimed, 'Good for you!' She then dashed off into a grove of scribbly gums, avoiding any further conversation. Perhaps odd, and even amusing, but it made sense to me.

I love what British nature writer Stephen Moss says in his birding memoir, *This Birding Life*, about the importance of a local birding area. 'If you have a local patch — a place where you regularly go to watch and enjoy wildlife — then you are in touch with the passing of the seasons ... In a world where it is all too easy to get things out of context, this is by far the best way to re-engage with reality.' Moss is right, as Zen as it sounds, when he says re-engaging with reality brings the moment into sharp focus. Birding at Sydney Park, my own local patch, does make me focus; I can escape the quotidian, or

whatever has been dominating my thoughts. When I'm trying to identify a bird of prey, after a troop of stropy Noisy Miners have sounded their raptor alarm shrieks, I'm not wondering whether I've been a good father lately or whether I'm teaching my Year 12 students the poetry of TS Eliot with aplomb, or whether North Korean missiles will land on Hokkaido and set off a catastrophic chain of events, or whether Ryan Gosling will be good as Ken in the new *Barbie* film. When I bird, I think only of the bird, all the bird represents and all it may become.

Here are some noteworthy moments from the last few years of birding at Sydney Park: Watching an iconic Australian White Ibis sail over the park's southern edge with a toilet roll in its beak, which happened not long before we all began fighting over toilet rolls during lockdown. Having a heated argument with an amateur wildlife photographer about the ethics of him entering a wetland to flush a rare Little Bittern so he could get a better picture of it. Watching a trio of Peregrine Falcons dash towards the CBD on a dazzling mid-February afternoon. Observing an eel snatch a Dusky Moorhen chick from the water's surface and also noticing how this left a child upset. Being sized up by an adult Powerful Owl in the most densely vegetated part of the park, its head bobbing, its enormous lemon-jelly-yellow eyes looking at me as it clutched a dead ringtail possum. (I didn't outstay my welcome — they can be dangerous during the nesting season. A forestry worker in Victoria once lost his eye to one!) Witnessing a Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo rip open a gum's trunk with its beak to prise out grubs that had been invisible up to that point. Nearly breaking my neck to zoom in on the sky's gleaming zenith, where 100 White-throated Needletails, just back from Siberia, drifted and floated in a midsummer thermal, along with rising prayers, lost angels.

When I was last at Sydney Park, there was no sign of Lewin's Rails. I played a recording of their call and made some imitations, to no avail. In one section of the wetlands, a huge white cat with yellow eyes froze and stared at me. I scared it off. In late 2022, another cat, this time a ginger

tabby, was prowling through the wetlands. I threw a large rock at it. Unscathed, it ran off.

Around that time, on a Sydney Park Facebook page, someone made a comment about what a menace cats in the wetlands were. The number of people who jumped on the page to defend the cats' welfare and natural survival instincts was astounding. They seemed oblivious to the threat cats pose to our birdlife. Just as I was finishing this piece, I listened to a Radio National podcast that centred on the impact of roaming domestic cats. In an Australian National University study conducted for the Biodiversity Council, the Invasive Species Council and Birdlife Australia, researchers found

that roaming domestic cats kill 546 million animals per year, 60 per cent of them native to Australia and many of them birds. In urban areas across the country, there are 50 to 100 cats per square kilometre!

In September 2022, some birding mates and I visited Scotia Sanctuary in far western NSW, a 600-square kilometre nature reserve of dunes, swales and mallee. The sanctuary is looked after by Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). We were

hoping for a glimpse of the Scarlet-chested Parrot, one of the rarest and most nomadic of Australia's parrots. Sadly, we didn't see one. Scotia Sanctuary has a predator-free section, home to rare mammals such as bilbies, numbats and bridled nail-tail wallabies, relocated from other areas of Australia. The AWC crew at Scotia are on a mission to keep cats out of this safe space. There are daily patrols of the enclosure fence when staff look out for any new openings. Feral cat cages, complete with hanging, glittering tassels used as lures, are placed along the fence line. I think a lot more could be done to monitor the cats at Sydney Park. It's a task for the park management, but local residents need to do more to keep their cats indoors too. Otherwise, cats at Sydney Park could kill off the Lewin's Rails and most of the smaller waterbirds there.

There are other threats. Foxes, rats, eels, off-leash dogs bounding into the ponds, water quality, spreading fireweed, extreme heat conditions — and everything else the Anthropocene hands us — are

When I bird,
I think only
of the bird,
all the bird
represents
and all it may
become.



putting enormous pressure on Sydney Park's birds. And the threat of development looms: green spaces to the south of Sydney Park at Tempe and Banksia have been destroyed, or dramatically altered, for roadways and various redevelopments.

Birdlife Australia is the premier conservation organisation for Australia's birds. Its website says that too many of our birds are in trouble. Indeed, some species are at crisis point and more have been added to the threatened species list for Australia. Migratory shorebirds and dry woodland birds are particularly vulnerable right now. The news seems bleak. Still, I carry hope in my heart. Just. I will continue to monitor, record, admire and celebrate the birdlife of Sydney Park. And fight for it.

Naturalist and historian of science Helen Macdonald sums up the feeling of connecting with

wild birds in her essay 'What Animals Taught Me about Being Human'. When a rook notices her briefly, she writes, 'And with that glance I feel a prickling in my skin that runs down my spine, my sense of place shifts, and the world is enlarged.'

Maybe, sometime, I'll see you by the wetlands of Sydney Park, new binoculars around your neck, listening for the fox-terrier-and-galloping-horse sounds of Lewin's Rails, very glad you decided to get out of your spinning head for a while and return to the natural world's reaching arms.

Lorne Johnson lives in Newtown and teaches at Ascham School. A widely published poet, Lorne released his collection *Morton* in 2016. His poem 'An assessment on *The Tempest*' appeared in the Summer 2022 issue of *Openbook*.

Little Bittern
(*Ardetta pusilla*)
from *Ornithology
of Australia*, volume 4,
c 1863-1875,
by Silvester Diggle



Regent Honeyeater
(*Xanthomyza
phrygia*), 1968
from *A Portfolio
of Australian birds,*
1967-1968 by
William Cooper



ELISABETH
CUMMINGS

Two major exhibitions — one recent, the other just opened — pay homage to eminent Australian artist Elisabeth Cummings, 89, whose home nestles in bushland on Sydney's south-western fringe.

It's the middle of summer and roasting hot when I drive down a bumpy dirt road in Wedderburn, my tyres spitting tiny bits of rock into the dusty verges. I've come via Campbelltown and driven through a semi-rural area where the orchards are wearing bridal veils of white netting to keep the birds away.

I've crossed a wooden bridge and entered dense bushland. Now I'm pulling up at a small wattle and daub house on a bushy slope below the road. Outside the car, the cicadas are going full blast. The landscape has that crackly, dusty smell that comes with a long dry spell.

Elisabeth Cummings is standing out the front of the little house waiting for me, probably glad I found my way. She looks cool, dressed in a t-shirt and linen trousers.

I offer her my city-bought gerberas and she hurries to find a vase before they droop in the heat. For a moment, she's lost in her enjoyment of the rich red and orange of the flowers. She points out how beautiful they are underneath, where the bright petals meet the juicy green of the stems.

Looking at flowers from underneath is not something most people do. But Cummings has a unique way of seeing the world. Her paintings are not faithful depictions of reality. But they're not completely abstract, either. They hover in between, with intriguing shapes that keep you coming back to look again while your brain tries to reassemble the image into something it can recognise.

At the same time, you're conscious of not really caring what the picture depicts because you're getting such a charge from the lush colour combinations, the bold forms, the tiny patches of striping, and the lines drawn with the wrong end of a brush dragged through wet paint.

Cummings' paintings have been compared to poetry, where so much emotion is implied or

suggested, rather than spelt out. Interestingly, she adores poetry and copies her favourite pieces into a special book. Among her best-loved poets are Judith Wright, Les Murray, Roy Campbell, John Clare, WS Merwin and Gerard Manly Hopkins.

Although she is well travelled, both within Australia and overseas, her pictures are really based on what she calls 'looking inwards into the figurative memory of experience'. In this way she follows in the footsteps of her artistic heroes such as Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard and Willem de Kooning.

Given her long exhibition career, not to mention three decades of teaching young artists, it's wonderfully fitting that Elisabeth Cummings is being celebrated at two important Sydney art institutions this year.

Now the NAS Gallery, on the National Art School campus in Darlinghurst, has mounted a survey show from the last 30 years of her painting practice. *Radiance: The Art of Elisabeth Cummings* is on from 18 August until 21 October.

Cummings graduated from the National Art School in 1957, when it was East Sydney Technical College. When she returned to Sydney after a decade in Europe, she taught at NAS from 1969 to 2001. (From 1975 to 1987, she also taught part-time at City Art Institute, which became COFA and is now the UNSW School of Art and Design.)

It was 'an enormous pleasure' to bring Cummings' work back to her alma mater, NAS director and CEO Steven Alderton said. 'Since leaving art school, she has determinedly and daringly painted her way to the stature of one of Australia's most eminent artists. Her practice is a deeply intuitive process, steeped in memory and her connection to the Australian landscape, beginning in her Queensland childhood.' He adds, 'She's an inspiration to our students today.'

Elisabeth Cummings at Wedderburn in May 2023. Photo by Peter Morgan



ARTIST'S
STUDIO
NO. 12





The exhibition, curated by Vivienne Webb, includes more than 50 paintings – interiors, landscapes and even some gouaches completed en plein air. To deepen the impact of the exhibition, NAS has published a new book about Cummings' art.

Campbelltown Arts Centre also celebrated Cummings' huge contribution in an exhibition that closed in August. The artist was already living in Wedderburn in 1988 when C-A-C opened nearby under its first director, Sioux Garside.

Elisabeth Cummings: From a Well Deep Within, curated by Emily Rolfe, focused on Cummings' printmaking with 48 artworks, including etchings and monotypes produced in partnership with distinguished printmakers Michael Kempson of Cicada Press and Diana Davidson of Whaling Road Studio. Excitingly, three forgotten etching plates were rediscovered this year by artist Luke Sciberras when he was helping out in Cummings' studio. Cummings and Kempson took new prints from these plates for the C-A-C exhibition.

The year after Cummings graduated from NAS, she went to Europe on a scholarship and settled in Florence for 10 years, where she painted and taught English. The city became a base for wide-ranging travels and was also where she married fellow artist James Barker in a civil ceremony in the Palazzo Vecchio, just across the square from the Uffizi. 'We got married by a little fat Italian man with an Italian flag wrapped around his middle,' Cummings said. Their son Damian was born soon after.

The family returned to Australia in 1968. In 1971, Cummings began camping on weekends with her dogs in an old army tent at Wedderburn, 72 kilometres from the city on the edge of Dharawal National Park. She was one of a small group of artists to whom a parcel of Wedderburn land had been given by local landowners Barbara and Nick Romalis.

Curator Sioux Garside has written that Cummings went to Wedderburn wanting to 'reconnect with the Australian psyche and

Above and left:
Brushes in Elisabeth
Cummings' studio.
Photos by Peter
Morgan



Elisabeth Cummings at Wedderburn in 1974. Photographer unknown



Bushland at Wedderburn. Photo by Peter Morgan

landscape after living for 10 years in Florence, immersed in the art of the classical world and early Renaissance art’.

In time, Cummings had a small, simple home designed for the location, built from local clay, and wattle and daub. It’s outside this house that Cummings waved to me in January 2021.

Even though I’m an arts journalist, I had never done a proper interview with Cummings. I badly wanted to fill that gap, and I reached out through King Street Gallery on William, her long-term representative.

Ever gracious, even making a superb lunch for us to share, Cummings welcomed me and gave me a precious glimpse into her life at Wedderburn. I wrote in my diary that night: ‘As you look at it from where you park, the house is in two distinct parts. On the right is the wattle and daub section that was built for Elisabeth in the 1970s. On the left, separated from the other part of the house by the breezeway, is a little dwelling area designed for Elisabeth by her architect son Damian Barker.

‘Through the breezeway you could see a hillside of quite sparse bushland on the other side, with lots of beautiful big rocks. If you walk through the breezeway to the other side of the house, and hop down onto the ground, you can walk a few steps through the rocky bush and look down into the gully below. It was completely dry there, although it runs when it rains. Elisabeth told me they were desperate for some rain.

‘The structure on the right-hand side is really just one big room with a double-sided fireplace dividing the spaces, and a smooth tree-trunk poking straight through the wooden floor and up to the ceiling.

‘There were many little windows and French doors set into the mud walls at lovely angles so you could see the bushy hill opposite,’ I wrote. ‘There were also a few funny little windows, no bigger than your palm, set deeply into the walls with amber-coloured glass. A bank of dormer windows ran along the top of the wall, letting in lots of light. A section of woven wattle branches had been left without daub, to show what the interior structure of the walls looks like.’

The tiny kitchen has a wood-fired stove with a wood box on one side. It was here one hot and windy summer’s day around 10 years previously that Cummings was visited by an unwelcome guest. A deadly king brown snake had come in, probably seeking water in the drought, and had draped itself around the kitchen sink.

Thinking quickly, Cummings put her dogs in another room and called WIRES. But there was no need. The snake had gone. ‘I think it eventually went out the way it came in,’ Cummings said. ‘I’ve seen other browns, but not a big one like that.’

The house is on tank water, which can be quite discoloured. For this reason, Cummings brings drinking



Mornington, Kimberley, 2012. Oil on canvas by Elisabeth Cummings. Photo by Michael Bradfield

water up to Wedderburn from her other home in Balmain. She wiped down our lunch plates so not a skerrick remained on them. She didn't want anything foreign to go into the drain and thence into the landscape.

A conservationist, Cummings has taken part in campaigns against fracking and mining in the area. She adores living so close to wild animals. Even spiders, which don't seem to trouble her.

During lunch, a tiny bush rat called an antechinus scurried across the top of the open door and along the inside wall. Committed chewers, they mercifully don't have a taste for art. 'They're very pretty', but they can take over,' Cummings said. 'I catch them occasionally and just take them up to the far reaches of Wedderburn, but I'm sure they run back.'

Cummings often sees wallabies in little groups on the rocks outside. One day her granddaughter, Ivry, was drawing on the verandah when a koala ambled past. Such sightings cause great excitement in the Wedderburn artist colony.

During lunch, I asked Cummings about her early life in Brisbane. Her mother was Mavis and her father, Robert, was an architect. He was a long-term trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery and knew many artists including Donald Friend, Roy Dalgarno and Kathleen and Len Shillam.

As a child, Cummings started art lessons with the distinguished Australian artist Vida Lahey. Later, she was a student of Margaret Cilento whose sister Diane would marry (and divorce) the actor Sean Connery. Margaret Cilento, who Cummings remembers as a gentle spirit, had been a student at the National Art School and said to Cummings: 'You should go.'

'She had bright red hair,' Cummings said. 'I was very delighted with her eccentricities. She wore different shoes – pretty little shoes, but they were from different pairs. Because she had lived in New York and Paris and London, she had good stories. So that's when I thought I'd be a painter.'

Lunch was over and we'd talked for hours. I got back in the car, dying to get back home and start writing it all up. 'I drove up Elisabeth's steep, bumpy driveway with a great slippage of tyres and scattering of stones,' I wrote later.

Looking back towards the house, I could see Cummings standing quietly at her door and waving.

Elizabeth Fortescue is a freelance arts journalist. She wrote about Peter Kingston in *Openbook Autumn 2023* and about Cressida Campbell in *Openbook Spring 2022*.

***Radiance: The Art of Elisabeth Cummings* runs at the National Art School in Darlinghurst until 21 October.**



FERAL

I couldn't master the subtleties, the underhand manoeuvrings of the court. Everyone with an agenda. All the double talk, the double standards. I was bearish, all thistle. And as block-headed and single-minded as my father was,

he could see I wouldn't be tamed, couldn't make myself care about courtly manners, the social graces, jockeying through all those egos. Not like Aphrodite, with her honey tan and bee stung lips (those seamless injectables), sipping ambrosia from a pink

coupe. Nor Athena debating the minutiae of state affairs for hours, keeping her enemies closer with her quick wit, the sunlit maple syrup of her eyes. And living always in the shadow of Apollo — my twin. The golden boy of Olympus. 'He Who Can Do No Wrong',

'He Whose Butthole Shines With A Thousand Suns' — impossibly brilliant at everything — healing, and giant slaying, the undefeated champion of sprinting and wrestling ... I mean, the constant portraits of him stripped to the waist beside olive trees, oiled

and flexing, gazing into the distance wistfully as if he 'just woke up like this' — more neurotic than Narcissus, was too much to endure. I grew tired of watching the whole pantheon swoon at his silken voice glissading up and down the slopes of his paeans. As children, we'd had our own

language, finished each other's sentences. We'd tip-toe out into the grasslands of the tundra at first light, race through the holts of pine and down into the oak forests to practise archery, hunt roe deer and boar, and play hide-and-seek with the hamadryads who could transform from maid

to gnarly stump or commonplace sprout in a blink. But he was coddled — the favourite son. And as he grew into a god he became haughty and full of his own radiance. I grew more taciturn, as out of place as a Cretan spiny mouse; the high gold halls of our father's

house were too bright, I was always wincing. At court, it made me sick how the goddesses had to couch their opinions in gratuitous pleasantries, preface them with *maybe* and *possibly* — supplicant, demure; how cunning and artful they had to be in their play

for agency. Whereas a god said what he meant and wasn't called *damned harpy* or *gorgon bitch*. When I mentioned it to Apollo, he smirked, rolled his eyes, told me I was being 'overly sensitive' — because *certainly*, that hadn't been *his* experience — the gods were his brothers! Good guys!

I'd wanted to reply he need only look to our father to know that wasn't true — but he'd already wandered off to carouse with fountain nymphs. I'd said nothing about having to constantly dodge the advances of certain gods who couldn't take a hint — most of them several times

older; how they stood too close, or cornered me in alcoves; or casually groped me as they passed in the vineyards, or the dining hall, or midway through a lyric in the salon, or in the kitchens, sometimes following me back to my quarters, pungent with wine. I'd made it clear

to Alpheus, the river god, on several occasions, that *I wasn't interested*. When late one night, I returned from running my hounds round the mountain, he — muddy with mavrodaphne — trapped me in the rip between his body and arcade wall, his hands swamping my hips, my breasts — so

I stopped him like a dam: my knee to his groin. I was fed up, choking with it, the entitlement of gods! Told the old lush to dry up, left him gurgling and sputtering on the granite floor. But he trickled off to snitch to Apollo, who scolded me later for being a troublemaker.

More and more I went hunting in the steep rocky places of Mount Olympus alone. All I wanted was to run barefoot as a brook through the forest, the honey buzzards double-helixing overhead; to sleep inside four walls of wind and sky. The court was a trap, claustrophobic. Every moment

it was trying to stifle me, make me small, I had to get out. The world was so wide! There was so much work to get on with. Watching the laurels divide and multiply moonlight in their leaves is a lifetime's work. Becoming every drop in the creek brimming with the night is an equation of thousands of hours.

I went to Zeus and demanded to be released: I was feral — closer to jackal, to asphodel — I was a danger to the establishment. He granted my request.

Dimitra Harvey

Dimitra Harvey was born in Sydney to a Greek mother and grew up on Wangal country. Her poetry chapbook, *A Fistful of Hail*, was published by Vagabond Press in 2018. Her writing has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Cordite*, *SBS Voices* and *Mascara Literary Review*, as well as anthologies such as *The Best Australian Poems*. In 2019, her poem 'Triptych' won third place in the Newcastle Poetry Prize.





**THE
CLIFT
EDGE**

Writer Charmian Clift was born 100 years ago. She died tragically young, but her work is in print, a documentary about her is being made, and her bohemian Greek island life is part of a forthcoming television series.

What might she have thought of cancel culture? Would she have identified as – or been accused of – being ‘woke’? Would she have entered the fray on gender issues? Been active on social media? We will never know, but my bet is that had Charmian Clift been alive today, she would have been thrilled by progress on some issues and dismayed, if not to say appalled, by others. And she would have been vocal about it.

Charmian Clift was born 100 years ago, in August 1923 in Kiama, NSW. The worker’s cottage she grew up in still stands near Bombo Beach, where a reserve bears her name. But she was always destined for a bigger canvas than that sleepy coastal community could offer.

It was her physical beauty that first got her noticed, when she won a Beach Girl contest in 1941 and became a bathing suit pin-up and cover girl, glowing with natural athleticism and vitality.

Her perceptive biographer, Nadia Wheatley, writes about her subject with unsentimental empathy and high regard in her 2001 book *The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift*. The biography provides cultural context for her way of life and strips away the layers of myth that have wrapped Clift in veils of romantic misinterpretation.

Of Clift’s youth, Wheatley writes: ‘After being applauded as a child for being clever rather than pretty, it was an extraordinary experience for the “little speckled thrushy” (as she identified herself) to be acknowledged as a swan overnight. Charmian quickly adapted to the role of beauty queen, little realising that the trade-off would be the devaluing of her intelligence. From then on, many people would regard her solely for her outward self.’

After a period in the Australian Women’s Army Service, Clift joined the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper where she met one of its luminaries,

George Johnston. The couple married in 1947 and had two children, Martin and Shane, before moving to London. They collaborated on a novel – which Johnston credited largely to his wife – *High Valley*, based on Johnston’s wartime journey through the mountains of Tibet.

Over the next few years, Clift reinvented herself. A free spirit, at ease in her own body, she ripened into a new, liberated kind of woman. In her daily life – as on the page – she was ahead of her time, a rebel who cared nothing for convention. Perhaps that spirit is what makes her enduringly attractive to successive generations. We envy her capacity to live on her own terms and we all want the formula, the secret sauce: how did she do it?

All that liberation came with a high price, however, both creatively and personally. She died of an overdose of barbiturates in 1969 at the age of 46, just ahead of the publication of her husband George Johnston’s novel *Clean Straw for Nothing*. Some said she was worried that his novel would expose her infidelities. Or perhaps she was past caring.

When Clift, Johnston and their two children moved in the 1950s to the Greek island of Hydra, after a year on Kalymnos, they found themselves at the epicentre of a creative crowd that included Leonard Cohen and other passing minstrels, poets and wannabes. Their lives were frugal but rich, messy and intoxicated, productive and destructive. Paradise, sometimes, but hell too. Adults and children ran wild.

In Greece, Clift wrote her two distinctive memoirs, *Mermaid Singing* and *Peel Me a Lotus*, as well as a novel, *Honour’s Mimic* and, together with Johnston, *The Sponge Divers*. He, meanwhile, was also at work on what would become his Miles Franklin award-winning

‘Beach winner’s new career’. The new career in question was as a physical training instructor. *PIX Magazine*, 21 April 1941.



Frontispiece by
Cedric Flower from
Clift's novel *Mermaid
Singing*, republished
by Horwitz in 1970

novel, *My Brother Jack*. They were industrious as well as social, prolific as well as hedonistic.

In all her writing, but most especially her essays, Clift's voice reads today as freshly minted, bell-like in its clarity. Her hugely popular columns for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, all 240 of them, were written in the last four years of her life for readers she referred to as her 'Thursday ladies'. She referred to her pieces as 'sneaky little revolutions', the title under which they were anthologised in 2022. They demonstrate her remarkable gift for economy with words and writing with equal flair whether her subject is frivolous or serious — from how to choose a hat for the races to the impact

of migration policy. Her words feel modern and timeless, as classic and classless as a pair of jeans.

For her own generation of readers, Clift represented escape: she ran away from everything that was safe and predictable to a Mediterranean existence that epitomised bohemian, creative glamour. In Greece she lived on next to nothing, basking in sunshine and sensuality, surrounded by a seemingly endless source of stimulating and seductive neighbours and visitors.

But the island idyll came to an end. The family returned to Sydney due to Johnston's health — he suffered badly from tuberculosis — in 1964. The family settled in Mosman, hardly the epicentre of counterculture. Perhaps a sense of being stuck in a suburb that did not match her sensibility or values made coming home harder than she expected. She admitted she felt 'both native-born and half-alien ...', comparing the experience of returning from 'a nomadic tribe to a strange new encampment' but adding, with characteristic optimism 'what is fresh and new and exhilarating ... is that for the first time I know that I actually belong here.'

On several occasions she wrote columns in which she prodded gently at cultural sore spots, asking whether Australia had changed in her absence as much as some claimed. She demonstrated that she was ahead of her time when it came to politics, raising her concern about Australia's growing involvement in Vietnam, for example, in an article titled 'On a Lowering Sky in the East'. Her friendship with civil rights activist Faith Bandler prompted her to urge readers to vote Yes in the 1967 referendum to amend the Constitution so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were counted as part of the population. In another essay, she suggested that an apology to First Nations peoples was long overdue.

Clift was a feminist, declaring her independence of thought and action at every turn. In a piece called 'Second Class Citizens', she called out what she saw as 'sexual apartheid in employment, wages, social standing and moral judgements'. She also raged against middle age, calling it 'a rather nasty joke ... there is very little that is consolatory about it.'

Her influence on subsequent generations of writers persists. British novelist Polly Samson chose to make Charmian a central character in her 2020 novel *A Theatre for Dreamers*, where she was a social kind of earthmother and writer, exploring creativity and free love in her telling of the Hydra years.

Nearly 20 years earlier, Australian journalist and novelist Susan Johnson wrote *The Broken Book* as a fictional tribute to Clift. It focused on the difficulties of juggling work and motherhood, and the guilt and shame that Clift endured as a result of giving away her illegitimate first child, Suzanne Chick, who subsequently wrote a memoir called *Searching for Charmian*, published in 1994. (In a further delicious twist, Chick's own daughter Gina Chick recently won the SBS reality TV survival show *Alone Australia*. Viewers were captivated by her handsome features, eloquence and ease in the natural world. It's tempting to think of these qualities as an inheritance from the grandmother she never knew.)

From her early days as a journalist, from when she first read her file of clippings at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, writer Susan Johnson was haunted by Clift. She told me, 'I photocopied much of that file and carried the clippings around with me from house to house, country to country, for years. There was something about her story which caught me. I don't think she was an especially good novelist, but I think she was of the finest order of essayist and memoirist, capable of turning ordinary life into the miraculous, of turning the prosaic into poetry.'

'I think it's her ability to capture wonder, the elusive, nuanced, shrouded mysteries of existence, of being alive, a visceral corporeal experience, but at the same time a metaphysical one only occasionally revealed to us as wondrous. She captures — like no other writer — those moments in life when we glimpse its beauties and enchantments, when the full wonder of being alive and breathing is suddenly known to us. I love her for that.'

Johnson reflects on Clift's literary impact. 'Her influence on me as a writer has been a commitment to capturing some truth about passing through life,



a yearning to portray — like her — *aliveness*. I want my work to be shot through with visceral life, with sensation, as much as I can make it. That's Clift's influence — even though I think she was not always a truthful writer, in that she wasn't interested in examining life's pains and sufferings and, indeed, might be accused of Disneyfying life's griefs.'

Johnson adds, 'Because her work is so joyous (she does avoid darkness) it will always have readers. The first translation into Greek this year of *Mermaid Singing* is probably only the start. It means another generation will discover the many joys of her work. However, I would add that both Clift and Johnston and many of their artist friends left

Charmian Clift at Castlecrag, NSW, February, 1965. Photo by Hal Missingham

Australia partly because of its lack of appreciation of the arts. But before she died in 1969, Clift was hopeful that the old Australia was becoming a place of artistic self-creation and vision. I believe in 2023 that's only partly true. In this year, the centenary of her birth, a documentary about her is struggling to find a home, which is a shame.'

Quite. Veteran award-winning film producer Sue Milliken and director Rachel Lane have spent four years making *Life Burns High*, a phrase borrowed from *Peel Me a Lotus*. They hope to complete the film by the end of Clift's centenary year, subject to finding the funds and a broadcaster willing to screen it.

During this production period, they have assembled riveting archival material from sources including the State Library of NSW. They have insightful testimonies from a hefty cast of people who knew Clift well, including fellow writer Rodney Hall, who lived on Hydra at the same time as the Johnstons but who sadly lost all his photos of that era in a bushfire. Further commentary comes from fellow writer and friend Tom Keneally and publisher Richard Walsh.

'It was Nadia Wheatley's biography that first got me interested,' remembers Lane, who went on to option the rights to the book, thinking initially it might provide the material for a feature film or television drama. 'But I soon realised how expensive that would be because of locations and period, so I switched to documentary, little realising what a challenge that would prove to be.'

Milliken remembers meeting Clift early in her career while working as a production assistant at the ABC, where both Clift and Johnston were working on a documentary about their friends Sidney and Cynthia Nolan. 'I can see her now,' remembers Milliken 'She was so vibrant and direct and charismatic. And she had the greenest eyes I have ever seen. George got all the kudos, but she was so capable and talented. I remember having a drink with her once after work and she said, "Everyone says 'poor George' because of his health, but no one ever says 'poor Charmian'.'" She was holding the family together. I do think there was rivalry between them and that they led complicated lives.'

Only one of the three children Charmian had while married to George is still alive. Tragically, like her mother, their daughter Shane committed suicide and their son Martin died of alcoholism-

related illness. Their youngest son, Jason, the only one born on Hydra, declined to be interviewed for the film. He has always kept his distance from the mythologising of his parents but retains copyright on much of the material in the documentary.

'The parents were a time bomb,' says Lane, whose film features a tellingly awkward exchange between the parents and children, self-consciously lined up for an interview that shows the youngsters torn between two worlds and two languages.

Wheatley contends, with compelling evidence, that Clift's end was an intoxicated cry for help rather than a deliberate decision to end her life. Reading between the lines of *Sneaky Little Revolutions*, edited by Wheatley, Clift sounds like the kind of expansive if untidy parent who would have made room at the table for any unexpected school friend her children brought home and been genuinely interested in what they had to say. A 'fun' mother who perhaps valued spontaneity over routine.

But eventually, the pressures of uncertain finances, the heavy drinking, and the increasingly fraught creative partnership took their toll. Clift was juggling one ball too many. What might she have accomplished had she lived? Milliken said her first attempt at adapting Johnston's *My Brother Jack* for television was excellent, so perhaps she might have found a new avenue as a screenwriter. We'll never know.


Fascination with the Hydra years continues. A Norwegian-Canadian TV co-production, *So Long Marianne*, about the relationship between Leonard Cohen and his muse, Marianne Ihlen, has cast Australian actress Anna Torv as Charmian Clift and the suitably lean Noah Taylor as George Johnston. (Somewhat disconcertingly, Scandi crime writer Jo Nesbo is credited as one of the screenwriters.) So, we are due for a dramatised layer of interpretation of Clift, the Greek island domestic goddess.

When she returned to Australia, Clift described what she called a 'feeling of imminence here' and hoped that might result in a creative renaissance of Australians telling Australian stories in film, literature, art and performance. She might be pleased to know that hope has borne abundant fruit.

Caroline Baum is the presenter of *Life Sentences*, a podcast about contemporary biography.

Charmian Clift in a Grecian dance series for *PIX* Magazine, 21 April 1941. Photo by FS Grimes





Documentary has a relationship with the ‘real’, with what has happened or might have happened. The road to a finished film can involve re-enactments, hypotheses and counterfactuals. It can take a narrative form without landing on a neat resolution or happy ending. It might be reportage but is rarely straight journalism. Experimental or conventional, wild or urban, blockbuster or niche, celebratory or urgent, documentary film is a hybrid, more artful and interesting than simply pointing a camera at real life.

Here is a selection of stills from films being screened at a forthcoming documentary festival that brings together filmmakers, writers, audio-makers, artists, curators, historians and academics. They will discuss process, collaboration, art, craft, ideas, financing and, of course, audiences. Each still is presented alongside a related image from the Library’s collection.

Creative Documentary Research Centre Festival and Black Snapper International Student Film Festival, presented by Macquarie University.

Library Auditorium, State Library of NSW, 27 November – 1 December, 2023.



**DOCUMENTARY.
CONVERSATIONS.
CONNECTIONS.
SOURCE.**



Ocean Odyssey



Above: Lord Howe Island in 1987, looking towards Mount Lidbird and Mount Gower.
Photo by Max Dupain



Red-tailed Tropic Bird nesting (top left) and Sooty Terns flying (above) at Lord Howe Island. Stills from *Ocean Odyssey* (2021) by Nick Robinson, an ambitious 3-D film that follows a mother and calf humpback whale on their 4800-kilometre journey along the East Australian Current, from the tropics to Antarctica. Courtesy Wild Pacific Media

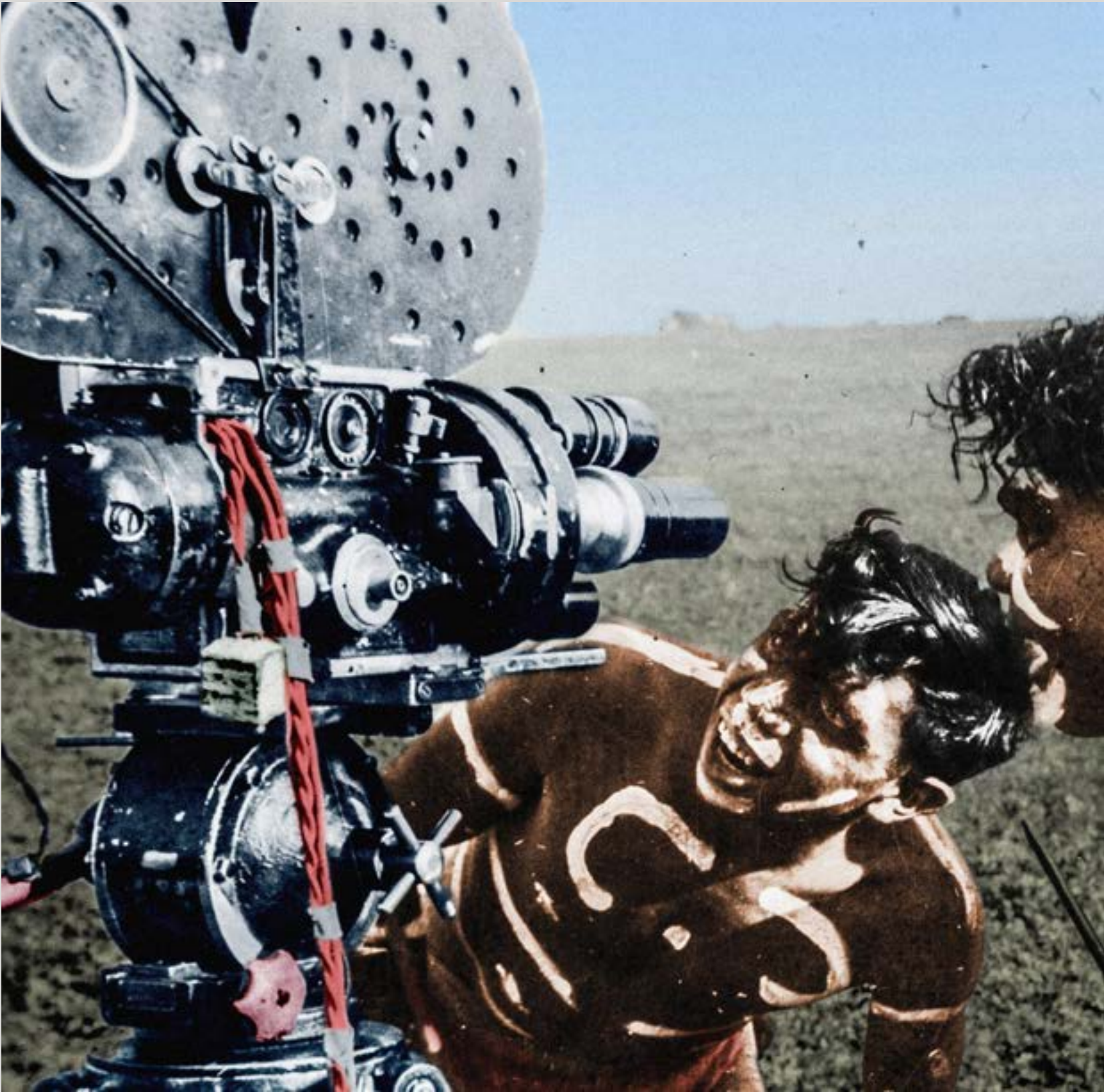




The Skin of Others

Above: Douglas Grant next to his ornamental pond and Harbour Bridge model at Callan Park, where he lived in the 1930s. Photo by Sam Hood

Opposite: Left: from left to right, actors Balang Tom E Lewis as Douglas Grant, George Washingmachine as an acquaintance, and Max Cullen as Henry Lawson in a scene from Tom Murray's 2020 film *The Skin of Others*. This film tells the extraordinary story of Douglas Grant (c 1885–1951), soldier, World War I POW, intellectual, draughtsman and journalist.



Ablaze

Still from the 2021 documentary
*ABLAZE: The True Story of the First
Aboriginal Filmmaker Bill Onus*
by Alec Morgan and Tiriki Onus.



Discovered inside a suitcase owned by Bill Onus (1906–1968) that had been stored in a basement, this photo was taken by Onus in 1946 while he was filming a scene for his 'lost' movie which recorded the first revival of his nearly destroyed Yorta Yorta culture. Three boys – who took part in the filming – look at his 35 mm camera.



Bill Onus throwing a boomerang, from a *PIX* magazine photographic series, 30 June 1941. Photo by Ray Olson



Mountain

Above: Ascending Aurora Peak,
Australian Antarctic Expedition, 1911–1914.
Photo by Archibald Lang McLean

Right: Everest climbers. Still from
Mountain (2017) a film by Jen Peedom.
Photo by John Griffiths



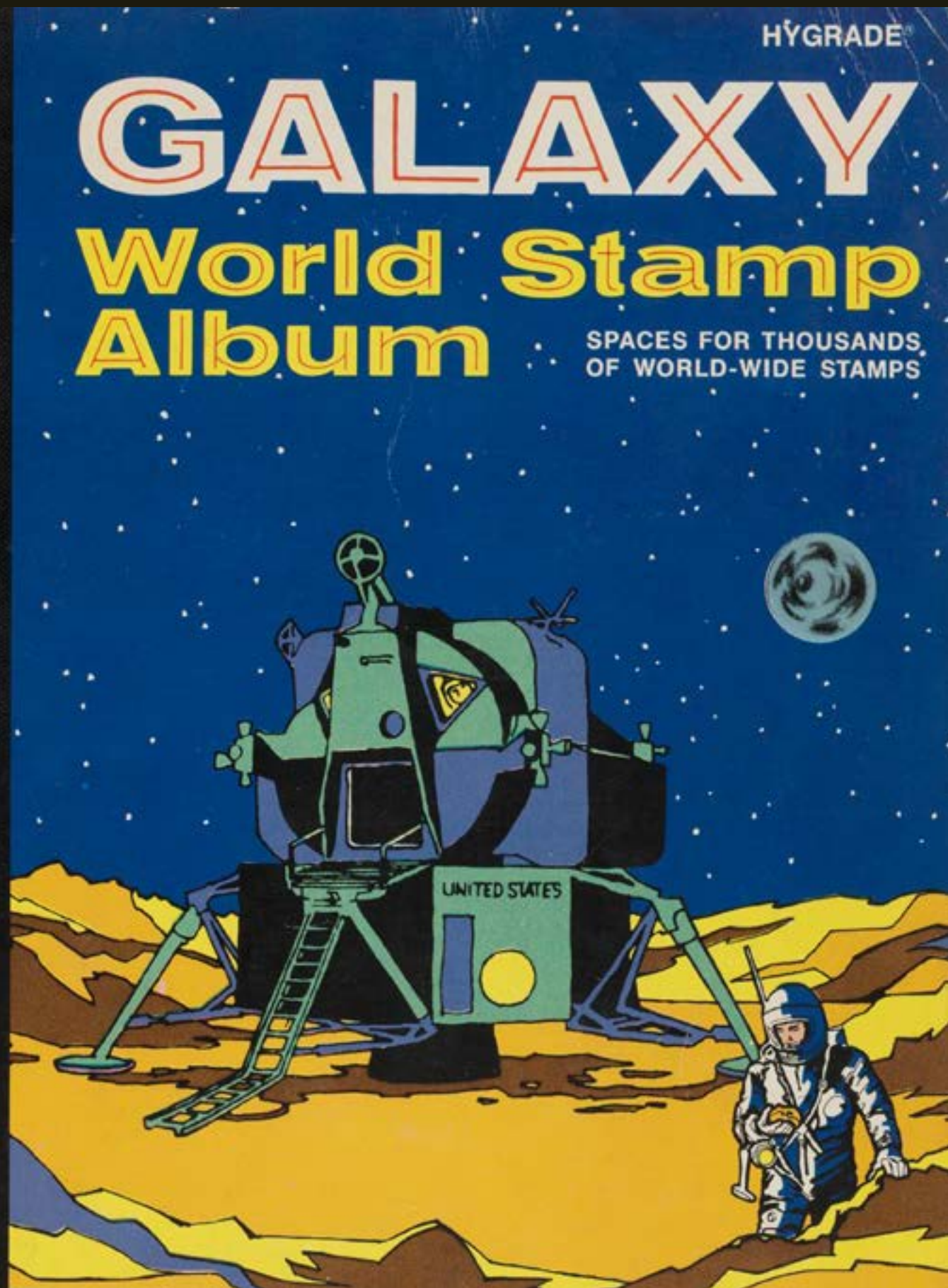


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WORDS Mark Dapin

Let's get philatelic

A writer heads back to his old stamping ground and discovers his childhood albums, which lead him into the Library's collection.

Earlier this year I flew back to England and finally opened the boxes I'd left behind when I moved to Australia.

I hadn't meant to abandon my stuff. I'd always thought my family (and my things) would eventually migrate to join me, but for decades they didn't come and then one day it was too late: my mum was dead. In the week of her funeral, my stepdad hauled down my boxes from the closet in the spare room. Packed inside were the remnants of my adolescence and childhood: my vinyl record collection, frozen in time in the mid-1980s, and my stamp collection, untouched since the early 1970s.

I leafed uneasily through the Stanley Gibbons Jet Age Stamp Album, published in 1966, the year that England won the FIFA World Cup. The print date seems significant. As a boy, I learned of the existence

of other cities from the football results, and the presence of other countries from my stamp album.

The album is a loose-leaf binder. Its cover design is a collage of stamps from Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the Niger, Israel, Bulgaria, Hungary and Upper Volta, featuring rockets launching, aircraft soaring and satellites blasting into space. Who today remembers the optimism of the Jet Age? Or, for that matter, Stanley Gibbons, the pioneer of philately, 'by Royal appointment', no less?

I learned so much from stamps, and the education survived when the teacher was forgotten. Tiny facts stuck in my mind: 'CCCP' was the Cyrillic abbreviation for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; 'Magyar Posta' was the imprimatur of Hungarian Post; republics that were not democracies were the only nations to call



Left, right and over:
Galaxy World Stamp
Album, Grossman
Stamp Co Inc, 1979

themselves ‘democratic republics’. So I always knew that the USSR used an exotic alphabet; the word ‘Magyar’ pertained to Hungary; and East Germany and North Korea were communist dictatorships.

At the head of each printed section in the Stanley Gibbons Jet Age binder is the name of the stamp-issuing nation’s capital city and currency, and often a single-paragraph profile of the country. The entry for Great Britain named London as ‘the largest city in the world’ (it’s not even in the top 10 anymore) and reminded young philatelists that ‘traditionally no British stamps bear the name of the country’, a convention that dates from 1840, ‘when Britain issued the world’s first adhesive postage stamp, the famous “Penny Black”’.

Australia, meanwhile, was a British Dominion, home of the ‘kangaroo, kookaburra and duck-billed platypus’ and a major producer of ‘meat, wool, butter and cheese’.

As I browsed my album, I was buffeted by a storm of memories I had never previously revisited — of buying bags of 50, 100 or 200 ‘mixed stamps’ from the local newsagent, emptying the packets, spilling out my treasure onto a desk built by my grandad, sifting the stamps into countries, panning for a Penny Black.

At school, philately was considered an introverted but not eccentric interest — although boys whose only hobby was hurting other people would sometimes ask, ‘Do you collect stamps?’ and if you said ‘yes’ they would stamp on your foot. (The same boys baited a similar trap for numismatists, by asking if they wanted a pound.)

My mum’s oldest sister migrated to the land of the kangaroo, kookaburra and duck-billed platypus and sent back airmails labelled ‘par avion’. At first, I trimmed around the perforations to cut the stamps from her letters and later I steamed them off over the spout of a gas kettle.

As a novice, I used to paste stamps into my album, until I heard that glue damaged the stamps and careful collectors used hinges. I began to buy packets of hinges from the newsagent too, and acquired arcane tools such as tweezers, whose purpose I can’t recall, and a watermark detector, although I don’t remember ever detecting a watermark — or why anyone would want to.

Later, my grandad gave me a new, leatherbound Stanley Gibbons album, its cardboard pages tiered with slide-in mounts to obviate the need for hinges. But the new album was for the display of mint-condition stamps, which I couldn’t afford to buy with my pocket money. My grandad used to give me presents of new sets of British stamp issues, but his generosity took the prospecting out of collecting and I began to lose interest.

When my mum left my dad, we moved into a flat with my stepdad, who also had a stamp album, and I guess that kept the conversation going for a while, but I think the hobby was over for me by the time I turned 12.

It hurts me now to think that my grandad might have been disappointed, or felt me ungrateful. My own grandchildren, if I ever have any, will never use a postage stamp — or a coin, or a newsagent. The Jet Age will look like the Dark Ages to them.

The last foreign stamp I was ever given was issued by the People’s Democratic Republic of Vietnam and featured Viet Cong guerrillas in action during the Vietnam War. It was presented to me by my careers teacher when I left school in 1979. He called it ‘the school prize for subversion’.

Less than 10 years later, I left England for good, to spend years travelling a world that I had first heard of from stamps. When I came back home for my stamp album, the most important things that I had left behind had gone: first my grandad, and then my mum.



Library stamps

The State Library of NSW holds three historically significant collections of stamps, none of which are currently on permanent display: The HL White Postage Stamp Collection, 1838–1913; the Armstrong Stamp Collection, 1850–1871; and the Sir William Dixson Stamp Collection, 1850–1952. They are stored securely in the basement, where they can be viewed by appointment only.

The collections include pre-Federation stamps from the colonies and Federation-era stamps from the Commonwealth, as well as antique international stamps.



The Henry Parkes letter sheet

Until the Great Post Office Reforms of 1839–1840, letters in the United Kingdom were delivered in person to the addressee, who was generally expected to pay the postage. The reforms ushered in the Uniform Penny Post, by which letters could be sent between any two places in the UK for a standard rate of one penny. The year 1840 saw the introduction of the Penny Black, a one-penny stamp printed by Perkins Bacon in London, showing the head of Queen Victoria against a black background.

The Royal Mail also began to issue prepaid letter sheets, a version of which had originated in the colony of NSW two years earlier.

The first prepaid letter sheet in the world was an approximately A4-sized sheet of paper impressed with the Post Office seal and valid for postage anywhere in Sydney for one penny.

The HL White Collection has an example of a letter sheet addressed to Henry Parkes and thought to have been used in 1843.

The collection belonged to wealthy grazier Henry White, who was author Patrick White's favourite paternal uncle. As well as a philatelist, he was a prominent ornithologist and oologist (that's a student of birds' eggs, obviously).

The Sydney View

Stanley Gibbons' first book of stamps for exchange included the first NSW-issued stamp — and the first Australian gummed stamp — the one-penny Sydney View, locally printed in 1850 from hand-engraved copper plates.

The design of the stamp mimics NSW's early Great Seal, granted to the colony in the reign of George IV, which shows convicts landing in Botany Bay greeted by a figure representing Industry, whose bale, beehive, shovel and pickaxe promise to free them from their chains and allow them to settle prosperously and securely in the city on the horizon. (This is quite a lot of information to include on a small postage stamp.)

The White Collection includes a reconstructed sheet of cancelled (essentially, postmarked) Sydney Views, with minor printing variations between each of the 25 stamps.

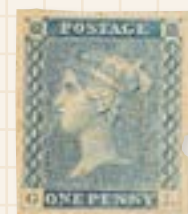


The Diadem

The rather primitive-looking Sydney View stamps were quickly replaced in NSW by stamps bearing a bust of Queen Victoria wearing a laurel wreath, which were superseded themselves in 1856 by an image of the queen modelling a diadem.

The plates for the Diadem stamp were made by Perkins Bacon.

Engineer Clive Armstrong was something of a Diadem completist. In fact, more than two-thirds of the Armstrong Stamp Collection comprises two-penny Diadems.



The Inverted Black Swan

Gibbons' first stamp book also contained the first Western Australian stamp, the one-penny Black Swan, which was engraved by Perkins Bacon and issued in 1854.

The White Collection has a rare 1855 Inverted Black Swan, one of only 14 or so such stamps in existence. This four-pence-denominated blue stamp was printed in two plates. The image of the swan is the right way up, but the frame that surrounds it is upside down. This was one of the world's first invert errors on a stamp, and it remains Australia's most valuable stamp error.



The Consumptives Home

An issue of stamps to raise money to establish the Queen Victoria Home for Consumptives was produced in NSW in 1897.

The stamps came in denominations of one shilling and two shillings and sixpence, but their postal values were only one penny and two-and-a-half pence respectively. The balance was donated to the appeal. Only a relatively small number of these charity stamps were printed. Some collectors believed that they were too expensive and not even real stamps.

Businessman Sir William Dixon was a keen philatelist and bibliophile, who bequeathed his collection of books, maps and manuscripts to the State Library of NSW to form the Dixon Library. The Dixon Stamp Collection has a full sheet of the shilling stamp.



Kangaroo and Map

Postage stamps from the colonies remained in use after Federation, until the first Commonwealth stamp issue, the Kangaroo and Map series, was introduced in 1913.

A competition to design the stamp, with a first prize of £100, was open to anyone in the world. In the end, however, Postmaster-General Charlie Frazer disregarded the result of the contest and chose instead a draft illustration submitted by Postmaster-General Charlie Frazer.

Frazer's stamp shows an outline of mainland Australia almost filled by a kangaroo, whose ears reach to the Gulf of Carpentaria while its tail almost tickles Melbourne. Tasmania, meanwhile, looks uneasily like the kangaroo's dropping.

Frazer's design met with disdain from the Melbourne *Argus*, which felt it 'very annoying to find that our country is to be represented in the eyes of the world by a grotesque and ridiculous symbol, and that she will be a laughing-stock even to childish stamp-collectors of every nation'.

Nevertheless, presentation sheets comprising a full set of the 15 denominations of Kangaroo and Map stamps, from the lowest value of one halfpenny to the highest value of two pounds, were presented by Frazer to each of his fellow members of parliament. Only a few sheets have survived, but the Dixon Stamp Collection preserves one of them.



Mark Dapin is a novelist, historian, true crime writer, journalist and screenwriter. His article on library tourism appeared in *Openbook* Summer 2022.



Here are reflections from Sasha Soldatow's biographer on her complicated subject and his unwieldy, impossible-to-contain life.

I knew that Sasha Soldatow (1947–2006) was vividly remembered by many people, but also knew not everyone would see him as a worthy subject of a biography.

He was a vivid presence, a bold writer, an original thinker, multi-talented, an anarchist, an activist, a dedicated partygoer and freelance provocateur. His story is also about the many social movements he was involved with: gay liberation, anti-censorship, prison reform, action to save inner-city housing, alternative publishing, cabaret. The biography, I decided, would be subtitled 'The life and times of Sasha Soldatow.'

I began researching uncertainly but felt increasingly that this was a project worth doing.

Interviews I did with people who had known him were essential, and reinforced that Sasha was remembered where most other people had become a blur of the forgotten, that he was influential in many lives. Besides these interviews, the most important source for my research was the papers Sasha had deposited in the State Library of NSW.



I knew Sasha wanted — even expected — his biography to be written. (I don't think he ever thought I'd be the one to do it.) This knowledge countered the icky feeling of delving into someone's personal letters and notes. There I'd find his frequent assertion that his historical sense insisted on intimate tellings. Sasha had placed his archived papers in the Mitchell Library with no restriction on access; they were meant to be read. There were even folders titled 'for biography': handy labels for his future biographer(s). There are at least 40 boxes of notebooks, drafts, newspaper cuttings, photographs and, mostly, his letters.

Fascinated, I'd started working on the biography before I realised that I was committed to it. It

began as someone else's idea; others said, 'Good idea, do it' and I eventually wondered, 'What if ...?'

As David Marr said in his interview with me, 'That collection speaks from the grave ... He was waiting for you, Inez.'



I knew Sasha wrote letters — we exchanged a few once — but I didn't know the extent of it. His boxes reveal that from the early 1970s he kept every letter he received and carbon copies of the ones he wrote. He kept letters marked 'not sent'. When, later, there was some correspondence via fax, he made a print copy — smart, because faxes fade fast. In the last few years of his life, he printed out emails.

While new forms of communication inspire their own fresh brilliance, there's a sense of loss seeing archives like this; it was such a common practice — long letters on paper between friends, sent in a stamped envelope. I did groan, however, when I uncovered handwritten ones — before typing was so ubiquitous, was handwriting easier to read?

Sasha's letters are uninhibited yet highly literate — correct grammar, precise vocabulary and punctuation, even in his later years when he was succumbing to the effects of a dramatic accident in Russia that, to some extent, disabled him and worsened his addiction to alcohol and pills.

From his earliest days to his latest, he would say that friendships and relationships were his real life's work. The evidence of this work is in his letters.

He fell out with some people and told them how they had failed him.

He wrote obsessive agonies over another fall into romantic love.

He entertained, complained, praised, scolded, pontificated.

Some of Soldatow's best work is in his letters. He knew it: they were at times a first draft for

Sasha Soldatow at a gallery opening, 1977. Photo by William Yang



pieces in *Private Do Not Open* [PDNO] (1978) and *Mayakovsky in Bondi* (1993), his books of short prose that disturb notions of genre, mixing essay, poetry and fiction writing.

While these books were critically praised on publication, they did not remain in print. Possibly their unique idiosyncrasy accounted for the marginal status that embittered him and was an inevitable topic in many of his letters over many years.



I knew that Bruce Sims (1948–2023), who worked at Penguin for many years and later at Magabala Books in Broome, was always valued by Sasha as an editor and friend. The boxes reveal their shared past in university theatre, the wealth of editing work and advice Sims provided on *PDNO*, and their close connection until the end of Sasha's life. Forty years later, Sims gifted his labour as the perfect editor of Sasha's biography.



I knew Sasha had moved to Sydney in 1972, attracted by its anarchist traditions, because he said so, as his archives remind me: he said it often in interviews and written pieces, all, of course, carefully filed. At university in Melbourne, Sasha already had been reading the University of NSW student newspaper *Tharunka*, edited by a team who were driven by the political zeal of the day, as Sasha was: anti-war, anti-sexism, anti-censorship, anti-authority.

Back then, student newspapers were widely read. *Tharunka* exposed and provoked the establishment by publishing investigative reporting and censored material — Australian censorship was ludicrously repressive in those days.

Sasha was keen to be part of all this. Before the move he'd met one of *Tharunka's* editors, Wendy Bacon, who would become a friend and colleague. Together, soon after, along with others, they began the alternative–underground newsletter *Scrounge*. Copies are filed in his archive: its grunge aesthetic speaks of the limited printing options of the time. The content is a collage of eclectic, if limited, sources: other underground publications and *Scrounge's* own investigations.

In a different vein, Sasha went on to produce the absurdist, irreverent newsletter *The Only Sensible News* with a group of friends, including me — his diary and notes are a reminder of the juvenile hilarity of its creation. Sasha named our creative collective 'Drink Against Drunkenness', now my biography's title.

More sophisticated in quality were Sasha's *Patterns* series of poetry and polemic. Like a lot of people around at the time, I remembered only fragments of all of this. Drafts and copies are a testament to the meticulous attention to every line. These are pamphlets meant to be kept. They are also evidence of advances in printing technology and the essential role of Tomato Press, the new press for alternative and underground publishing, including poetry, posters, t-shirts and magazines.



Starting research for the biography, I soon learned that Sasha's 1983 essay 'What Is This Gay Community Shit?' (WITGCS?), in the style of his *Patterns* pamphlets, was the most remembered piece by him. Sasha was a well-known identity in early gay liberation. He wrote for the gay press as soon as it came into being.

Photos of Sasha Soldatow in dinner party mode, one with Inez Baranay, found in one of the 40 boxes. Photographer unknown



The ideas forcefully articulated in WITGCS? were, basically, that being gay did not in itself mean like-mindedness with all other gays. Also, that capitalism subsumes everything, including liberation movements. Sasha's later opinion pieces returned to this essay and even after his death it was quoted and read, a testament to the continued relevance of his arguments in the era of the 'pink dollar' and popular queer eyes.

His archives disclose not only the careful drafts of WITGCS? but that earlier collaborative paper written with Larry Strange — a lawyer who had a tempestuous relationship with Sasha at that time — was where these political perceptions were first presented, at an anarchist conference in 1978.



Anyone who remembers Sydney in the 1970s would understand a voluntary migration from Melbourne. But there was more than anarchist activism and gay society to move towards; there was what Sasha would leave behind.

His old self. His mother.

Friends knew of Sasha's stormy relationship with his mother. His humorous and bitter grievances are repeated in his letters over the years. But it also becomes evident that he cares for her; his letters to her are more formal, there's a different tone to them.

Most revealing of all, among old passports and photographs, is the document Sasha worked on near the end of his life on his mother's behalf:

Wendy Bacon and Sasha Soldatow in the doorway of a house in Victoria Street, Kings Cross, 11 June 1973. The sign on the door, a quote by Le Corbusier, reads, 'The first proof of existence is to occupy space.' Courtesy Getty Images.

a submission to the German Forced Labour Compensation Programme of the International Organization for Migration. His compassionate, painstakingly well-written account details her harrowing experiences in World War II, as a young Russian woman working in a forced labour camp. Sasha's lifelong if incomplete knowledge of this always complicated his complaints about her.



Sasha is remembered as a central character in the famous squatting action in Victoria Street, Kings Cross, during 1973 and 1974, when he joined residents and supporters in a bid to save the street from greedy developers who would destroy its architectural and social heritage. His archives disclose a rare copy of an extensive piece he wrote at the time describing life in the squats. Part of his forensic examination of the politics of the protest groups (sexism, conflicts over desires for official positions and standard hierarchies) was the essential and historically significant alliance with the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) whose green bans saved some of Sydney's built and natural environment.

The hyper-masculine style of the labourers was tinged with casual homophobia, but Sasha got on well with them, offering respect and humour from his frank, unapologetic gay self, and was respected in turn. Soon after this action, the BLF put a green ban on Macquarie University for its dismissal of an academic for being gay.



I knew how much Sasha took meticulous care over every word and sentence and this made him a valued editor to many writers (I'd been one) of prose and screenplays, many of whom went on to be published or produced. In his letters he often wrote, 'I crave details.' He was a sought-after mentor to new writers, perhaps most famously Christos Tsiolkas: Here, in the 40 boxes, are the letters and drafts as the novel that would become *Loaded* took its shape and was published under Sasha's guidance. The two writers became closer and co-wrote the provocative *Jump Cuts: An Autobiography* (1996).

Here are copies of the testimonies many writers wrote on Sasha's behalf when he embarked on legal action against the Australia Council for the Arts for failing to award him a grant for 16 years. This case was, for a long time, what most people

knew about Sasha: here are folders full of the newspaper reports and opinion pieces; it seemed everyone in the literary world discussed the case.

And here are lengthy files of his meticulous legal research and correspondence with his lawyer: in some contexts, Sasha showed great organisational ability, focus and discipline.



I had listened with a group of friends to Sasha's 1988 radio program on Harry Hooton. I find in his boxes just how serious and prolonged his interest was in the visionary anarchist poet, an intellectual forebear. Two years later, Sasha published a thoroughly researched introduction in his admired edition of Hooton's works, and in the early 2000s he enrolled to do a PhD on Hooton. Sadly, his health worsening, he was unable to continue.



I knew Sasha was involved with 'prison stuff' as an activist: here is his material on prisoners' rights and prison reform. He even did a stint as writer-in-residence at Long Bay Jail and corresponded with notorious prisoners such as Ray Denning. Sasha shared a house with some formative members of groups like Women Behind Bars and Prisoners' Action Group and would cite their work as shaping his thinking. He acknowledges them in his 1980 non-fiction book *The Politics of the Olympics*; rereading it for the biography (in the Library — it's hard to find a copy) was to remember that it is thoroughly researched and brilliantly written and begins with a poetic dedication to all prisoners.



I knew that Sasha called himself 'Party Fun'; he would go to all the parties he could and threw quite a few himself, as he recounts in many letters and journal entries. He also created a theatrical persona for electrifying performances of his own work in cabarets, readings and his own shows: here are drafts of lines and stanzas rewritten over and over.

Less known is just how depressed he could be, the angry and despairing moods that recurred throughout his life expressed with dark bitterness.

There is little chronology in his files — letters are filed by people's names — but once you've read most of them, it's clear that despising and avoiding psychiatry was his lifelong position. He also avoided, even mocked, any form of therapy or technique of self-examination.



I knew he had died at the age of 58, of liver failure. His archives illuminate the story of his lifelong addictions. Almost literally lifelong: he had been prescribed Valium as a teenager and kept taking the drug, referring to it often as some kind of essential component of his life. Sasha drank regularly from an early age; in Sydney his social group drank, and no one became worried about the extent of his intake until it was too late.



‘You can’t sit still in a corner and just look when the world around you demands an answer, or a commitment.

You cannot be a poet without politics.

We believed in something.

Don’t ask me what it was.’

Inez Baranay is the author of *Drink Against Drunkenness: The Life and Times of Sasha Soldatow* (Local Time Publishing). She is the author of nine novels as well as books of short prose and memoir. Having lived and worked around the world, particularly in Bali, India, Morocco and Turkey, she is based in Sydney, at least for now.

Sasha in full flight as Rock’n’Roll Sally, turning drag on its head during a performance. Photo by Megan McMurchy



A MODEL ARCHIVE



Images of June Dally-
Watkins modelling
taken from various
scrapbooks and
journals

WORDS Lisa Clifford

A daughter decides to give the scrapbooks and journals of her beloved mother — an Australian fashion icon — to the Library.

The newspaper trail starts in 1947 and finishes in 1976. My grandmother's pride in the scrapbooks is evident in every neat scissor cut, article crease and fold. Mum's excitement is unmistakable in photographs of her joyful smiles. You can feel the thrill of their joint success through the pages. The fun of their adventure as they move into their new Sydney lives, perhaps a little wide-eyed but always determined.

In 2022 I donated June Dally-Watkins scrapbooks and journals to the State Library of NSW. They have many facets but they mostly chart the beginning of her modelling career, her triumphs in the United States, the growth of Australia's fledgling fashion industry and the founding of the country's first model agency. Miss Dally, as June Dally-Watkins would ultimately become known, was Australia's first-ever supermodel, before the term had even been coined. She was also my mother.

Within the scrapbooks and journals now held by the Library are her descriptions of Hollywood and the famous people she met along the way. In the eyes of the Americans she worked with, this beautiful young Australian girl seemed to be a fresh and different creature, with a cute accent. My donation to the Library also includes the program of the first Christian Dior fashion parade in Australia, which was, in fact, the fashion house's first complete collection ever to be shown outside Paris. Mum was so proud of that original program, signed by every model. One wrote, 'With love from me and my lipstick brush.' There is humour and happiness in each inscription.

But the scrapbooks are also a poignant record of a mother and daughter relationship, between my mother and hers. I suspect it was only Nanna scouring the newspapers to fill those albums because Mum was so busy



working. It was Nanna who stayed home to take Mum's model bookings by phone, sewed her clothes and cooked their meals. Mum's work supported them financially for a long time.

It's an emotional thing knowing that Nanna's love is glued all over these pages. So I guess it's no wonder I got the last-minute wobbles about giving away such wonderful family memories. Initially, handing over Nanna and Mum's scrapbooks to be archived felt wonderful, as though I was doing something of social value.



I felt that bequeathing the albums would help Mum endure, that by making the albums public I might prompt a deeper understanding of the historical context for newspaper headings such as ‘Girls Lack Poise’, or advertisements proclaiming ‘I’m lovelier since I changed to Innox’.

In our ‘politically correct’ lexicon, so much of what Mum stood and worked for is now challenged or even derided. In my daughter’s glossary, for example, expressions such as ‘Women don’t owe you pretty’ are common. Aspiring to being ‘poised’ or ‘lovely’ might now be seen as old-fashioned or weak. Definitions of femininity change, the notion of ‘ladylike behaviour’ is now seen as limiting or confining, though goodness knows what my mother would have made of the world of Instagram, and aspirations to be ‘hot’. Every generation of

Jeanette Elphick, another star model from June Dally-Watkins’ agency

women has fought for change. In Mum’s day it was her battle to have children and to work after marriage that contributed to strides forward in the women’s movement.

Like buyer’s remorse, does donor’s remorse exist? It did for me. The emotional confusion around giving up these documents gave me pause. Their contents are my family’s memories. Surely my children and nephews – and even their children – would appreciate the photos as they flicked through them? Maybe it was best for such personal records to be kept within the family? But, again, I thought it could all go towards fostering research and awareness of the limitations of the cultural world that my mother moved within and the achievements she made.

Indeed, the clippings are snapshots of life in the middle of the last century. Social pages, fashion shows, advertisements, fashion editorials, *Australian Women’s Weekly* fashion shoots, catalogues. Mum, like other remote country girls, grew up devouring these magazine stories, hanging on to every photo. But as time goes on, the scrapbooks take on a more serious tone. In 1952, for example, Mum helped form the Mannequins and Models Association of NSW to improve pay rates. ‘Photographers fees have gone up, but models are still receiving the same fees as fifteen years ago,’ reads one article. The unionisation of the modelling industry had begun. The headline of another article blares ‘Models Seek Actors’ Equity Membership.’ Miss Dally was all for women’s rights, equal pay and equal opportunities. Not bad for an illegitimate girl born June Marie Skewes.

Nanna Kay, born Caroline Marie Skewes, must have been incredibly proud of her daughter, who grew up in Watsons Creek (60 kilometres from Tamworth and with a population of 12), and climbed to the top of Australia’s business and fashion world. The closest town to my grandmother’s New England farm was Bendemeer, which apparently has the dubious distinction of being one of the first places Captain Thunderbolt robbed in 1864 when he held up the Northern Mail. Nanna was an unmarried mother. When Mum was born in 1927, not much was happening around Watsons Creek except for rabbit shooting and sheep shearing. The stigma of having a ‘bastard’ child in the bush was so disgraceful that,

as Nanna and Mum told me years later, they were better off in the anonymous world of Sydney. When she was 14 years old, Mum was adopted by David Dally-Watkins, my grandmother's first husband and the original owner of that elegant name.

My uncertainty about letting the public into our family life was no small thing, but those doubts did turn to a conviction to share. Headings such as 'TAA Flies Fashion Around Australia to Test How Australian Designed Travel Clothes Stand Up to the Job' are so wonderful I thought they should be shared. There are charming photos of Mum pretending to be asleep on that particular assignment that are captioned: 'Our candid camera caught the mannequins asleep in their comfortable sleeperettes as they fly back from Adelaide to Perth.' Headlines in another album are from *Sun-Herald* and *Daily Mirror* stories about my mother judging the Miss Sun Girl Quest, a beauty pageant that ran from Greenmount Beach on the Gold Coast along the beaches all the way north to Noosa. Beauty pageants may be controversial now but are clearly part of our heritage.

The scrapbooks under my care had languished in a cupboard since Mum died in 2020. We handled the albums with love and took pleasure in the memories, but it was perhaps a negligible love because really, we didn't take any notice of them. No one ever 'viewed' the photos, read the articles, or stored them in a temperature-controlled environment to ensure their longevity. Perhaps children don't give the legacy of their parents the respect it deserves. Inherited documents are taken for granted or considered a nuisance. 'What are we going to *do* with those files?' is an often-repeated phrase. Our heritage has always been there, we are born into our parent's stories, we've never been in a world without them. We either take their historical value for granted, or want to change it.

So, I decided to give them away. Public access to records of the formative days of Australian fashion and modelling is important. Probably not many people under 30 have heard of June Dally-Watkins. Young people wouldn't know who was at the helm of Australia's first model-booking agency and perhaps, one day, some would like to find out. But a lot of people do remember June Dally-Watkins. So many, upon hearing her name, smile and say, 'My sister did your mother's course,' or

'My mother was a Dally's girl,' or even in one case, 'My sister was chosen to dance with the Bluebells at the Lido cabaret show on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. But they wouldn't take her unless she'd done the June Dally-Watkins course first.'

Once I'd made the decision to donate Mum's files, I needed to better grasp how the Library would make the albums available. To be honest, I hadn't reckoned on how much care would be taken. I booked some quiet time in the imposing Mitchell Reading Room to experience what it might be like for another researcher. I was given a stand-up perspex sign saying I had permission to take photos. As a donor I have photographic rights, which made me smile. The catalogue





box was then weighed before being passed over to me. The box's weight helps archivists and librarians know if documents have been knowingly or unknowingly slipped into bags. Mum and Nanna weighed in at 3.611 kilograms. I pored over the photos and articles, probably for the last time, knowing they are in good hands. When cultural institutions acquire significant items, those items are loved.

Now, I've absolutely made peace with the donation decision. The State Library of NSW is in my DNA now. Or is it the other way around? Mum and Nanna are in good company. Their neighbours in the five-level underground stacks vary from documents discussing the suitability of Princess Elizabeth's wedding present, to the 1927-1931 Razor Gang Wars. Nanna would have loved all of that.

The word 'patrimony' means property inherited from one's father or male ancestor. Inheritance through the female line is termed 'matrilinear'. But that word doesn't do justice to how I feel about my donation. So, I'll make up a word: Mumony. My mother would have adored that.

Lisa June Clifford is a writer and journalist, and June Dally-Watkins' youngest daughter. Born in Sydney, she moved to Italy at 16 but returned for an Australian Film, Television and Radio School scholarship. After a career in radio and television journalism, Lisa resettled in Italy. She is the author of *Walking Sydney*, *The Promise — An Italian Romance*, *Death in the Mountains* and *Naples: A Way of Love*. She now lives between Florence and Sydney.

Thanks I've sent
for Lots of help.
Pamela
Hi Poetry Girl!
Don't want
to miss
with
Sweetie
hated her
to come
with
Belle



Programme

AN EXCLUSIVE PRESENTATION
BY DAVID JONES' OF

Fifty Original Creations

Christian Dior
WITH ADAPTATIONS

THE MOST COMPLETE DIOR COLLECTION
EVER TO BE SHOWN OUTSIDE PARIS

Thanks for the
smile June
January 1948

To the
with
for
the
the
the

It's been
from
the
the
the

WOMEN'S NEWS AND FEATURES



IF YOU WANT to give your
look a touch of mystery
and drama, the dress with
long sleeves is the answer.

As Worn By The Duchess Of
Kent In Paris



THE ANSWER to every
woman's question, and
the answer to a girl's
dream, is the headscarf.
It is the most useful
and stylish accessory
you can wear.

DIOR'S PARIS—SYDNEY SPRING LOOK



1. "Palatine" is featured in several shades. It has a high collar and a long, flowing skirt. 2. "Suzanne" is a long-sleeved, high-waisted dress with a full skirt. 3. "Marianne" is a long-sleeved, high-waisted dress with a full skirt and a large collar. 4. "Christine" is a long-sleeved, high-waisted dress with a full skirt and a large collar. 5. "Christine" is a long-sleeved, high-waisted dress with a full skirt and a large collar. 6. "Christine" is a long-sleeved, high-waisted dress with a full skirt and a large collar. 7. "Christine" is a long-sleeved, high-waisted dress with a full skirt and a large collar.

Australian Model Raps
Hollywood Female Garb



WHITELY STYLISH — Australia's most glamorous model, the blonde, is seen in a Dior dress.

Lack of Foundation Has Sloppy Effect



WORDS Omar Sakr

The Libraries That Made Me

Behind Casula Mall, overlooking a green field, there is a small library, a long low building of brick with a back wall of glass windows and curtains through which light occasionally glints on row after row of books. I remember my mother taking me there for the first time, and coming away with *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* — a story lifted out of *The Thousand and One Nights* and presented here on its own — because it had Ali in the title, because the brown cartoon men looked like my family. I was a child, and so delighted by this, and by the magic and wonder of the tale itself; I was hooked from then on, and Casula Library fast became a second home.

To attach a sense of belonging to a public institution has its perils, however. Once, while recovering from a severely infected in-grown toenail that led to the removal of the entire nail itself, leaving a raw expanse, I was told to stay off my feet for a week. I was thrilled to be out of school, and went to the library every day instead — it was a short walk and I wore sandals, putting pressure on my heels, half-hobbling there. The hush of the place soothed something in me I did not even know was hurting, and I'd pick up a book and find a seat along the far wall, out of view, to lose myself anew.

Evidently, a child coming into the library alone, Monday to Friday, rang some alarm bells, because one day a thin balding man in a suit came and sat next to me. He said he was an inspector from the Board of Education, and wanted to know if everything was okay at home. Did I have a home? Why wasn't I at school? Thinking back on this now, I wonder if my memory is correct, and if such a position does or has ever existed at the Board, but at any rate, he was a social worker of some kind who had been called by the librarians. I showed him my horrific toe and said I had to be out of school until it was better, that was all. Aside from this, my little Arab *Matilda* experience was untroubled: I loved the library, and felt that the librarians loved me.

All I wanted to do, then, was read. All I want to do, still, is read. The world has never made sense to me, which I understand better now that I've been diagnosed with autism. I've always been different to my kin and strangers alike,

a difference long made light of, made an ugliness of — but in books, in the worlds thereof, sense was constructed, and within that sense I was included. I've yet to experience a more powerful drug and here was a drug store, free, that I could access whenever I pleased. On rare occasions, the library didn't have the book I wanted, and I was awed when I heard there were other libraries that were connected to this one — that they would have the book, and could hold it or send it here.

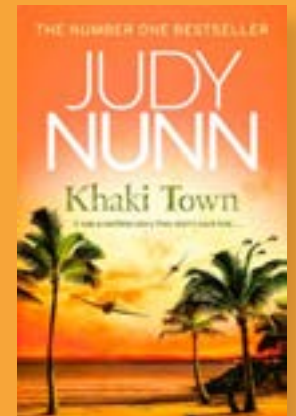
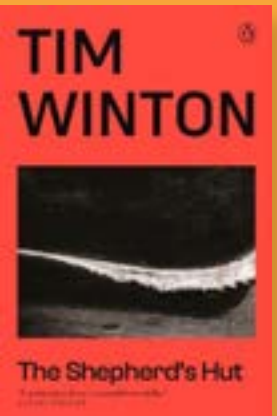
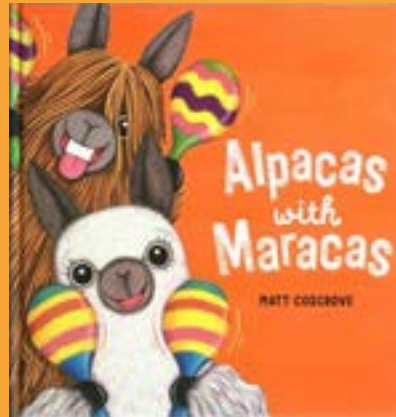
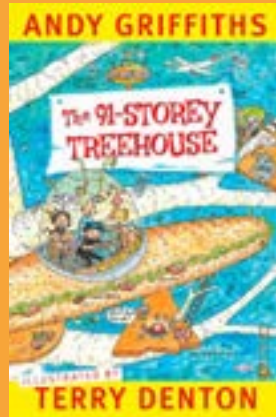
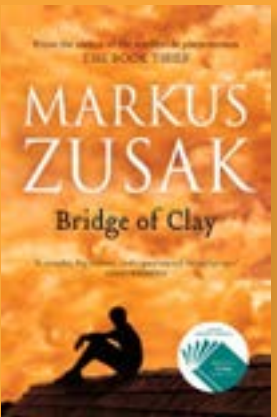
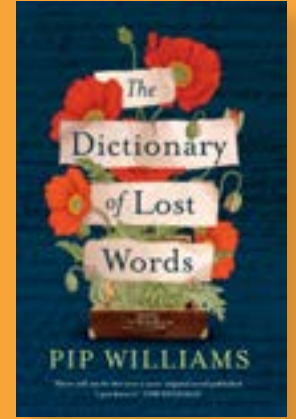
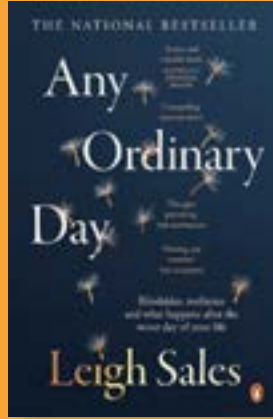
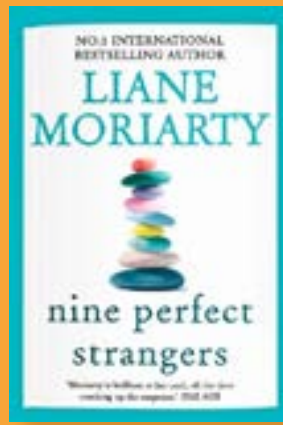
Magic, I tell you. I was agog. They would do this for me? Bring a book I had asked for, from a far-off place, simply because I asked? I was raised by a poor single Arab migrant, so there is an obvious class element to my shock, but even outside of purchasing power, at home I was often ignored. In the library, I was a person like anyone else, I could be heard, and attended to, and given any number of other worlds to inhabit. Through reservations and inter-library orders, I came to know of Liverpool City Library. I will never forget seeing it for the first time, will never forget that I used to think of Liverpool as 'the city', which I still laugh about now.

Liverpool Library is huge, compared to Casula, an extravagant three-storey palace. At the front, beneath the large courtyard, large colourful letters spelling out *l-i-b-r-a-r-y* are stacked on top of each other, as if a giant had left them there, a towering name that confirmed for me this place belonged to a story, and could hold all my fantasies. This was my interest: not classic literature, not the canon, which I found boring — it was fantasy and science fiction, horror and comics, then the internet too (having no computer at home). As I grew older, starting at Liverpool Boys High, I visited this mundane palace most days after school. 'For homework' I'd say, if anyone asked, not knowing how to articulate that while no one library can be my home, I am at home in all of them.

Omar Sakr is the son of Arab and Turkish Muslim migrants. He is the author of three poetry collections, including *The Lost Arabs* (UQP), which won the 2020 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry, and a novel, *Son of Sin* (Affirm Press, 2022). His latest book is *Non-essential Work*. He lives and works on Dharug land, where he was born and raised.

Photo of Omar Sakr at Casula Library, renovated since he was last there.
Photo by Joy Lai





The top 20 highest-scoring books in 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 PLR surveys

WORDS Catherine Keenan

Politics, books and money

The inside story of public lending rights

Though Whitlam didn't hide from many people but, according to writer Thomas Keneally, he tried to hide from Colin Simpson. Simpson, a journalist and travel writer who died in 1983, was vice-president of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA). For years he'd been writing letters to politicians, goading and cajoling them to institute a lending rights scheme. They mostly ignored him. Eventually Simpson got so fed up he adopted a more forthright approach, showing up at functions and buttonholing Whitlam on the subject. 'Oh God, there's that lending rights guy,' Keneally remembers Whitlam intoning, looking for an escape route.

Fortunately for writers, escape was hard to find, given Whitlam was well over six feet tall and soon to become Prime Minister. So in 1972, he gave in. He committed the Australian Labor Party to the establishment of a Public Lending Right, or PLR, scheme that would compensate Australian authors and publishers for income lost by having their books loaned from public libraries rather than bought by individuals. Whitlam won the election and PLR came into effect in 1975.

Nearly 50 years later, it is still the Federal Government's single biggest commitment to the Australian literary community, the primary means by which it encourages and supports the creation of new Australian literature. This year, the scheme paid out over \$23 million to more than 17,000 authors, illustrators, editors, translators and publishers.

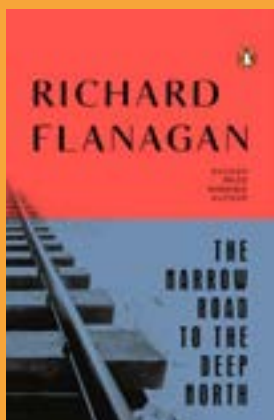
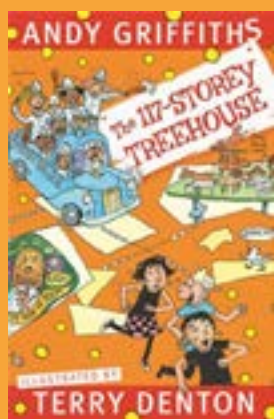
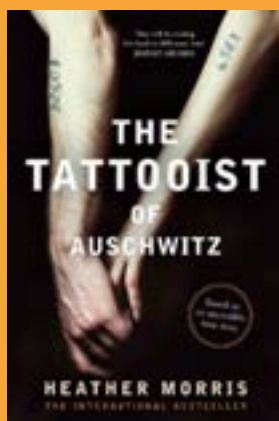
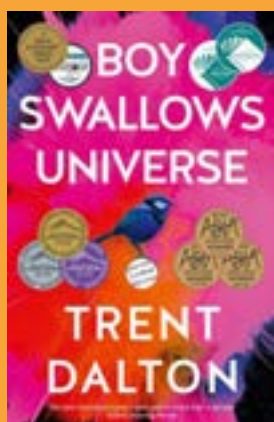
For most writers, lending rights provide a modest payment — the majority of claims are for less than \$1000 — but it's wondrously predictable, arriving in bank accounts every June, a gentle and welcome reminder to authors that their books are still being read. With the average writer's income hovering just above \$18,000 per year, such payments can represent a significant amount. Children's book

author Kirsty Murray is one of many who says she wouldn't be a writer without lending rights. 'I wouldn't be able to continue to produce the body of work I have,' she says. 'It makes the difference between being able to do that next book, or having to take another job.'

While other initiatives to support Australian writers have come and gone, PLR has not only stayed, it has grown. The most significant expansion came in 2000, when the scheme was broadened to take in libraries within educational institutions. The Educational Lending Right, or ELR, was introduced as a separate payment, sent out annually alongside PLR. Australia was the first country in the world to implement such a scheme in full.

In January 2023, the Albanese Government announced a second historic extension to the scheme. Australian lending rights payments, unlike those in some countries such as the UK, are calculated not on how often books are borrowed, but on how many copies of a book are available to borrow on library shelves. Every year, a representative sample of libraries is surveyed, and authors with 50 or more copies of a title are eligible for a payment. Their publishers are eligible for a much smaller one. Up until now, however, only printed copies of books were counted, but from 2024 ebooks and audiobooks will also be included. The Federal Government has promised an extra \$12.9 million over four years to fund this.

Viewed in a certain light, the introduction of both ELR and digital lending rights was simply common sense. If we agree that it's right to pay authors and publishers because their books are borrowed from public libraries, then why not pay them when their books are borrowed from school, TAFE and university libraries as well? Similarly, if it makes sense to pay authors and publishers because their physical books are borrowed, why not



The campaign for digital lending rights began in the early 2010s.

pay them for audiobooks and ebooks too? And yet, in both cases, change only came about because the ASA, along with writers, publishers, librarians and others, relentlessly petitioned politicians, appeared before committees and wrote columns and articles advocating for ELR and, later, digital lending rights for any publication that would have them.

Simpson may have been the most dogged player in the establishment of lending rights, but the longevity and increased scope of the scheme only came about because of the persistence, altruism and sheer bloody-mindedness of many writers, such as Libby Gleeson, Nadia Wheatley, Angelo Loukakis, Nick Earls and Kirsty Murray, as well as the current head of the ASA, Olivia Lanchester. Their success is testament to how much can be achieved when the literary community links arms in a common cause.

In *Status and Sugar*, Stephany Steggall's history of the ASA, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, she notes that when Simpson began advocating for lending rights, he based his argument on the more established case for performance rights: compensation given to composers and musicians when their music is played by others. This, in turn, was traced by Simpson to a French man called Victor Parizot, a composer of light music, who in 1849 refused to pay his bill in a Paris restaurant. Why? The small orchestra there was playing a tune he recognised as his own. 'I will pay you for my dinner only when you pay me for playing my music,' he said to the proprietor, who promptly took him to court – and lost.

This was the first time a court had recognised the right of composers to be paid when their work was used by others. We now take it for granted that musicians deserve a cut, however vanishingly small, if their work is played on the radio, or in gyms, or to packed concert halls. (In Australia, music licences are managed by APRA AMCOS. The Copyright Agency provides a comparable service for writers and publishers outside the library sector.)

Nearly a century had to pass, however, before this principle was applied to books. Denmark was the first country to introduce PLR in 1946. Australia was the second country outside Europe to do the same, following New Zealand in 1973, but it was not universally welcomed. Librarians in particular fought against it, largely because they worried the public might have to start paying to borrow

books or, perhaps worse, that payments would come from their own budgets. Governments are, generally speaking, averse to introducing any new scheme that involves paying people, particularly unbiddable people like authors, but the times were on Simpson's side. PLR rode in on the wave of cultural reform and renewal initiated by the Whitlam Government in the 1970s. Many countries across Asia and Latin America, as well as the United States, still don't have a lending rights scheme.

The ASA began agitating for the introduction of ELR in the early 1990s and had a major win in 1994 when Paul Keating promised to implement it as part of his Creative Nation policy, our first national cultural policy. However, Keating lost the 1996 election to John Howard, and his Liberal Government was far less inclined towards such a scheme. Then Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, even proposed cutting back PLR so that it only applied to books for up to 25 years – as opposed to 50 years – after publication.

In her book, Steggall recounts details of a fractious meeting between Alston and a group of authors in which the minister disputed the idea that authors needed financial support at all. His evidence? 'I saw Nancy Cato at Noosa wearing a jazzy new tracksuit,' he is alleged to have said. (In a letter to *Australian Author*, Cato explained she wasn't holidaying but had lived in Noosa for 30 years, and owned 'only one tracksuit of winter weight and it is about 10 years old'.) Authors and publishers were frustrated and angry but soon found themselves with bigger fish to fry.

When the Howard Government began floating the idea of a Goods and Services Tax (GST), the ASA joined forces with publishers and fought hard to make books exempt. Author Nick Earls had just joined the ASA's management committee and was flying into Sydney for a weekend retreat when news broke that the now-defunct party, the Australian Democrats, would no longer hold out for books to be exempt from the GST. The cause was lost. 'That was a really depressing moment,' he recalls. The ASA had to regroup quickly and pivot back to campaign for an ELR.

In 2000, the Howard Government agreed to the introduction of ELR as a consolation prize for having lost the bigger fight. In the year after the 10 per cent GST was introduced, book sales

plummeted by 19 per cent. The ELR payment was introduced as a four-year commitment only, a way of tiding authors over a bumpy patch. Happily, it became permanent in 2007.

The campaign for digital lending rights began in the early 2010s, when libraries began to increase their digital holdings. As books aged and fell apart, many libraries replaced them with digital versions. Between 2015 and 2020, the printed collections in Australian public libraries reduced by 15 per cent while ebook collections increased by 65 per cent. Then, COVID lockdowns began and loans of ebooks and audiobooks soared. From March to May 2020, public libraries in NSW processed over 800,000 e-loans, a 300 per cent increase on the same period in 2019. Yet authors weren't compensated a cent for it.

While Australia blazed a trail with the introduction of ELR, other countries, including the UK and Canada, acknowledged digital lending rights before us. Again, it was the ASA that led the campaign. Chief Executive Olivia Lanchester says they only really gained traction when libraries joined the campaign, just before the pandemic.

Again, the ASA deployed a diverse range of authors as ambassadors for the cause — Morris Gleitzman, Natasha Lester, Carrie Tiffany, Markus Zusak, Kirsty Murray and Nick Earls. They petitioned politicians and policy-makers, and shared personal stories that brought the issue to life. Earls, for instance, who has published nearly 30 novels for adults and children, looked up holdings of his books at Brisbane City Council libraries. He found that of the 56 different editions of his books available, only 25 were print and 31 were ebooks or audiobooks. This explained why it was that in 2018 his PLR and ELR payments had made up just over 20 per cent of his income, but in the five years since, while his ELR payment has remained pretty stable, his PLR payment has fallen by 44 per cent. 'Library holdings of ebooks and audiobooks have accelerated faster than quite a few of us might have anticipated,' says Earls.

A change of government, and Labor's \$286 million National Cultural Policy, Revive, provided the opportunity they needed. Digital lending rights were confirmed by Arts Minister Tony Burke in January 2023.



Australia's lending rights scheme is, by design, a nation-building project. There is a sense that PLR and ELR act as a kind of superannuation scheme for writers, a reward — however scant — for their life's work. The payments are only available to living Australian authors. Royalties continue after death, but PLR and ELR payments are intended to keep authors writing; when that's not possible, the payments cease.

For most of our great writers, the new digital lending rights will, sadly, have little effect on what lands in their bank accounts each June. The scheme only applies to ebooks and audiobooks published in 2017 or later. Kirsty Murray joined the ASA management committee expressly to fight for digital lending rights, knowing she was unlikely to benefit much from them herself. But that wasn't the point: she wanted to future-proof the scheme, so as to leave a legacy for writers coming after her.

Murray is old enough to remember the days when school libraries groaned with Enid Blyton and other imported books. 'Now you walk into an Australian school library and you'll see a lovely representation of Australian stories,' she says. And that is worth fighting for.

Catherine Keenan is a freelance writer and co-founder and executive director of Story Factory. She wrote about children's picture books in *Openbook Winter 2022*.

Colin Simpson beside a stack of his books in 1962. Photo by Max Dupain

In his new book, Sam Twyford-Moore explores Australian identity through the careers of Errol Flynn, Peter Finch, David Gulpilil and Nicole Kidman.

On a rainy midweek in Sydney, Glebe's freshly reopened Badde Manors Cafe affords big-window street views from its old wooden booths. Bathed in the day's silvery light, the iconic student hangout feels like the ideal location to interview the memoirist, literary critic and cineaste, Sam Twyford-Moore. He can see me coming from a mile off. I can see him framed through the glass too.

Sam has just published his second book, *Cast Mates: Australian Actors in Hollywood and at Home*. It's a step-by-step biographical study of Errol Flynn, Peter Finch, David Gulpilil and Nicole Kidman over the last century. In looking at their lives and more especially their films, along with the social and political contexts surrounding them, he tells a much bigger story about what it means to be Australian — and how we have defined or lost ourselves against the dazzle of American motion pictures.

'Memory and forgetting in Australia are such strange things,' Sam says. 'It's not just a matter of what *you* remember and forget. It's what we do collectively too.'

As we speak, news is breaking of major American directors Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg and Paul Thomas Anderson intervening over brutal cutbacks to Turner Classic Movies (TCM), offering to curate and promote content to save the cinema channel. Sam laments, 'We are not even close to having that kind of struggle for our history. We don't have the level of infrastructure you see in the USA for a start, but our cultural forgetfulness is so ingrained. America is bad at

it; we are *really* bad at it. The silent movie era in Australia, there are only scraps left. We just chuck stuff out,' Sam says. 'Henry Lawson once starred in a movie, you know. There's no surviving print of it. You would never find it even if you tried.'

I've known Sam on and off for almost 20 years. First as a student of mine in the Creative Non-fiction course at UTS (University of Technology, Sydney), when he'd sometimes add drawings and cartoons to enhance his idiosyncratic essays or cheekily place them in the margins as meta-commentaries on what he was saying. 'Drawing and writing were my passions, so I guess cinema does merge those two interests really well.'

Later on, I'd observe him working across a run of impressive professional roles: Festival Director and CEO of the Emerging Writers' Festival in Melbourne from 2012 to 2015; founder of the Digital Writers' Festival in 2014; then founder and former co-host of *The Rereaders* literary podcast. A creature of boundless energy and latent humour, he has been managing the Faber Writing Academy for the last five years.

One explanation for Sam's drive and obsessions might be found in his first book, *The Rapids: Ways of Looking at Mania* (2018). Partially diaristic, Sam evades too much weight being placed on his own story by equally tracing oddball figures like the actor Carrie Fisher and theatrical monologist and author Spalding Gray. He also made use of a collage-like writing structure to inquire into the nature of bipolar disorder, or

Sam-Twyford Moore in the Golden Age Cinema, Surry Hills. Photo by Joy Lai



THE
PROJECT.
IONIST

‘Gulpilil is our most historically consequential actor of all time.’

what Sam happily referred to as his own ‘manic depression’, an un-PC term that he joked in interviews was ‘me taking it back to its roots’.

The nature of *The Rapids* could be summarised in the distance travelled between an opening epigraph — Spalding Gray’s comment ‘Why does madness feel like insight?’ — and Sam’s closing words: ‘And you see this book here? I’m going to teach you to speak my language with this book.’ By which time, of course, Sam has already made an innovative and entertaining stab at doing so in his splintery, pop-culture way.

In *Cast Mates*, the jumpy energy of *The Rapids* has settled into a more conventional narrative embrace, though Sam’s zeal for resonant minor details and rabbit holes — where coincidences and side characters pull focus — makes for rich and surprising reading. Its thumbnail biographies are charged with his journalistic thoroughness and gossipy alertness, with an extra dash of witty vinegar to keep readers amused.

If a book on movie stars nonetheless seems like a U-turn after a debut memoir exploring the nature of mental illness, Sam’s side-stepping proves to be another deep dive into the nature of identity and the cultural forces that contribute to who we are. ‘A lot of people might not see much connection at all between *The Rapids* and *Cast Mates*,’ Sam says. ‘But it’s pretty clear to me.’

One such connection outside the book was Sam and me running into one another at a Randwick Ritz revival screening of Errol Flynn’s *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). I was there for purely nostalgic reasons: daytime TV fandom of Flynn from when I was a kid. Sam was there for professional interest. Would the sly verve and ironic charm of Flynn still hold up, we both wondered. It did. But it was then that Sam informed me of Flynn’s less-than-charming real life, from statutory rape charges and ugly stories from his wives, to his decline into cynical alcoholism.

It’s all mapped out in *Cast Mates* in the chapter ‘The Perfect Specimen: Errol Flynn’. Sam tells

me that with each actor, he set to work watching their films in chronological order. ‘Some of that was a real slog,’ he admits. ‘But it was interesting to see the actors age. Especially Flynn. You watch him *turn* and go to seed. He was living beyond recklessly. The affects of alcohol on his body were obvious. He goes dead inside.’

Sam had a more positive experience with Peter Finch, who’d won a posthumous Academy Award for Best Actor as the demented newsman shouting ‘I’m as mad as hell’ in *Network* (1976). *Cast Mates* seeks to redeem a few of Finch’s other forgotten roles that were overshadowed by that belated achievement, including his fine parts in Australian films like *Robbery Under Arms* (1957) and our mutual favourite, *The Shiralee* (1957). The story of a swagman on the road with his daughter, *The Shiralee* is described with affection by Sam as ‘such a great document of that generation of men. It reminded me of my grandfather and all the coal miners he worked with. Hard bitten, but well meaning.’

It’s this kind of feeling for the material that gives *Cast Mates* an emotional tone even when the stories have no overt links to Sam’s life. Along with covert autobiographical themes, the nature of film itself as a growing-up experience heartens Sam’s overall approach. Aged 37, he ribs me about his having missed the Flynn era on daytime TV, but talks openly of how important film was growing up on the Central Coast of NSW. ‘There was not a lot of cultural activity going on. I’d spend my weekends cycling down to the video store to get the “7 Weekly Videos for \$7” deal. All the James Bond movies, *The Wizard of Oz*, we’d spend the whole week watching them. Movies were the babysitter for a lot of kids back then.’

If a hero does emerge in Sam’s book, it is the late Yolngu actor David Gulpilil. Sam’s proud of having consulted with Jada Gulpilil to get a respectful portrait of his father completed. ‘When you think about Australian cinema and the 1970s New Wave, choosing an iconic figure to mark that shift really came down to Mel Gibson or David Gulpilil.’

‘These days star power is eroding.’

In Sam’s opinion, ‘Gulpilil is our most historically consequential actor of all time. We are only just starting to realise how big his legacy is. Hopefully down the track there will be a bigger biography of him. I said to Jada I was paying my respects to him, but it’s only one part, not the whole. Jada has his own book in him. The stories he told me about being with his father in America and riding on Jack Nicholson’s shoulders. I told him he should write a *Travels with My Father* kinda book.’

Sam, likewise, sees his appreciation of Nicole Kidman as a small corrective to ‘some of the misogyny you see in attitudes to her career and her success along the way. Comments like “The Ice Princess” and “Mrs Tom Cruise” that used to crop up. I can take or leave her [Academy Award-winning role] in *The Hours*, but it’s really impressive how she has used her cultural capital to make weird choices. I think she is at her best when super-heightened, there’s this uncanniness about her.’ Films like *To Die For* (1995), *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) and *Dogville* (2003) figure high in this judgement. ‘I really like *Birth* (2004) too. It got slammed a bit when it came out, but now it has been revalued as a great cult film.’

The afternoon light mutes things in Badde Manors Cafe, as if to remind us our own scene is coming to an end. Sam picks out personal favourites in what begins to sound like a weekend movie festival he could easily curate. Flynn is an odd one, iconic as a figure, but his movies no longer watched. *Captain Blood* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* are hard to beat, though Sam harbours a quirky taste for Flynn’s run of roles in American Westerns.

He loves Finch in *Robbery Under Arms* — which he describes as ‘an Australian Western in some ways’ — and the aforementioned *The Shiralee*. David Gulpilil’s laugh serves as a powerful end in *The Tracker* (2002); the chapter Sam wrote on him was, ‘in response to his surrounding circumstances and what he has survived through the film’. But Sam is also fond of Wim Wenders’ sci-fi road movie epic *Until The End of the World* (1991) in which Gulpilil featured. As for Kidman,

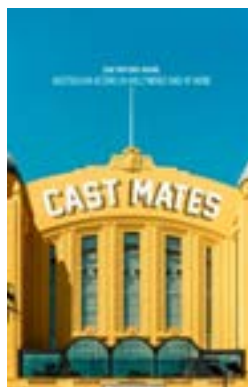
Sam is planning a screening of *To Die For* that might interest ‘a younger generation of film fans who have never seen her in that role’.

What all this means for Sam — and for where Australian identity is headed in film — is hard to pin down. Sam admits the book was ‘a way of making a map of my mind’.

‘I’m not a psychic. I don’t really know what will happen next. These days star power is eroding. I mean, is Chris Hemsworth famous, or is “Thor” famous? How much do we care that Margot Robbie is “Barbie”? It’s not bad that it matters less to us that they are Australian, when it might have once been a much bigger deal. I do think we are in a time where Australian identity is up for debate in a really positive as well as volatile way. So there is this remaking of who we are that is happening.

‘A lot of local stories have been overlooked because we got so star struck by Hollywood. The whole idea of a representative star is becoming something different. Maybe it will mean us looking closer to home for who we can be.’

Mark Mordue is the author of *Boy on Fire* — *The Young Nick Cave* (Harper Collins Australia).



Above left: Sam Twyford-Moore’s new book, *Cast Mates*
Above right: Poster of *The Shiralee*, 1957



Photo by Joy Lai

Ravani

Patrick White's Greek cake recipe

Semolina cakes soaked in aromatic syrup abound across the Middle East, North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. Originating during the Ottoman Empire, today this dessert has several names and even more variations depending on the geographic coordinates of where it is being baked.

One story suggests its name comes from the Ottoman poet Rewani, who had a penchant for bacchic and culinary themes. Across centuries and borderlines, recipes swap or omit ingredients, leaving many semolina syrup cake options: ravani or revani, basbousa, namoura, harissa and sambali, to name a few.

This cake was ubiquitous during my Greek upbringing. I wonder if Patrick White first encountered it when he visited Athens for the first time in 1945, or during subsequent visits to the country he held in such affection. Perhaps White's partner, Manoly Lascaris, preferred the Egyptian basbousa of his childhood in Alexandria or recalled the ravani of his youth in Athens?

During the 1980s, White sent this recipe to his good friend, author and arts patron Thea Waddell, to whom he dedicated the last work of fiction published in his lifetime, the short story collection *Three Uneasy Pieces* (1987). Presenting the recipe to the Library, Waddell recounted White's insistence that she use a 9-inch square baking tin for this cake.

The golden rule for syrup cakes is to either pour hot syrup over a cooled cake, or cooled syrup over a hot cake, and allow ample soaking time. Reading White's instructions, I'm mesmerised by one decadent anomaly in an otherwise straightforward recipe. Instead of combining the usual sugar, water, citrus peel, a cinnamon quill (or orange blossom or rose water if you're further east), White asks for three cups of marsala and three cups of sugar to be boiled together. I have occasionally seen recipes suggesting a few tablespoons of brandy be added to the syrup, but how did a whole bottle of Sicilian fortified wine find its way into this recipe?

Approved baking tin in tow, I commence, following White's recipe to the letter. I pause now and then to admire the flourishes of his written hand. Waddell's handwritten notes on the recipe suggest, 'Polenta may be the same as semolina.' She also writes on the reverse side, 'This does work.' I bypass her first suggestion but look forward to seeing whether her second is right.

White loved to cook, and he and Lascaris regularly hosted guests at their Centennial Park home. He wrote to a friend in 1979, 'I spend half my life at the stove, but fortunately enjoy cooking. It goes with writing.' Letters to friends over the decades are peppered with mentions of food and reviews of local cuisine during his travels. Food — its role in daily life and its endless potential for symbolism — flavours his writing.

It is a driving force for each character in his novel *The Eye of the Storm*, published in the same year he became the Nobel Prize Laureate in 1973.

Meanwhile, I press on, folding peaked egg whites into sunny yellow yolks and sifting semolina, carefully combining this trinity to create a pillowy mass ready to be transformed in the oven. I think about how many times women in my family before me have gone through similar motions, making a version of this cake for a family gathering, or in case guests drop in.

Except for this last bit: with absolute glee I glug the entire bottle of marsala into a saucepan with three cups of sugar.

I realise White hasn't included instructions on how to present or garnish his ravani. I remember watching my yiayia scoring diamond shapes across the cake, creating deep channels for the syrup, and follow suit. By now the cake has cooled — the hot liquid soaks in and quickly disappears, leaving only a deceptively heavy tin as proof of what lies beneath. You might serve each glistening slice with crushed pistachios, along with the non-negotiable demitasse of strong, thick Greek coffee and a glass of ice-cold water.

As for Thea Waddell's final note, and my initial incredulity about the marsala syrup, I now agree — it really does work.

Ravani — recipe as written by Patrick White

8 eggs

4 cups sugar

2 tbs lemon rind

Pinch of salt

2 tbs flour

1 cup fine semolina

2 tbs butter

3 cups marsala

Grease and flour a 23-cm (9-inch) square tin. Separate yolks of eggs, add 1 cup of the sugar and the lemon rind and beat for 7–8 minutes. Beat the whites with the salt until holding a peak and fold into the yolks. Add the sifted flour and the semolina, stir carefully. Then pour in the butter, which should be melted. Pour into the greased tin and cook in a moderate oven, about 175°, until delicately browned (about 1 hour). Put the marsala and the remaining 3 cups of sugar into a saucepan, bring to the boil slowly, stirring until the sugar has been dissolved. Boil rapidly for 15 minutes, uncovered. Pour the hot syrup over the ravani in the tin in which it was cooked and leave to cool.



WORDS Anne Hocking

A wicker basket of photos

When Henry Kidd Harpur arrived in Sydney in 1841, he could not have known that his logbook would be at the core of a remarkable collection donated to the Library 180 years later.

In September 1840, Henry Kidd Harpur and his younger brother, Josiah, sailed from Liverpool, England bound for Sydney, and a new life in the growing colony. The Harpur logbook documents the ship journey taken by so many hopeful immigrants at that time, and details their first days and weeks in Sydney, and then Bathurst, as Henry does the rounds of his contacts, looking for appropriate work for his younger brother and himself.

We then did not know what to do. I could scarcely contain from crying aloud in the open street when I found myself all alone and friendless in a far, far distant, strange country where everything and every person seemed to laugh me to scorn. I now wish most heartily that I had stayed at home ...
— Thursday March 11, 1841

Traces of the lives that the Harpur brothers established in Australia were passed down through the family to Henry Kidd Harpur's great-grandson, Kenneth Richard Harpur. Every family seems to have their keeper of family history and in 1973 Ken self-published a limited edition of 25 copies of *Harpur History*, a transcription of Henry Kidd Harpur's logbook, along with letter fragments and associated family genealogy.

The Library was given a copy at the time and, because of our remit to collect original material, tried to persuade Ken Harpur to donate the logbook itself. But it wasn't until 2019 that Ken approached the Library again and offered us the logbook, along with other research he had done on the immigrant ship *The Brothers* on which the brothers arrived.



The offer, which arrived by email, was allocated to me to process. I immediately recognised the opportunity to secure the logbook that is at the heart of the Harpur story. However, after several rounds of correspondence discussing details of the offer and how to get the material to the Library, the emails unexpectedly fell silent.

Then, in March 2022 I received a crackly voicemail message from a Gregg Harpur. Sadly, he told me, his uncle Ken had passed away, but while clearing his belongings, Gregg and wife Christine had come across my email

Left: Jane Henrietta Kidd Harpur and Susanna Matilda Australia Harpur with their nurse, possibly Jeremin (Sarah or Sally) Medley. Ambrotype, taken around 1860, by Thomas Glaister.

Right: Portrait of Henry Kidd Harpur, daguerreotype by George Goodman, probably taken around 1845, which makes it one of Australia's oldest photographs



correspondence and wondered if the Library was still interested in the Harpur material.

We arranged for them to bring it in for assessment. Here, at last, were the logbooks written by Henry Kidd Harpur on his long journey to Australia with Josiah. Here were the worn letters between the brothers and their family in Ireland. And here were many print photographs of the descendants of the Harpur brothers. All were perfect for the Library's collection given they document two men making new lives in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century.

But the real surprise came when the Harpurs brought my attention to a small wicker storage basket. 'We're not sure about these,' they said. 'Let us know if you're interested in them as well.'

There, sitting in the basket, was a collection of ten ambrotype and daguerreotype photos in their distinctive red leather cases. At first glance, I could see that they were in remarkable condition. Only after further research would their full significance be revealed.

The collection of photos included several of family members in Ireland, either brought with the Harpurs as mementos or sent to them in Australia. Six of the images, however, were taken in Australia and included an individual portrait of Henry Kidd Harpur and a portrait of his wife Henrietta Elizabeth Harpur (nee Walker).

Sarah Jane May (nee Harpur) with four of her children. Most likely taken in Ireland in the early 1850s, photographer unknown

Another particularly intriguing photo included the note 'Old Sally (nurse) with Aunt Eliza's children Janie & Susie'. It was an astonishing group portrait of an Aboriginal woman clearly in service to the family and dressed in contemporary Western clothing, with two young girls and their dog.

Using the family tree from Ken Harpur's book and Ancestry.com, the children were quickly identified as Josiah and Eliza Harpur's daughters Jane Henrietta Kidd Harpur (1857-1875) and Susanna Matilda Australia Harpur (1859-1873). Therefore the photo was probably taken around 1860.

A stamp on the mount of this beautiful ambrotype photo confirms that it was taken by renowned early photographer Thomas Glaister (1824-1904). But who was the First Nations woman, 'Old Sally', in her extraordinary dress, posing for this formal, yet somehow intimate, photo with her two charges?

Initial research suggests that she may be Jeremin (Sarah or Sally) Medley (1826-1892), mother of Aboriginal son, John Rowland Harpur. Documents tell us that John Rowland was adopted by Henry Kidd Harpur and baptised with his daughter Eliza Cordelia in 1854. John Rowland's mother, Sarah or Sally, was presumably in service to Henry Kidd Harpur's brother, Josiah Harpur, at that time.

The Harpur brothers' possible connection with the local First Nations people is reinforced by their respective marriages to sisters Henrietta Elizabeth and Eliza Caroline Walker, both daughters of



William Walker (1799–1855). Walker was known as ‘the first missionary of Blacktown’ and was appointed by the Wesleyan Mission Society ‘to the black natives of Australia’. Sarah or Sally’s life was, undoubtedly, complex. To learn more about her will require a good deal of further research.

The small portrait photograph of Henry Kidd Harpur, a daguerreotype, turned out to be of particular interest. We uncovered evidence that it was taken by the very first professional photographer in Australia, George Goodman.

The Harpur portrait is held in a similar flip-top case to the famous portrait of Dr William Bland taken by Goodman in early 1845, which is the earliest-known surviving photo in Australia. (This photo will be displayed in the Library’s new Photography Gallery.)

When my colleagues in Collection Care inspected the back of the glass plate of the Harpur image, they found that it was placed in a Thomas Wharton ‘pan’. These pans had been used exclusively by renowned daguerreotype photographer Richard Beard in London. Goodman purchased his licence ‘to take photographs within specified British colonies’ from Beard before he travelled to Australia. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that Goodman used the Wharton pans for his early Australian photographs.

Newspaper articles of the time report that Goodman spent time in Bathurst in early 1845,

and because the Harpur letters provide evidence that Henry Kidd Harpur was living in Bathurst in 1845, this small portrait photograph of Harpur may well be contemporary with the set of Lawson family photos known to have been taken by Goodman on his way back from Bathurst in May 1845.

Henry Kidd Harpur and young Josiah Harpur did find work and indeed went on to establish themselves as respected businessmen in Sydney. Henry Kidd worked in stores in Sydney and Bathurst before he joined his brother Josiah in a wholesale wine and spirit business in George Street, Sydney. He was gazetted as a magistrate in Wollombi in 1859 and then the family moved to Muswellbrook before returning to Sydney to set up another retail business at 426 George Street, Sydney.

Josiah Harpur spent time at the Bendigo and Turon goldfields before moving back to Sydney to work with his brother in their business. He assisted in founding the *Empire* newspaper and was an early member of the Sydney Stock Exchange.

Josiah, his wife and several children lived (and died) in Brisbane House, on Glebe Point Road. In the way that our own lives can overlap with the people in the archives we collect, it was in this building, over 100 years later, that I rented a flat just before commencing work at the Library.

Anne Hocking is a librarian in Collection, Acquisition & Curation.

Portrait of Henry Kidd Harpur’s wife, Henrietta Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Reverend Walker (1799–1855). Born in NSW, she was 25 when she married Henry in 1849. Date and photographer unknown



Rara Avis the impossible black swan

Black Swan,
late 18th century,
artist unknown

WORDS Margot Riley

A new addition to the Library's world-class collection of Australian ornithological drawings.

Up close, the exquisitely fine rendering of this rare eighteenth-century watercolour drawing is breathtaking. The figure of a black swan sits proudly erect, afloat, its raised wings revealing white flight feathers. Depicted in profile like a heraldic symbol, it seems to embody the unknown artist's wonder for this elegant animal, then considered the most exotic of all Australian birds. Tantalising traces of an inscription on the back of this painting suggest there may be more to its story than first meets the eye.

The idea of a black — as opposed to a white — swan had captivated popular imagination since Roman times. The black swan, or '*rara avis*', became a metaphor for something that didn't exist — until the myth-busting discovery in the 1600s of this 'impossible bird' by Dutch mariners, off the coastline of what would become Western Australia.

Turning this drawing over reveals a note, handwritten in French. Its message is fragmented because the picture was trimmed for framing at some point, but several names jump out: Gordon, Weber, Cok, Clerk, Goure — the misspellings cannot mask their significance. The text states that the swan picture was a gift to the anonymous inscriber by 'Madame Gordon, wife of the Commandant of the garrison at Cape Town'. Dutch soldier, naturalist and explorer Colonel Robert Gordon (1743–1795) was indeed in charge of the garrison there from 1780 to 1795. Swiss-born Susanna Nicolet (1748–1831) is known to have sailed from Amsterdam on the *De Parel*, arriving at Cape Town in 1780, where she and Gordon were married two weeks later.

The inscriber claims that the drawing is the work of John Webber, an English artist on Cook's third Pacific voyage, and recalls dining with other members of that expedition. But here the inscriber's recollections become problematic; Captains Cook, Clerke and Gore did call at Cape Town on their way to the Pacific in late 1776. However, Cook and Clerke had died by the time of the expedition's return in early 1780. The author does credit, correctly, Gordon's international reputation as an important collector of natural history specimens and drawings, gathered during his own expeditions and others'.

The Gordons also met and befriended Governor Arthur Phillip and other officers of the First Fleet, including David Collins, John Hunter, Philip Gidley King and surgeon John White, during their stopover at the Cape, in 1787.

The First Fleet's subsequent arrival at Port Jackson ensured more European encounters with black swans. Hunter mentions the birds being 'shot for the pot' in January 1788, commenting that 'the Black Swan ... is about the size of the Common White Swan at Home & is good Meat'. Governor Phillip recorded his first sighting of this 'very noble bird' on 15 April, while exploring a saltwater lagoon near Manly with enthusiastic natural history collector John White, who remarks on the bird's resemblance to that '*rara avis* of the ancients — a black swan'. The birds took to the air when several shots were fired and White observed that 'their flight gave us an opportunity of seeing some white feathers, which terminated the tip of each wing; in every other part they were perfectly black'.

The excitement Europeans felt for Australia's new and exotic natural world sparked a demand for visual evidence. Natural history drawings, living birds and skins were despatched from the fledgling colony to a fascinated Europe, prompting a frenzy of exchange and copying. It seems likely that on subsequent visits to the Cape, in 1789 and 1791, Captain John Hunter and midshipman artist George Raper gave Colonel Gordon the drawings of Australian birds and an eastern grey kangaroo that survive in his collection. Perhaps the swan drawing was chivalrous gift to their charming hostess?

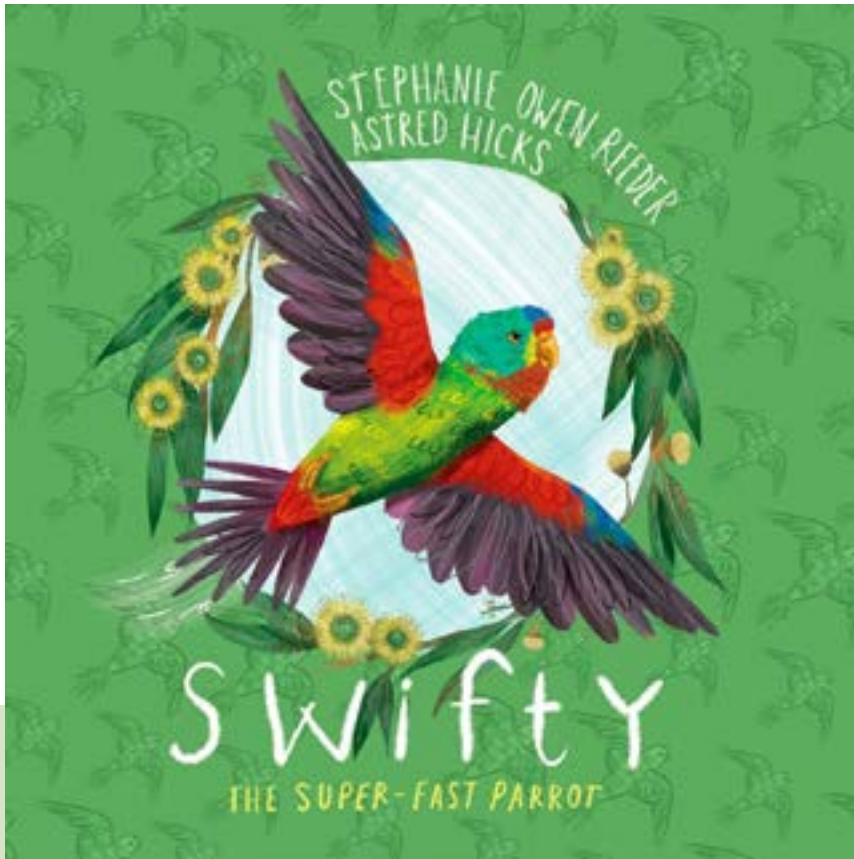
Following the commandant's death by suicide in 1795, Mrs Gordon returned to Europe with their sons, travelling first to London, where she hoped to publish or sell her husband's journals and drawings. The Gordon collection of over 450 drawings was eventually purchased by the Duchess of Sutherland and remained with her descendants until its sale to the Rijksmuseum in 1914.

The whereabouts of the swan picture during the intervening two centuries — before it resurfaced on the art market last year — remains unknown.

Margot Riley is a Curator in Collection Acquisition and Curation.

A flock of book covers

A book designer — and self-described ‘bird nerd’ — reflects on birds that have taken wing in her work.



They have been around for about a week now. I can barely describe how much I look forward to their annual visits to our inner-city suburb — a magnificent patrol of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos that wheel over terrace houses and wail into our backyard trees.

While I sit drawing at my computer, I can see them through the window. Some enjoy the birdbath, others stand guard in the branches overhead, cracking seed pods or talking in their quiet pepper-grinder voices. During winter, Sydney is a stopover for other avian travellers as well. There have been reports of Swift Parrots on the fringes of the city — this weekend I might take the kiddo to see if we can spot any. Right now, I am supposed to be working on a brief but instead I am watching the cockatoos, my mind drifting to the times when I have used birds in book cover illustrations. For birds invite metaphor and their winged shapes create space for emotions.

With *Swiftly*, there were several firsts: The first children’s picture book I’d been invited to both design and illustrate. The first time I was assigned an ornithologist as an adviser. The first cover where I’ve used a bird to literally illustrate the story.

Usually, my covers are more conceptual, though *Swiftly* is not without symbolism. Stephanie Owen Reider tells an imagined story of a Swift Parrot’s precarious travels so as to introduce young readers to the realities of species extinction. Showing Swiftly soaring away from her circular tree hole, my cover offers an invitation to readers to follow on her journey from Tasmania to the mainland and back again. That circle is a repeated motif throughout, a ‘designerly’ chain that guides Swiftly round her long route and creates a subtle visual rhythm for the

CSIRO Publishing



Swiftly savorts around a fluttering flag.

She zizzes across a sparkling harbour faster and faster she flies.

WORDS Astred Hicks, with Megan Hicks

reader. It's also a simplistic device that represents a view through binoculars, suggesting that while Swift Parrots may be hard to spot with the naked eye, in close-up their lives are rich and beautiful.

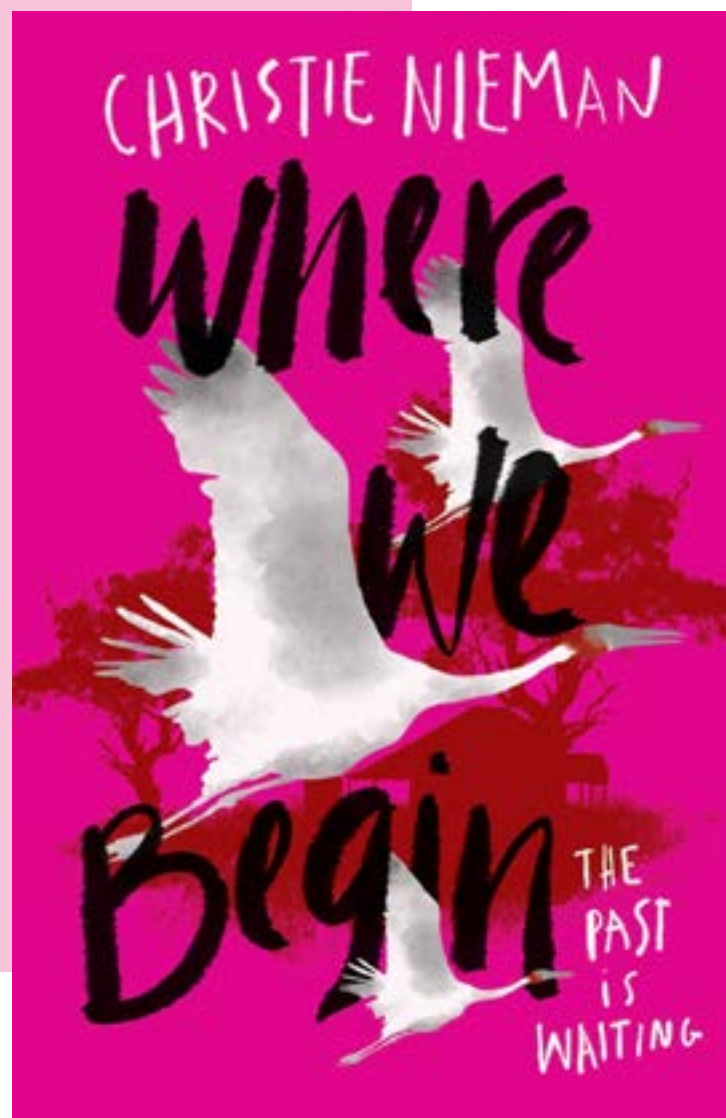
Illustrating *and* designing a book is intense, as I respond to the author's manuscript and interpret it visually. I must plot out the layout for each page and take into account type placement, reading rhythm and visual flow. Will it be sufficiently

dynamic to engage a young reader? And for this type of book, the illustrations must accurately represent their real-life inspiration without anthropomorphism — no winking or grinning at the audience for this parrot. Even with my personal interest in birds, I found the character development a little daunting, so was happy when CSIRO Publishing assigned me my own ornithologist to advise on the preliminary sketches.

Every cover design that reaches publication leaves a trail of concepts in its wake. *Where We Begin* took a particularly twisting journey to arrive at its final version. When I took the brief, the publisher (commissioning editor) and I talked at length about the author's skill at weaving the landscape into her stories. Christie Nieman's distressing narrative of a girl coming to grips with family secrets unfolds in the dark Australian countryside, but my initial concepts, with rolling hills and foreboding country houses weren't capturing the gravity of the story; nor were they right for the young adult audience.

So I stopped, scrapped everything I'd done and took a few days to read back through the manuscript. This was risky because time is always limited, but both my publisher and I had faith that I would find the right direction. That's the thing with book design — the best covers are the result of communication and trust between designer and publisher. On my re-read I was struck by a passage that mentioned Brolgas and these birds became the inspiration for the cover, expressing the story's essence.

Three Brolgas take flight, three women take flight, desperate to break free of intergenerational trauma. The beating of wings is the frantic beating of the women's hearts. The clash of pink and red forms the story's intense and violent setting. As with many of my covers, I tried for a gut reaction through a combination of beauty and meaning, where the connection between the book's contents and its cover may not be immediately obvious. I choose to believe that if a reader is moved by a story, they will return to the cover with new eyes.





Walker Books Australia

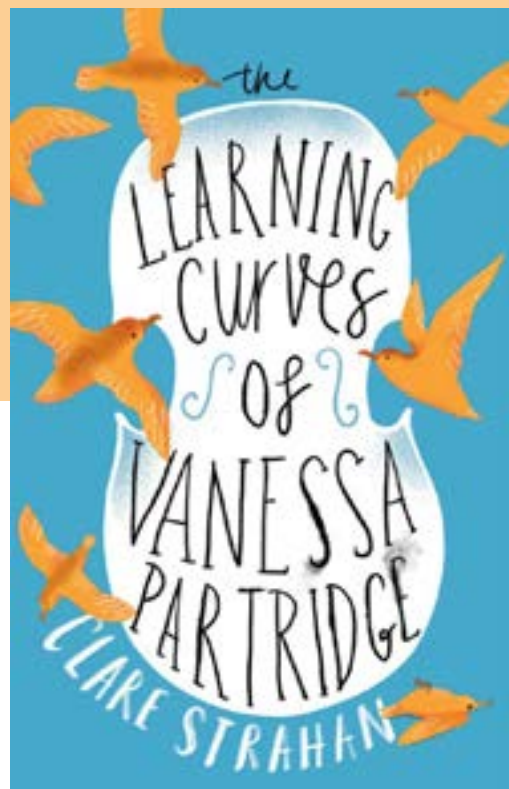
I love working on books for young people because they are so design savvy. In their everyday lives they are constantly exposed to creativity, from beautiful picture books for toddlers to ever-evolving visual trends in young adult media. So when I'm designing and illustrating books for them, my covers don't have to be literal because young people can make their own interpretations. They like playfulness and undercurrents, subtle suggestions and hidden meanings and, above all, beautiful things. Knowing all this, I gave a small bird an important role in the cover imagery for *Evie and Rhino*. Neridah McMullin, whose story is about sorrow, separation and mended hearts, was inspired by an unusual event on the southern coast of Australia in 1891. On my cover, Evie and Rhino, each suffering personal loss, gaze longingly at each other. Below them a storm-tossed ship symbolises their grief and pain and evokes elements of the story. The Victorian-style floral frame is a broken heart that both entwines them and keeps them apart. A small Orange-bellied Parrot flies across the gap, giving hope that the garland – and thus Evie and Rhino – might once again be drawn together.

I often design books that go on to win awards and while I am happy for everyone concerned, prize stickers exasperate cover designers. The Children's Book Council Award shortlist medal awarded to *Evie and Rhino*, for example, partially obscures that significant little parrot. In the worst – or best – cases, covers have to be redesigned to accommodate the array of medals a book has won.

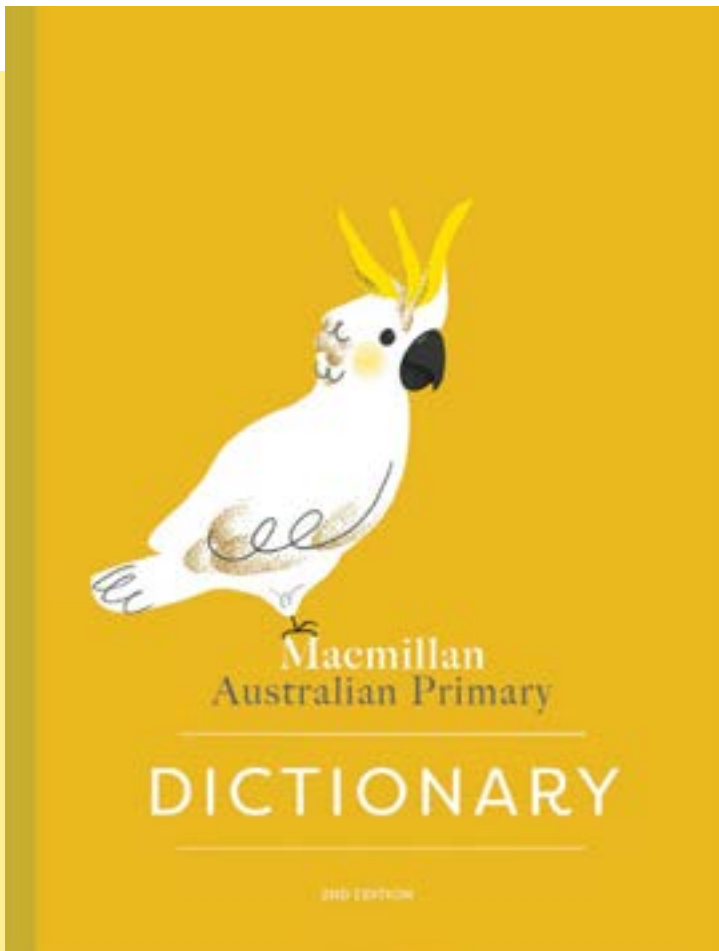
I see my role as a go-between, setting the mood and pairing audience with author by creating a visual connection that invites the reader to meet the writer and engage in a conversation. While I often rely on metaphor, with *The Learning Curves of Vanessa Partridge* I tried using both the literal and the symbolic to strengthen that reader–author connection. What a complex cover it turned out to be, despite its apparent simplicity.

Clare Strahan has written a lovely coming-of-age novel where sensible teenager Van learns about sex, love and independence during one summer holiday at the beach. Her emerging womanly figure is suggested by the sensual curves of her cello. The busy shearwaters, bathed in the golden light of sunset, haphazardly fly this way and that, mimicking Van's confused feelings as she deals with new and disturbing experiences. But the shearwaters also represent freedom and strength, which in this case are the signs of Van's growing maturity. The comically dead bird with an X for an eye also hints at the dark humour within the book.

I would have explained all this to the publisher during the course of developing the final artwork for the cover. I am initially required to create three or four very different visual concepts. It can be a long process as I examine the story from different aspects. Being able to explain your work is a large part of design, so when I present my concepts to the publisher, I also send a rationale for each one. This is the beginning of a lengthy series of back-and-forth discussions with the publisher who understands the creative process, knowing when to allow me to take risks and when to provide gentle guidance.



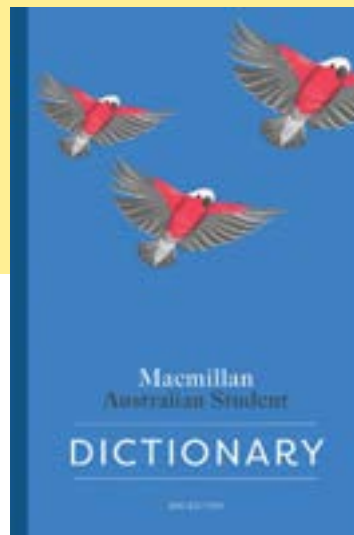
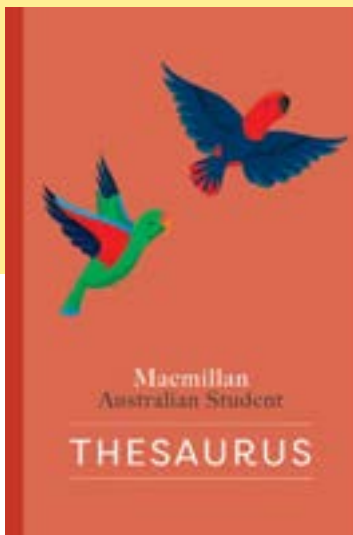
Allen & Unwin



For the Second Edition of their six Australian dictionaries, Macmillan asked me to create concepts for a cover theme that would unify the series. A pinnacle brief in my design career: dictionaries! The prospect was both exciting and challenging. I spent many hours researching and thinking about how to create a modern design that appealed to both young children and adults. In the end, it all came down to birds.

Songbirds and parrots are highly intelligent and learn their calls from others of their species. It's now known that both groups originated in Australia and took their vocalisation skills around the world. It seemed to me that this avian evolutionary process could be likened to the way human language has evolved and spread. Playing with these ideas of birds and language, I decided that a range of native parrots, with their noisy garrulousness and mimicry of human speech, made a perfect match for an Australian set of word books. As the age of each volume's intended readership increased, my illustrations became more detailed to symbolise a broadening vocabulary.

I chose the cheeky and inquisitive Sulphur-crested Cockatoo for primary schoolers. Always learning, always exploring, this bird represents the start of a child's linguistic journey. On the Student Dictionary, a flock of smart and sociable Galahs takes flight, just as older students take on more independent learning. The extreme sexual dimorphism of Eclectus Parrots reminded me of synonyms, so a pair decorates the Student Thesaurus. There are three other volumes in the series yet to be published – the Macmillan Dictionary, Pocket Dictionary and Pocket Thesaurus. Perhaps you'd like to guess which parrot species I've drawn for them



Pan Macmillan Australia



Astred Hicks is an award-winning Australian book designer, bestselling illustrator and author. She is also a self-proclaimed bird nerd.

Megan Hicks researches urban culture and the informal messages people write in public places. Like Astred, she is always on the lookout for birds, but prefers to consider herself a word nerd.

WORDS Tony Duke

Charles Perkins on the bus after a visit to Tranby, Glebe

Not a week goes by that someone doesn't reach out to us at Tranby asking if we have seen, or know about, this photo. It is iconic, both for being an exceptional photograph and for the story it tells of the man in it, Charles Perkins, and his commitment to his community. Charles was on his way home after attending Tranby to mentor young Aboriginal men from rural NSW, and the photo speaks of Tranby as a place of Aboriginal-led learning and exchange.

Tranby Aboriginal Co-operative Limited (originally called Tranby Co-operative for Aborigines Limited) has been serving the cultural and educational needs and aspirations of First Nations people and communities since it was established in 1957. It has hosted and supported many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to further their education and strengthen their connection with and service to their communities.

This photo was taken around 1965, a time of intense activism in Australia in the lead-up to the 1967 referendum. Tranby was a meeting place, a hub in the national network of community activism. The primary focus for Tranby has always been — and still is — education that is designed, developed and delivered in a culturally appropriate and engaged

way. For Tranby, learning on the job, learning in communities and learning through activism are all just as important as learning in the classroom.

This photo symbolises the ongoing journey for justice that First Nations people have endured since colonisation by the British. It was taken around the time of the 1964–1965 Freedom Ride in NSW that Charles Perkins was instrumental in organising. Today, as we discuss and debate recognition of First Nations people in the Australian Constitution, we each need to deeply reflect, as Charles is doing here, on our way forward for a just and proper settlement with all First Nations people across Australia.

Perhaps we should all hop on the next bus and visit Tranby in Glebe, offer ourselves in service, and take the time to sit quietly and reflect, away from political point-scoring and accusations. We should make the time to accept our singular and collective responsibility as participants in a democratic society and seek to deliver the just and proper recognition and settlement — long overdue — for and with First Nations Australia.

Tranby invites and welcomes you.

Tony Duke is the Manager for BLACKBOOKS, a branch of Tranby Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd. www.tranby.edu.au



Charles Perkins on his way to University, Sydney Area. 1965 1/3

Robert McFarlane

Charles Perkins on the bus home after a visit to Tranby in Glebe, around 1965. Photo by Robert McFarlane, who sadly died in July 2023

YOU SAY YOU WANT A REFERENDUM

Each referendum produces lots of printed material which, of course, the Library collects.

Right: 1951 poster against the proposal to ratify a statute dissolving the Communist Party of Australia that had been struck down by the High Court
Below: Government 'Yes or No?' pamphlet for the 1988 referendum about parliamentary terms, fair elections and recognising local government in the Constitution. None of the proposals was carried

Even in the digital age, there is no end to the printed material in our lives. Pamphlets, posters, booklets, beer mats, badges, menus, matchbooks (maybe not so many of those anymore) and stickers. Over decades, the Library has collected an immense assortment of these kinds of ephemera from elections, plebiscites and both state and federal referenda. As with each referendum before it, the upcoming Voice referendum will produce lots of material making the case for Yes or No.

Much of this ephemera has been created to persuade, inform, or to promote ideas. Advertising is a central element of any referendum. Media philosopher Marshall McLuhan called advertising the greatest artform of the 20th century — many items in the Library's vast collection support his case. A good example is the loud red poster screen-printed for the 1951 referendum (about powers to deal with communists and communism). It exclaims, 'Don't be taken in by parrot-cries! Vote No'.



Even printed material without artistic merit often has historical significance, as with the plain and straightforward 'YES or NO?' government pamphlet to inform voters ahead of the four questions posed at the referendum held in 1988. Typically, none of the proposals put to voters was carried.

Before the advent of online and social media, the most widely dispersed form of advertising was printed material. In 1999, the government spent approximately \$48 million on Yes, No and Neutral campaign advertising for the Republic referendum. With the Voice referendum, each household will receive a booklet outlining the case. Through the enormous audience reach of printed ephemera, we can see the mechanics of persuasion from both



A scare campaign from the No side in the 1984 referendum



WORDS Andrew Trigg



sides of referendum campaigns, expressed in an often imaginative and visually striking format.

Short-lived but eminently collectable, ephemera convey the tastes and values of the times. Its functional quotidian format condenses ideas and information. So, it is well suited for referendums where voters are being asked specific and often complex questions. This complexity is perhaps one reason why only 8 of 44 referendums have ever been successful.

Referendum ephemera range from informative but bland official government literature, outlining both Yes and No campaigns, to outlandish black-and-white art that employs irony to lampoon the figures associated with either campaign. One example from the 1951 referendum splashes, 'We don't want fascism here!'

Thirty-three years later, alarmist tracts set beside photographs of Stalin and Hitler warned against Australia becoming a republic: 'it is only a matter of time before a Dictatorship emerges'. This was in response to the 1984 referendum on the interchange of powers; had it passed it

would have allowed the Commonwealth and the states to voluntarily refer powers to each other. In the same item, voters were presented with a 'Republican Hall of Fame' alongside profile shots of infamous potentates and undesirables.

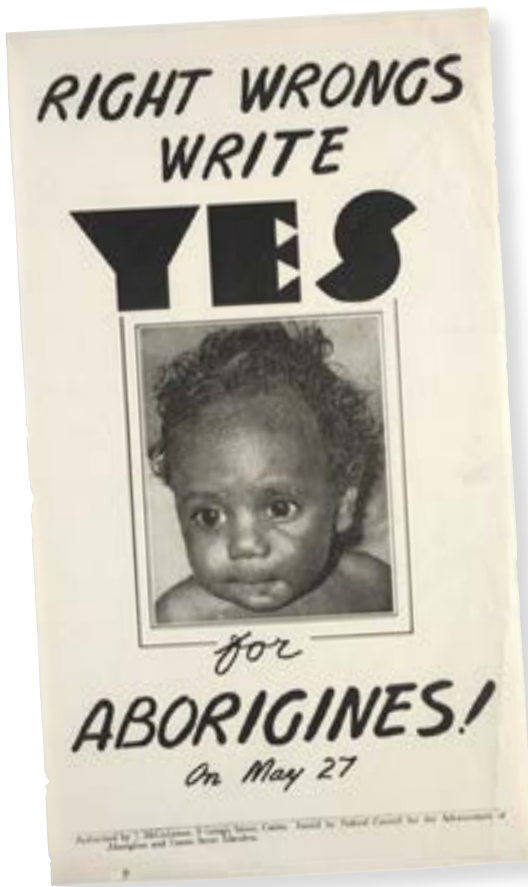
Referendums are a form of direct democracy where the government asks for voters' views on a specific question. As well as being necessary to alter the Australian Constitution (and therefore the way our federal system of government works), they can afford a popular source of legitimacy for governments on contentious issues and can even take on a nation-building role when it is a question of social justice. The 1967 referendum to include Indigenous Australians in population counts demonstrated how Australia was able to move positively and with wholehearted agreement — the majority (90.77%) of voters said Yes. Fifty-six years later, Australia is again being given the opportunity



Top: 'Dictator Bob' from the 1951 referendum No campaign

Bottom: A badge from the Yes case in the 1999 referendum





to move towards greater constitutional recognition of First Nations peoples.

Various Yes and No campaigns have appealed to patriotic spirit, sometimes using well-worn symbols of hard-line nationalism that warn of the dangers of not voting one way or the other. In response to the 1984 referendum mentioned above, an ephemeral publication 'Wake Up!' was circulated by far-right group

Council for a Free Australia, who rally against the 'erosion of our traditional way of life', beneath a proudly flying Southern Cross flag. The Australian flag often features as the embodiment of national identity. Campaigns for No often conflate various issues, for example, invoking the flag in the 1999 referendum. The question, about whether the nation should be a republic rather than a constitutional monarchy, had nothing to do with the flag.

According to constitutional lawyer Professor George Williams, the Constitution defines the political selfhood of the people. From this vantage point, constitutional politics is different to ordinary politics, reflected in the printed

ephemera associated with it. Like election ephemera, referendum ephemera is passionate and persuasive, but is often wordier and more ruminative too, reflecting the complexities of unfamiliar and sometimes technical proposals. For example, during the well-known 1967 referendum – when people voted overwhelmingly to allow the Commonwealth to make laws for Indigenous people – there was a second question that proposed removing a requirement expressed by section 24 of the Constitution that there be a nexus between the sizes of the House of Representatives and the Senate. It failed.

In printed material, we see voters repeatedly confronted with the potentially horrific effects of allowing the government to amend the Constitution. War, dictatorships, a fascist police state, forced labour, martial law, or 'Hitler-style powers' are – allegedly – risked by those who vote Yes. These sentiments are reinforced through depictions of Nazi swastikas and 'fat cat' Prime Minister Robert Menzies copping a boot up the backside as we see in an item related to the contentious 1951 referendum. A cartoon caricatures 'Dictator Bob' replete with Nazi swastika armband, American dollar-sign medal, and a rap sheet enumerating the litany of his missteps relating to the Nazis, conscription and economic policy during the Depression.

Much of the ephemera claims to reveal the hidden meaning of a proposal, revealing possible threats to freedom, using words such as the 'dangerous fraud behind those innocent words' that will deprive voters of their 'birthright of



Above: The 1967 referendum had bipartisan support

Right: A right-wing publication urges a No vote during the 1984 referendum

IN PRINTED MATERIAL, WE SEE VOTERS REPEATEDLY CONFRONTED WITH THE POTENTIALLY HORRIFIC EFFECTS OF ALLOWING THE GOVERNMENT TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION.

freedom'. Conversely, the repeated use of a badge or badge motif denotes public pride in one's stance on the matter and indicates that the decision is one which should be made definitively.

A badge produced for the 1999 referendum on the republic is unequivocal: 'No Republic No Worries'. Another item from the No campaign uses the immediacy of a cartoon format to neatly summarise its argument. The angry-looking republican mechanic is attempting to hoodwink honest Joe Blow. These kinds of portrayals of upright, mainly white, men and women fulfilling their roles as workers, soldiers, homemakers and child bearers evince an idealised Australian citizen. Simplicity of message is always key in ephemera, which is perfectly suited for an 'If it aint broke don't fix it' message.

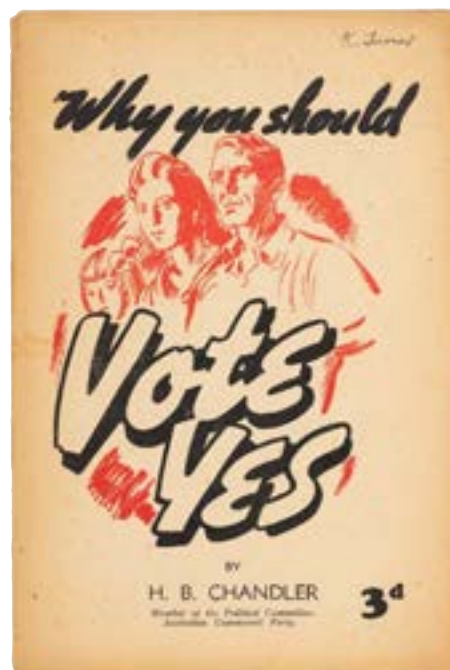
No constitutional referendum has ever succeeded without bipartisan support. Often it is the shadow of political agendas that seeks to confuse voters, or to at least sow uncertainty. The most successful Yes campaigns have built on a fundamental change in national attitudes. In 1967 there wasn't an official No campaign. Other times, No campaigns have relied on fearmongering, on voters not understanding fully the proposal, and on voters' inherent suspicion of politicians. A newspaper format perhaps lent authenticity to the declaration

'1988: A Year of Danger', when four questions were put to voters on parliamentary terms, fair elections, local government, and rights and freedoms. The 'hidden agenda' argument commonly appears in ephemera created by No campaigns and we see it being replicated in 2023.

Referendum ephemera captures the spirit of the moment and, like all material in the Library's collections, is a record of human activity and the ways in which history is made. Libraries continue to collect digital ephemera: tweets, marketing emails, and website pop-ups and banners. Advertising formats in the 21st century may have changed, but the contents and language are surprisingly similar to what has gone before.

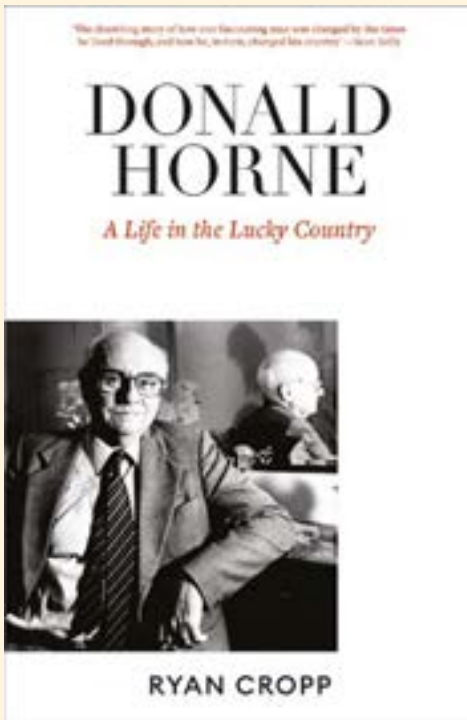


Andrew Trigg is a Specialist Librarian in Collection Acquisition and Curation.



Top: A badge designed to produce uncertainty

Left: Cover of pamphlet produced by the Communist Party explaining the Yes case for the 1946 referendum



Donald Horne: A Life in the Lucky Country

by Ryan Cropp

La Trobe University Press

I didn't know much about Donald Horne when I began to review this biography, except that the Library has 118 boxes of his papers, and the Fellows Room here is named after him and his wife Myfanwy. It contains 4000 of his books, and the desk and armchair he sat on when he began to write his most famous book, *The Lucky Country*. In 2018, Ryan Cropp began writing this book as one of the Fellows in this room.

As he explains, 'Horne was not easily typed. He was at times a journalist, a magazine editor, an academic and an arts bureaucrat, though none of these professional labels ever really served as an adequate description of the role he played in Australian public life.'

Cropp traces his subject's intellectual and political journey, 'starting out somewhere on the political right and ending up as an icon of a new political centre-left'. This transformation and search for what he — and the nation — stood for, is at the heart of the book.

The biography examines Horne's formative influences, starting with his idyllic childhood as an only child in a big extended family in Muswellbrook, to his disillusionment when the family moved to Sydney and his father suffered a breakdown. He entered Sydney University in 1939, and became editor of *Honi Soit*, fighting against censorship. The biography recounts his disappointing stint in the army



I'd Rather Not

by Robert Skinner

Black Inc.

'A good party feels like a rich life, which is presumably why we throw them.' Although — as Robert Skinner explains in *I'd Rather Not* — in between the good parties are absurdities, disappointments and unfortunate interactions with camels. In a series of extended anecdotes, Skinner takes readers on a

jaunty ride that is fabulous, funny and occasionally poignant.

There is something familiar about the ridiculous events Skinner shares, and a comforting reassurance that he survives his various (mis)adventures. After all, he tells us: 'If Plan A doesn't work, there's always Plan B, and if that doesn't work, well, there's plenty of letters in the alphabet.' In between the many things that go wrong, there is a quiet determination to try and make some sense of life and love and the world, to make a difference. Skinner's work is not just memoir, it's companionship.

Rachel Franks



We Run Tomorrow

by Nat Amore

Penguin

'The screensavers stand together as one. Ready to fight to the death. Fight for their future. Because the adults may run things today but we run tomorrow!'

Sticks, Maki, Jed and Tommy make up the Lockett Squad. Hailing from Lockett Street, the foursome is united by a shared love of action superheroes, the Screen

Savers. When things get tough, Stick's narration turns to catchy graphic novel captions, blurring the line between the experiences of the Lockett Squad and the heroic actions of the Screen Savers.

Just as Sticks, Maki, Jed and Tommy deeply relate to the Screen Savers, readers will recognise themselves in the Lockett Squad — everyday kids facing life's challenges together. Heartwarming and hilarious, *We Run Tomorrow* seamlessly blends Nat Amore's narrative with the sequence of graphic novel snippets by Mike Barry, giving middle-grade readers an entertaining and empowering reading experience.

Susan Brawn

and his cadetship in the Department of Foreign Affairs, moving then to his short-lived ‘anglophile stage’. The book covers, entertainingly, his return to Sydney from the English countryside to become an executive at Frank Packer’s Australian Consolidated Press, aged only 32. He became a successful editor of a tabloid magazine but hankered to be a serious journalist. At ACP he launched intellectual weekly *The Observer* in 1958, and later set about ‘bringing the *Bulletin* into the modern world’ when he became its editor in 1960.

Cropp writes about ‘[Horne’s] relentless output over his two-decade-long journalistic career, his advertising copy, speeches, tabloid dross, and two unpublished novels, his life experiences and editing three intellectual magazines’. It all led to the 1964 publication of a book that coined a phrase that entered the Australian vernacular. The chapter about *The Lucky Country* was the most

satisfying for me as a reader. The reason the book had populist appeal, Cropp explains, was because Horne ‘blamed the leaders for the nation’s faults, not the people who elected them’.

Horne was, apparently, an intimidating boss – every second journalist in Sydney claimed they had tipped a beer over his head. He was, however, a mentor to younger journalists, ‘one of the great old-school Sydney lunchers’ and a prodigious drinker and chain smoker – the story of how he gave up cold turkey before an operation was harrowing!

Cropp gives great credit to Horne’s wife, Myfanwy, who set aside her own journalistic career to become his first reader and most assiduous editor, as well as looking after domestic arrangements. Without her, Horne’s incredible literary output might not have happened.

I would recommend reading this book as a way of understanding public

and intellectual debates in Australia from the postwar period until the early 1990s, and to understand the man behind one of the most popular non-fiction books in Australia, a book that has never been out of print. As Cropp writes, many of the dilemmas Horne articulated in 1964, particularly about identity, nationhood and Australia’s relationships with Britain, Asia and the United States, remain key political predicaments. Cropp points out that the job of a public intellectual is to translate and explain the cultural and political temperature for the rest of us. Horne had a natural ability to ‘capture more in a single sentence or phrase than others could in entire books’.

The book also has a select bibliography, comprehensive notes and an excellent index, which we librarians love.

Kathi Spinks



Thirst for Salt

by Madelaine Lucas

Allen & Unwin

The narrator of Australian writer Madelaine Lucas’ debut *Thirst for Salt* goes unnamed throughout the novel. Instead, we come to know her as *sharkbait* – a nickname given to her by Jude, a man she meets in the ocean while on holiday with her mother. A local in the coastal town, and 20 years her senior, Jude

and the narrator fall in love. In Jude, the narrator imagines a life she has always wanted, far different from her own which was shaped by her mother’s impulsivity and her father’s absence.

Lucas writes with a steady and assured hand, exploring the complexities of romantic, platonic and familial relationships while avoiding reductive conclusions. *Thirst for Salt* considers why it is that so often we contemplate – or desire – the lives we might have lived, or hope to live in the future. Perhaps Lucas, like her protagonist, also feels the pull towards these ‘other lives’, and explores the realm of possibilities through her writing.

Daniela Baldry



West Girls

by Laura Elizabeth Woollett

Scribe

West Girls digs down into the strata of Western Australian society, unearthing complexities of class and social mobility through the lives of aspiring model Luna, her high-school friend CB and other characters on elliptical orbits to the nexus of the story. Indeed, peripheral characters often allow Woollett’s sharpest insights into how

wealth and privilege form an individual’s aspirations and worldview.

Her protagonists are, on the whole, flawed individuals, often subservient to their desires, for which they suffer. But it’s also what makes *West Girls* such a great book – despite their shortcomings, you cannot help but empathise with their plight.

At times you wonder how the seemingly disjointed brushstrokes of the narrative will form a cohesive story. Arriving at the end, as if gazing into Indra’s mythical net of diamonds for the first time, you appreciate the mastery of the author’s craft. A compelling read by an author with a keen understanding of contemporary Australian culture.

Ross Balharrie

20 questions

- 1 Name the 1980s pop group that has an album cover featuring band members standing outside the Mitchell Library? (Bonus points if you can name the album.)
- 2 Who was the first person to perform at the Sydney Opera House?
- 3 Which two gemstones are actually the same mineral?
- 4 From where do these works get their titles?
By the Pricking of My Thumbs by Agatha Christie (1968) and
Something Wicked This Way Comes by Ray Bradbury (1962).
- 5 Wattle, or acacia, are celebrated on 1 September each year. How many species do we have in Australia: a) less than 300 b) around 800 c) more than 1000?
- 6 Where would you encounter spider naevi?
a) human anatomy b) astronomy c) the insect world?
- 7 Who is Australia's most successful surfer?
- 8 What vegetables are used in the French dish vichyssoise?
- 9 What is the world's largest landlocked country?
- 10 What do Harry Houdini, Sean Connery and Indira Gandhi have in common?
- 11 What movie, starring Jean Dujardin, which premiered at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, is about the hunt for the terrorists who launched the 2015 attacks in Paris?
- 12 Which popular film composer appeared in the music video of The Buggles', 'Video Killed the Radio Star'?
- 13 What commodity sparked what is now regarded as the world's first economic 'bubble' when it came to Europe, from the Ottoman Empire, in the 16th century?
- 14 Gina Chick was the 2023 winner of SBS television's *Alone Australia*. Which literary figure was the grandmother she never knew?
- 15 What is the name of the book that won more categories of the 2023 NSW Premier's Literary Awards than any work before it?
- 16 What bird, named after a famous colonial artist, might be found in Sydney Park?
- 17 The High Court of Australia opened in October 1903. Where was its first location?
- 18 Where was June Dally-Watkins born?
- 19 The quote 'Spring is the time of plans and projects' comes from which famous novel?
- 20 Nestlé has announced it will no longer produce which famous Australian lolly?

Find the answers to this quiz at the bottom of page 6.





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Photo by Tim White

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
Astrobotany, Tetryon:
Arcturus Waratah
conflorescence
@franca_turrin

EDITOR
Phillipa McGuinness

EDITORIAL ADVISERS
Vanessa Bond,
Richard Neville,
Susan Hunt,
Maggie Patton,
Louise Anemaat,
Lydia Tasker and
Rawiya Jenkins

DESIGN & PRODUCTION
Simon Leong

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Romeo and Juliet

14 September 6.30 pm

A Midsummer Night's Dream

9 November 6.30 pm

Hamlet

12 October 6.30 pm

Julius Caesar

18 January 6.30 pm

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EXHIBITION CONTINUES



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Wetlands of Sydney Park at dawn.
Photo by Joy Lai



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fighting every day to make
the widest possible range of
viewpoints, opinions, and ideas
available to everyone. Your
dedication and professional
expertise allow us to freely read
and consider information
and ideas, and decide
for ourselves which
ones we agree with.’

**A letter to the dedicated and
hardworking librarians of America
from President Barack Obama**

