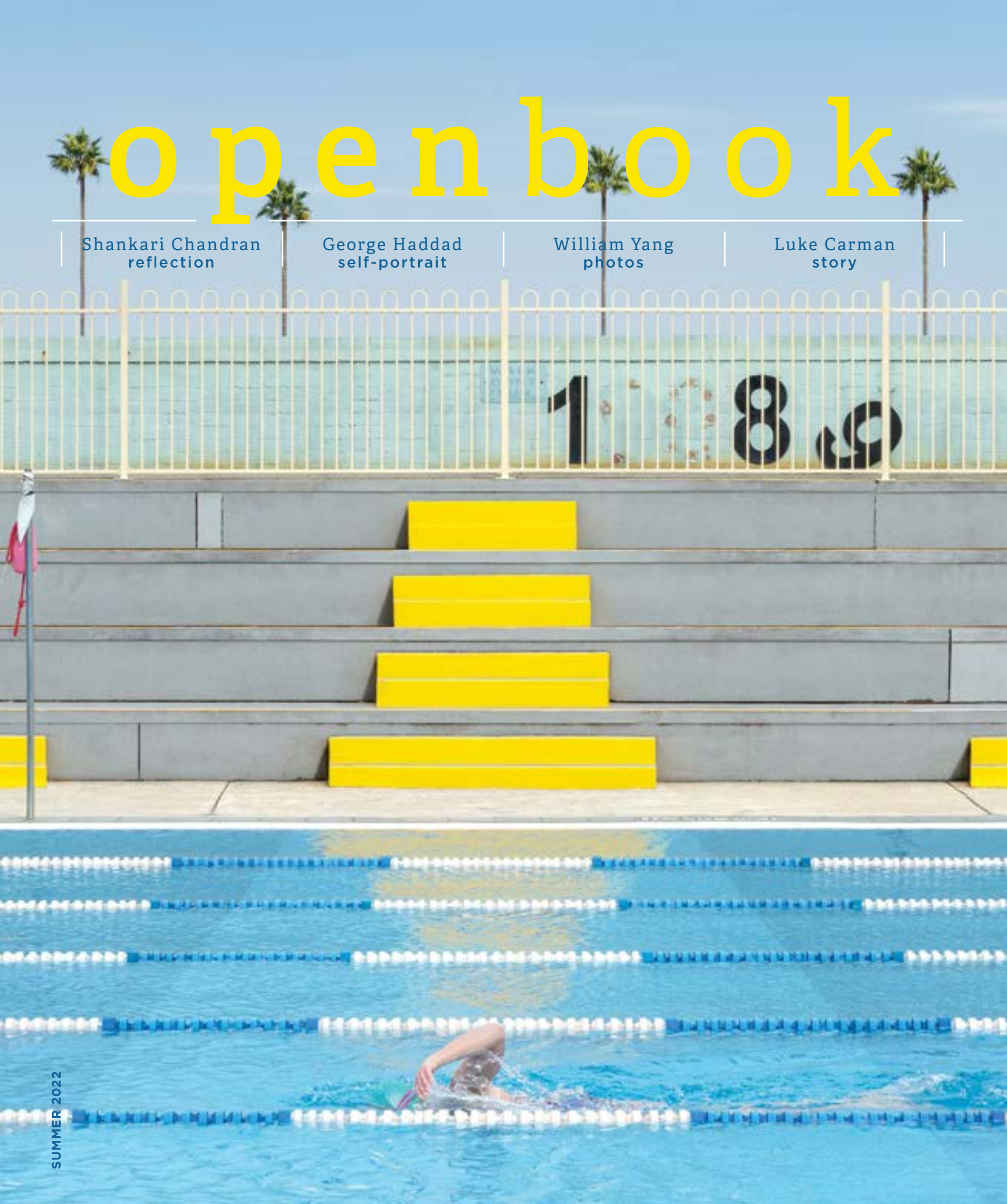
openbook

Shankari Chandran
reflection

George Haddad
self-portrait

William Yang
photos

Luke Carman
story



SUMMER 2022

Heat wave.
Photo by Paul Blackmore

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.

Photo of Linda Jackson by William Yang

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Illustration by Rosie Handley

Over these summer months, may we read ourselves into being.

Time has bent and twisted itself out of shape over the past few years. Challenging and unpredictable, weeks, months and even years have folded in on themselves. 2022 has been more about rain — flooding rains — than about sunshine. Much as we might feel a little off kilter, now December comes around again, bringing with it summer, holidays and the festive season. It is a month that might also prompt reflection, as one year ends and another begins.

During 2022, we lost more than one major force in Australian literature. As readers, writers and supporters of libraries, we should remember some of those novelists, memoirists and poets we have lost. Last July, the Library hosted a celebration of the life and work of Frank Moorhouse, who died in June, aged 83. Essayist, copyright activist, martini-drinker, bushwalker and much besides, Moorhouse will be most remembered as a novelist. Over three extraordinary volumes, unofficially known as the 'League of Nations' trilogy (think about the ambition contained in that phrase) — *Grand Days* (1993), the Miles Franklin award-winning *Dark Palace* (2000) and *Cold Light* (2011) — Moorhouse gave his fellow Australians, and the world, a character for the ages in Edith Campbell Berry. As she moves from Jaspers Brush (not far from where Moorhouse grew up on the South Coast), to Geneva and back to Canberra, Edith is a stupendous literary embodiment of geographies, institutions, competency, desires and plain old human messiness.

Robin Dalton, who was born in 1920 and died in July 2022, also wrote about eccentric, unforgettable women in *Aunts Up the Cross*, published in 1965. She had ten great-aunts who lived in Kings Cross, as did she, in her parents' house, with her Ulster Presbyterian surgeon father and her Polish-Jewish mother. The lives she described in the book, and her later memoirs, seemed not to contain a single dull moment.

David Ireland, described as 'a giant of letters', died in July at the age of 94. Three of his novels won the Miles Franklin award during the 1970s, his best known being *A Woman of the Future* (1979).

This list of writers who have passed, sadly, includes two women who were not octo- or nonagenarians. Prolific and beloved, poet Jordie Albiston was aged 60 when she died in March. It seems especially apt to share this opening line from 'book', a poem from her 2021 collection *Fifteeners*: 'your eyes are the open book you open unto me'.

Dame Hilary Mantel wrote a lot about about death, particularly in revolutionary France and Tudor England, and about her own lifelong ill health. But her own passing in September at the age of 70, from a stroke, came as a shock. Her epic trilogy about Sir Thomas Cromwell began with her 2009 novel *Wolf Hall*.

Wolf Hall might not be obvious beach reading, but it, like the work of all the writers mentioned here whose passing we mourn, can transport readers somewhere far distant in time and place. If there is one present we all want for Christmas, surely it is the gift of more time — downtime in particular.

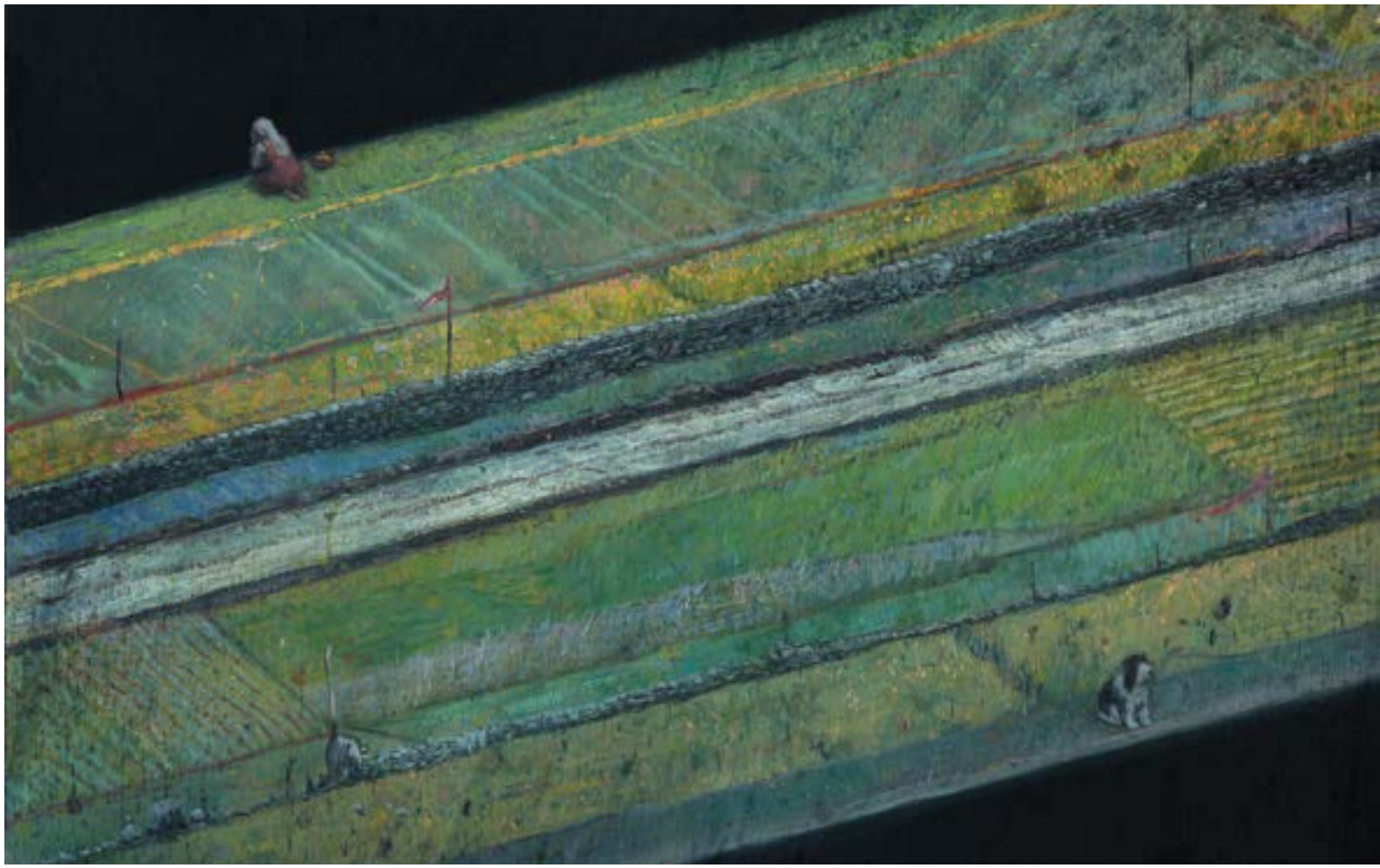
I hope you can use yours to enjoy the wonderful words and watery images in this summer issue of *Openbook*. Our feature on *Sydneyphiles*, photographer William Yang's first exhibition, reminds us of Sydney's verve, past and present, fitting as we head into WorldPride 2023. You might also find time to read those books that will live on beyond their authors. Hilary Mantel wrote that sometimes her medical procedures left her feeling so damaged that 'sometimes I feel that each morning it is necessary to write myself into being'. Over these summer months, may we read ourselves into being.

Phillipa McGuinness

***Openbook* editor**

Quiz answers page 94 **1.** (c) Wiradjuri **2.** Zora Cross **3.** (b) 16 **4.** (b) 1902 **5.** Campari, gin, vermouth **6.** *Bring Up the Bodies* **7.** Brewarrina; Barwon River **8.** Kate Evans and Cassie McCullagh **9.** Gallimard **10.** *Nitram* **11.** Elizabeth Macarthur **12.** Shaun Tan **13.** Henry Lawson, Mary Gilmore, Les Murray **14.** Mehreen Faruqi **15.** Stephanie Gilmore **16.** *Mullumbimby* and *Too Much Lip* **17.** Kylie Mingue **18.** Helen Garner **19.** Robin Dalton **20.** Mrs Dalloway

openbook *obsessions*



Shaun Tan, *Field,* 2017, acrylic and oil on canvas

Loyal and true

'No matter what future meets our planet, no matter how transformed or tragic, even apocalyptic, it's hard to imagine that a dog will not be there by our side, always urging us forward.'

These words come from beloved author and illustrator Shaun Tan's book *Dog* (2020), which first appeared in *Tales from the Inner City* (2018). Emotional and evocative, his stunning artworks show tiny canines, separated from yet still present for the humans that love them. The Library's recent acquisition of Tan's original paintings, sketches and illustrations from these books gives us a wonderful opportunity to observe the evolution of his art.

We see various stages of Tan's detailed working process, from early brainstorming notes and pencil sketches that work out the relationship and flow between text and image, to initial concepts and storyboards testing out composition. We see the development of small impressionistic 'oil sketches' that play with balance and colour palettes. Rounding out the artistic process are several of the large-scale acrylic and oil paintings that appear in the printed books.

Enjoy the books and get a sense of the work behind them in the Library's Amaze Gallery from 5 November.

Photo by Shaun Tan, courtesy of the artist. Originally published in *Tales from the Inner City*, Allen & Unwin, 2018.

George Haddad

There is an anarchist in me who swells against my sensible façade. Sometimes he bangs on the doors to be let out, but because there are no handles, I can never help. I wonder if the doors ever had handles, or if someone removed them. Twice I have seen him creep out of a cut in my skin. He didn't stay out long, perhaps disheartened by the breadth of his task. When I sit down to write, he torpedoes around inside me, disrupts the linearity of my sentences, the concreteness of my imagery, but when he is asleep, I go back and tidy everything up, make it palatable for my readers, for me, reminding myself that the best writing is aerodynamic.

Late one night at my desk overlooking the lilly pilly, the anarchist crawls into my head, quietens the retching neighbour, the idling motorbike in the street, and commands me to forget, to celebrate. I'd been failing to write a character that in various ways could be relatable to anyone — just like the person I was raised to be. I fear what the anarchist inside me is capable of, but I am grateful for his reminder that writing exists inside me too. That the words spiralling around the coils of my brain and spilling out of my fingers with a tap, tap, zap, are lifted straight from my DNA, my spleen, my blood — funnelled, fresh and fraught with an innate desire to tell. Still, those words are subdued, fashioned by my education, filtered through the convention of the written word and wider world. How to heed the anarchist's advice without losing it all?

In Year 10 English at Christian Brothers College Burwood, we were tasked with writing an autobiography of our short lives. The printout still lives in a box of silly things (including a medal I won for a drawing competition and a troll doll in a tuxedo) that I've held onto because they chart who I am. I read over it recently and I saw the anarchist's smile flash over the page like lightning. The form can only be described as a list poem (overlaying a sketch of a tombstone), that quite seamlessly evolved into prose. The first line was: *I'm a needle in a Haystack,* and the last line: *One day I'll just run.* I think about hugging that angsty sticky George and telling him how impressed I am by the daring quality of the structure. Ms Knowles awarded me full marks and in the comments wrote that I would one day be a writer. At the time I wanted to be a filmmaker. I still don't know what I am.

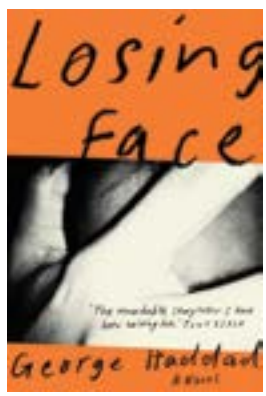
As a creative writing teacher, I lecture my students on the importance of writing about their experience, and of play and experimentation in their practice, of writing off the page, of not writing at all, of listening instead. Sometimes I watch myself rehearse the script from the other side of the room, but,

I read over it recently and I saw the anarchist's smile flash over the page like lightning.

like an elastic band, I very quickly snap back together before the chasm swallows me. That's when I feel the anarchist trundle under my skin. I hear him guffaw.

My grandfather was an oral strophic poet who died in his home in the hills of Lebanon in 1987 only months after I was born. In his final years, he scrawled his poetry onto the walls of his three rooms that had not long been converted from mud to concrete. The village people couldn't understand why he had rebelled, why he had finally picked up the pen in favour of performance. Nobody snapshot the words before they were painted over and nobody can recall any of the lines. The house is still in the family, and when I visited for the first time as an adult, I placed my hands and my heart and my ears on the walls. I heard the bleating of the goats tethered in the room below, the honking of a car horn rolling up the hill, and the clang of the morning sun.

As I lay the groundwork for my next novel, I am compelled to sharpen my tools, to reassess my moulds and reconsider what materials I might pour into them. What will it take for this novel to be novel? To be dissident, to shake my practice. What will it take for me to let go, to celebrate failure? I turn to my queerness. I pray at its altar. The anarchist rests for a moment.



George Haddad's book *Losing Face* is published by UQP

George Haddad photographed at La Perouse. Photo by Joy Lai

Take 5 SWIMMING SUITS

WORDS Margot Riley

Young surfers walking along Bondi Beach, c 1934. Photo-negative by Sam Hood

Surf suits, 1934

The NSW state government resumed the Bondi foreshore in June 1882, and by 1902 a tramline from the city provided easy access for large crowds of daytrippers. Under the influence of the wool-knit 'Speedo' performance garments worn by Australia's successful aquatic Olympians, surf suits became briefer and more practical. Improvements at the beach in the 1920s included construction of the Bondi Pavilion, which opened in 1929. Advertised as the 'Playground of the Pacific', Bondi grew in popularity from the 1930s, drawing not only Sydneysiders but people from all over the world.

Three girls in their bathing dresses, c 1900, glass plate negative. Macpherson Collection

Bathing dresses, 1900s

As the sun came up on the twentieth century, many people discovered the pleasures of swimming for the first time. Despite the popularity of the beach, however, public bathing in daylight hours was still strictly outlawed in some areas. By 1903, bathers had begun to flout these restrictions with little fear of arrest, as long as they were decently clothed. While many bathing bans were lifted, authorities still insisted that swimwear cover the body from neck to knee, to preserve dignity and the moral order. Posed in a bushland setting, these three antipodean water nymphs are demurely clad in elaborately impractical bathing outfits for their dip in the creek.

Sand play, 1930s

The growing penchant for surfing created a new industry for inflatable floats and beach toys, like this dapperly clad elephant. Rubber replicas of fish, whales, seahorses, giraffes and alligators — and many other animals — came in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Packing flat and easily inflated when required, they were promoted as accessories for seaside holidays, popular for sport 'to get rid of superfluous energy' or for floating 'blissfully and lazily on the waves without effort'. By the mid-1930s, however, concerns were being raised about the dangers posed by small children losing the support of their surf toys in deep water.

Jantzen advertisement, *Australian Women's Weekly*, 5 August 1950

Designer swimwear, 1950

While Speedo promoted performance, the fashion-conscious preferred Jantzen. With a factory located at Auburn, New South Wales, Jantzen offered a glorious range of his-and-her swimwear. This 1950 advertisement exhorted swimmers to 'Be attractive whilst you're active'. Perfect for making a splash at the beach, she wears 'Flame Flowers', a vivid and exotic design in Jantzen's exclusive new 'Satin Sleek' fabric, priced at 65 shillings (approximately $175 in today's currency). Her fun-loving companion wears satin-lastex 'Aquaduck' trunks, with a built-in supporter, and available in black, lemon, ice-blue and flamingo.

Beach scene, child with blow-up elephant, Nielsen Park, Sydney, 1930s. Photo-negative by Sam Hood

Happy in his work!, 1954, printed c 1995. Photo by Jeff Carter

Spray tans, 1954

This image shows industrial chemist John Paterson applying his mutton bird tanning oil, 'Vita Tan', to a bikini-clad customer on the Gold Coast. Paterson ran his spray booth concession for 20 years from 1952 and claimed that the mutton bird's natural preening oil contained a screening medium that filtered out the 'burn-producing rays' of the sun but allowed the 'healthy tan-producing rays' to pass through, with the bonus that it did not wash off in the surf. He became a well-known identity, travelling the east coast from Victoria to Queensland in an ancient Rolls Royce, promoting 'Vita Tan' along the way. The Gold Coast was also the home of swimwear designer Paula Stafford, whose bikinis surged to prominence in Australia in 1952 when a woman wearing a Stafford design was ordered to leave a beach for being immodest.

WILLIAM YANG AND SYDNEY

From left to right:
(Top) Designer and art dealer Brian Sayer, artist David McDiarmid, fashion designer Jenny Kee, actor Jude Kuring, fashion designer Linda Jackson. (Bottom) Jeweller Peter Tully, photographer Fran Moore and teacher Helen Simons outside the Hogarth Galleries, Paddington December 1977. Photo by William Yang

WORDS **Sally Gray**

A landmark 1977 exhibition was a snapshot of the city.

Among my favourite William Yang photographs — and there are many — is a series of images of Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson both wearing colourful Kee-designed wool knits, posing in the rooms of William's winter 1977 exhibition *Sydneyphiles*. Academics Martyn Jolly and Daniel Palmer count this exhibition, held at the Australian Centre for Photography in Paddington, among the 'ten photography exhibitions that defined Australia'. The show broke conventions for how 'artistic' photographic practice could be perceived and presented; diaristic, it displayed scattered, informal groupings of photographs. More than anything, it placed personal life and subjectivity at the centre.

Sydneyphiles was William Yang's first exhibition. 'It launched me as a photographer' he has said. When *Sydneyphiles* opened in June 1977 he was still known as Willy Young before 'coming out as Chinese' — as he wrote in a photo-text work in 1984 — after meeting and befriending a classically educated Taiwanese woman, Yensoon Tsai, who became his cultural and spiritual guide and who influenced the subsequent direction of his work. By the time he published his first book, *Sydney Diary 1974–1984,* which included images from *Sydneyphiles,* he was William Yang.

What I love about William's series of images of Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee is the way he captures both his own show and the ineffable glamour of the two fashion creatives. They embody the particular cultural energy of Sydney in 1977. Like the photographer himself, they have chosen unconventional ways to present themselves—huddling, cuddling and hiding their faces—all of which work against the norms of fashionable self-presentation. Also, like William, they had a winter show that year: their fashion parade *Colour and Shape* snaked its way along the balconies of the Strand Arcade with dancer-as-model Little Nell — later famous for her New York nightclub, Nell's, which thrived between 1986 and 2004 — doing balletic high kicks around the pillars. The fashion innovators would shortly set off, in October 1977, on their 'trunk-show' tour of Milan, Paris and New York, showing Jenny's knits and Linda's original outfits to small, invited audiences. On tour, they would be feted by the fashion cognoscenti and appear in fashion writer Anna Piaggi's pages in Italian *Vogue*, and in New York's *Women's Wear Daily*.

I suppose this series of images resonates for me not only because the *Sydneyphiles* moment coincides with William's 'launch' as a photographer, but because it was also around this time that William's camera, and self, came into my own life. He entered the private environments we shared with our friends the gay activists, artist David McDiarmid and jeweller Peter Tully and the wider circle of fashion, art, sexual-political, design and decorative arts scenes we circulated in. In a move of camp possessiveness, Peter Tully gave William the title 'court photographer' for his constant presence behind the camera at the private parties, exhibitions and theatre openings of Peter's circle during this period.

It was a time in which a new and palpable cultural confidence was evident in the wake of the election of the arts-friendly Whitlam Government in December 1972 and the completion of *Jørn* Utzon's Sydney Opera House in 1973. An awakened cultural ambition, specific to Sydney, drew back expats who had left Australia to escape stultifying cultural conformity and attracted people from other capital cities and regional towns to Sydney. There was a sense in the air — in spite of the return of a conservative national government in 1975 — that we had to let go of the cultural cringe. We could confidently make a modern Australian culture.

William became famous for recording, and even co-creating, the idea of Sydney as a centre of cultural daring, originality and excitement. For the young and enthusiastic, it seemed that the beautiful harbour city, facing out to the Pacific Ocean, was on its way to a utopian creative future. Recent immigrants, artists, bohemians, political radicals and sexual dissidents were attracted by the cheap rents of the city's inner core, bringing new forms of ethnic, cultural and sexual diversity.

Sydney was the Australian and Western Pacific city where you 'went to be gay', as Dennis Altman put it in his 2013 book *The End of the Homosexual?* Regarded as the most colourful and rakish Australian city, Sydney was reputed to have an irreverent attitude towards authority and respectability. This was the place where, without leaving Australia, you might find a sense of metropolitan potentiality. A 'real city', as poet and singer Patti Smith wrote in her book *Just Kids*, is 'shifty and sexual'. Sydney was Australia's 'real city'.

Later that year, William took another series of photographs from within this extended cultural moment. The occasion was a joint exhibition opening of David McDiarmid's *An Australian Dream Lounge* and Peter Tully's *Living Plastics* in December 1977 at Hogarth Galleries in Paddington. David had recently returned after ten months in the United States and his evolving art reflected his way of seeing Australian culture from the outside, inflected by irony and a camp sensibility.

Dream Lounge was a room-scale installation in which plastics, vinyl, fake fur, lino, found objects, careful stitching in coloured plastic thread, a modified Grant Featherston chair and kitsch postcards were crafted into an environment that was both consciously vernacular and an artefact of utopian queer imagining. Jenny Kee was photographed by William, seated on the Featherston chair in the *Dream Lounge* wearing an original Ballets Russes costume designed by Natalia Goncharova for *Le Coq d'Or* in 1914. It had been given to her by influential London-based Australian Vern Lambert, a dealer in vintage fashion and textiles who inspired Karl Lagerfeld and Anna Piaggi. The effervescence of the moment is captured in a group photo of the artists and friends taken later that evening in the lane outside the gallery.

The worlds that William was photographing brought together the vernacular and the global in the space of a day. He might go from the home of Nobel Prize–winning novelist Patrick White to photographing boy surfers at Bondi Beach. He might head later to an event by the queer performance group Sylvia and the Synthetics — including the now-iconic figures Doris Fish and

William became famous for recording, and even co-creating, the idea of Sydney as a centre of cultural daring, originality and excitement.

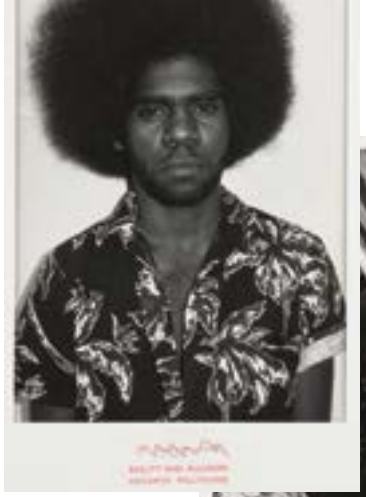
Danny Abood — before capturing sculptural men's bodies at the sex-on-premises venue Ken's Karate Klub in Kensington.

Like many who contributed to Sydney's innovative cultural ambience in those years, William was an outsider. He had arrived in 1969 after growing up, completing architectural studies and writing for theatre in Queensland. The idea that one's self could be discovered and formed in the anonymous and diverse energy of cities was at the heart of their late-twentieth century magnetism.

Since *Sydneyphiles* William has had at least 26 solo exhibitions, along with countless group shows. He has become internationally famous for his monologue slide show performances, which were digitally filmed and televised through the 2000s. His early photographs from the 1970s capture the youthful exuberance of the soon-to-be-famous, the already established and the anonymous. By the 1980s, fame and celebrity were a global force, part of the cultural conditions of neoliberal capital accumulation, proliferation of mass media and global communication. All this kept William busy making images for the print media. Simultaneously, gay male identity politics in Sydney was becoming more clearly articulated and by the 1990s William's photographs both recorded and helped create a set of narratives around the new queer subcultures.

Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee of *Sydneyphiles*. Photo by William Yang

A selection of William Yang's photographs from *Sydneyphiles*. The central image, not part of the exhibition, shows the handwritten inscriptions for which Yang later became known



Clockwise from top:

Ken's Karate Klub, photo by William Yang. Nell Campbell in Lavender Bay, photo by William Yang. William Yang and Jenny Kee, photographer unknown. Peter Tully at a Flamingo Park parade in 1979, photo by William Yang

Mardi Gras parades and parties became signature locales for William's astute and politically eclectic eye through the 1980s and 1990s. His 1997 book *Friends of Dorothy* made it clear that one of his principal concerns was to capture the specific visuality and affect of Sydney's diverse gay male cultures. A compelling image dates from the early Mardi Gras period in which Peter Tully became known as 'Mister Mardi Gras' and the 'originating genius' of the visual conception of the annual Gay Mardi Gras parade and huge dance party.

Peter had been instrumental in the formation of the Mardi Gras Arts Workshop and was its artistic director from 1982 to 1986, mentoring the volunteers who turned up looking for inspiration. Peter, quoted by journalist David Leser in an article for *HQ* magazine in 1992, saw it like this:

> The gay community was coming together with a political identity and I thought, along with the political identity, there should be a cultural identity ... there was great sense of liberation reaching a peak in Sydney and huge numbers coming out of the closet.

At the 1981 parade, William Yang photographed Peter Tully wearing a version of his 'Ceremonial Coat for the Grand Diva of the Paradise Garage', a sculptural outfit now held in the National Gallery of Australia. In this costume made of fluoro plastics, vinyls, holographic reflective strips and found objects, Peter pays homage to the aesthetic influence of the gay, African American and Hispanic dance club The Paradise Garage that ran in New York for a decade from 1977. This profoundly impacted his later work, which Peter titled 'urban tribalism'. This was the moment when artistic creativity and brave politics were Mardi Gras' driving force, before corporatisation, before HIV/AIDS.

William captured a moment of fugitive optimism in the Mardi Gras parade of 1985: David McDiarmid and I are captured as 'Flower-Heads'. Flowers cover our heads and faces in an arrangement David created using chicken wire and fresh flowers; we are both wearing our everyday clothes which happen to be textiles painted by David. This was taken ten years before David's death from AIDS-related conditions in 1995. It was also ten years before I became his executor, copyright holder and curator of his visual legacy, a development that galvanised major changes in my own life as I researched and wrote about the times through which we had all lived.

Although I now know that David had suspected by 1985 that he was HIV-positive, he had not then been tested. None of us — William, David or myself — could have had an inkling of the specific ways in which our lives and stories would become interconnected into the future. Since the late 1990s, William and I have become professional fellow travellers as we — as copyright holders — facilitate use of images for each other's respective projects and publications.

Sadness in 1999 was the first of William's monologue slide shows that I attended. While it wasn't only about AIDS, it was one of many affecting cultural artefacts created about the impact of the epidemic. It wasn't self-pitying, melodramatic or sentimental, just deadpan factual. But the imagery — both glamorous and abject — spoke eloquently of the lives formed in Sydney, the careers and politics expressed there, and the wakes and candlelight vigils held to celebrate and mourn the lives lost.

From the eclectic exploratory perspective of an introvert-outsider in 1977 — 'thoughtful, not extraverted' is how he described himself in 2008 — William's work is now honed into a series of visual and philosophical enquiries grouped under gay male life, AIDS, family, fame, male bodies, Chinese-ness, beach, landscape and history. He characterises his work as 'story-telling'. Since the late 1990s, he has brought himself out from behind the camera to create his monologue slide shows, performing the stories of his time. To quote the title of his 2021 solo exhibition at QAGOMA in Brisbane, his career is one of both 'seeing and being seen'. Visually, textually and performatively, he has crafted legendary accounts of Sydney: the times, places, people and events he encountered there.

Dr Sally Gray is the author of *Friends, Fashion and Fabulousness: The making of an Australian style*, published by Australian Scholarly Publishing.

PHOTO ESSAY

Get wet

Summer. Salty skin. Sandy feet. Sweltering days. A bit of sunshine — we hope. Swimming must surely be part of the deal, whether in ocean pools, surf, rivers, chlorinated pools, waterholes or even a famous thermal pool. Let some leading photographers whet your appetite.

We will rise early at daylight and drive to the sea, across the plains, over the mountains, and down to the sea. I know a road over the mountains off the highway which is shorter.

From *Futility and Other Animals* by Frank Moorhouse, 1969

Bronte pool.
Photo by Paul Blackmore

From ‘The sunrise swimmers’ series, Newcastle. Photo by Brydie Piaf

Mahon Pool, Maroubra.
Photo by Pip Farquharson

Bondi Icebergs.
Photo by Pip Farquharson

Thermal pool, Lightning Ridge. Photo by Dillon Seitchik-Reardon, Places We Swim

Flat rock. Photo by Paul Blackmore

Top: Waterhole, Blue Mountains. Photo by Justin Hunter

Bottom: Drummoyne pool, early morning. Photo by Rachael Willis

Clovelly. Photo by Pip Farquharson

'Sunday' from 'A woman of water' series, Newcastle.
Photo by Brydie Piaf


BRONTE RD
EXTRACTION
EBLEY ST
30-DAY INTEREST
FREE MEANDERINGS
EMBARRASSMENT
SUPERIOR
SIMILES
NEWLAND ST
TAX FREE
IMPERFECTIONS
SPRING ST
DR REALITY
COFFEE
PSYCHIC
VACATIONS
DISCOUNTED
OXFORD ST
LISTEN
HERE.
REALLY
LISTEN.
DENISON ST

WORDS **Luke Carman**

A splinter of ice

Aiden sat in his car and listened. 'His eyes were closed and he breathed with a grunting noise. A thin stream of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.' An audiobook, the unabridged *Dubliners*, as performed by the Dublin Royal Theatre Society, played through the car speakers. The narrator's voice expressed the slightly sibilant modulations expected of a professional thespian, with a warm wetness offsetting the crisp articulation of each accented syllable. The chapters played randomly, shuffled on a playlist, and had been doing so since Aiden left his driveway in Strathfield. It had taken three chapters to get to the Eastern Suburbs, but the unfamiliar roads had obscured Aiden's attention so completely he'd hardly registered a single complete sentence.

Having now come to a stop within the crepuscular concrete bunker of Bondi Junction's Eastgate carpark, with plenty of time to spare before the appointment, Aiden was free to luxuriate in the unparalleled pleasure of *truly* listening. 'His collar was unfastened and his necktie undone. He opened his eyes for an instant, sighed and closed them again.' It occurred to Aiden that he'd been listening to books since before he could read. Most people did, of course, but Aiden felt he'd maintained his fondness for listening longer and more loyally than almost anyone. Innumerable classics of the English language had been absorbed by Aiden in this aural fashion, English, obviously, the only language he knew, though he had tried to learn Italian, and once French, but only to impress a Francophile poet he'd met at university. Aiden had struggled mightily there, at his chosen institution of higher learning, even with the singular language he possessed. He'd tried his hand at reading well, at becoming *literate*. Hours spent at a desk in the campus library, between undergrad tutorials, bent over the broad pages of the textbooks assigned for his courses, but no sooner did he sit himself in the quiet solitude between the towering bookshelves, than he found his mind preferred to wander. His gaze would drift away from the blurring propositions on the page, out to the motley menagerie of lurching ibis and preening crows accumulating on the hills outside the library windows. He'd play with the pages then, turning them back and forth with his eyes fixed on the empty roads leading around the campus, until the electric lanterns blinked to life outside, and the final student buses heading into town would pass the library window, his fellow students looking blankly out through tinted glass at the spreading darkness of the evening. There seemed a tinted film over these memories, too, and he saw, not the real faces of actual half-remembered students, but something stiff, uncanny, and imperious, like the immutable serenity of sculptured expressions he imagined might greet him in distant museums of antiquity. He often dreamed of travelling to foreign cities, with faraway art on their gallery walls, in palaces and sepulchral chambers, and he wandered through these dreamy destinations accompanied by a certain murmuring hush billowing through his mental meanderings. He'd made these psychic vacations so often that it was effortless to slip back into this sojourning now. 'In a few seconds he opened his eyes and looked about him. He looked at the circle of faces and then, understanding, strove to rise to his feet.' The spoken words of the book caught Aiden's lapsed attention and turned him back upon the narrative's unfolding.

Aiden was half-way through listening to Joyce's 'Grace' when his time was up. A young couple, parked beside him, happened to be getting out of their car just as he did the same. Despite the uncomfortable proximity, which meant synchronising the opening and closing of car doors, they paid him no attention. Aiden might have repaid them in kind, but the sheer attractiveness of the pair was almost alarming. Both were tall, tanned, long-limbed, and in such absurdly pronounced physical proportions that he felt a kind of primeval embarrassment more befitting a mud-crusted serf stumbling upon his liege lord and lady. To ease the distress this dysgenic juxtaposition caused, Aiden silently scoffed at the couple as they wandered over to the shopping centre doors, hand in hand with each other, and he thought how stereotypically *Bondi* they looked. Just the sort of couple some reality

Illustrations by Rosie Handley

television producer would cream over, Aiden decided. He could imagine them portrayed on a billboard for one of those programs where couples performed duelling renovations on housing developments, or perhaps where they're forced to eat mealworms on a tropical island between tug-of-war tournaments. Just last week, a co-worker of Aiden's approached him in the staff kitchen, apropos of nothing, and recommended a reality show. The co-worker, Andy, walked over with a leaking teabag pinched between finger and thumb to ask, 'You ever seen that *SAS Australia*?' Aiden had not. 'They take these celebrities and they make them go through the actual SAS training,' Andy said. 'These SAS dudes are just yelling in their faces and screaming at them like they're a bunch of nobodies. These army dudes don't give a fuck about whether you're famous or not. You could be some high-flying AFL legend, and they'd still treat you like something they plucked out of their pubes. You'd love it, trust me.' Andy said all this, and then tossed his teabag into the wide mouth of the kitchen bin.

By the time Aiden had finished thinking about his co-worker's similes, he'd made his passage through the Eastgate shopping centre and was out in the Bondi Junction streets, heading east. A painfully loud pneumatic drilling was coming from some unseen construction nearby, obscured from sight by the heights of office-blocks and old apartments. Half the people on the street seemed to be construction workers in hi-vis, some still wearing their helmets as they wandered around with coffee cups and half-eaten kebabs. Most of the businesses on this side of town were medical in nature, Aiden noticed. Signs advertising budget dental surgery, walk-in podiatry, superior cosmetic extractions, and money-back guarantees on malpractice representations pressed in from every angle. At last, at the far end of this thematic sector of the suburb, he came upon the surprisingly small signage he was after. It read, simply, Bondi Eye Care.

At the entrance to the tall, plain building which contained the eye clinic was a small café. Two men, one bald and the other fat, both wearing dark suits, were leaning up against the cafe's counter, behind which was a young girl with pale blonde hair who was wrestling with a whistling coffee machine. Aiden made the mistake of making eye contact with the bald man. 'Hello!' the stranger yelled the moment they locked eyes. 'You like a coffee? Best in Bondi, I swear to God!' the bald man assured him. Feeling hectored but not directly opposed to the prospect, Aiden checked the time and replied, 'Well, why not? I'll have a large flat white.' The bald man opened his mouth so wide he displayed the red of his throat, and he peeled off a laugh that could pass as an elephant seal's mating call. 'Sorry mate,' he said, tears of laughter already forming in his eyes. 'I don't work here!' Both the men in suits turned to each other, in immediate hysterics, and they pointed to the young girl behind the counter. 'Hey Rach,' the bald man said, still laughing. 'Looks like I've got you some new business. This guy wants a flat white!' The girl said nothing, and Aiden stepped up to the counter of the café and waited, blushing, for the young woman's attention.

> ... the offending object was a large rubber eyeball that was now rolling around at his feet.

When the coffee was ready Aiden thanked the barista, who never took her eyes from her duties. Aiden took a sip from the cup and nodded a farewell to the two suited men, who ignored him completely, and he passed into the lobby of the building. As Aiden stood waiting for the lift to arrive at the lobby, another man walked in from the street and stood closely beside him. The man was dressed in funereal black, including a rather large and ill-fitting fedora, and his long, black beard was white and woolly at its knotted fringes. When the lift opened, the two strangers entered together without a word, pressing different buttons for separate floors. They stood in a further silence while the lift slowly ascended, and Aiden could not resist another look at his oddly apparelled companion. His attempt at a furtive glance was caught immediately by the other man's piercing blue eyes. 'Do I know you?' the stranger asked. Aiden admitted he did not. There was a return to silence between them. The lift shuddered and groaned its way to the third floor. 'Can I ask you a question?' the stranger asked. Aiden assented he could. 'Are you Jewish?' the stranger asked, his blue eyes intensifying in the lift's flickering luminescence. Aiden confessed that he was not. The door opened with a chiming bell. 'Well, you should be,' the stranger said, looking away as the doors rattled shut between them.

There were several patients already waiting inside the eye clinic, and the receptionist greeted Aiden without taking her eyes from her computer. She slid a clipboard of forms toward him once his presence was adequately explained, and he sat beside a large pot plant to fill the forms out. 'Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Dr/Other' was the first question, and easy to answer. 'Who can we contact in case of an emergence?' was a more difficult prospect. Faintly familiar pop music played quietly from an unseen speaker, and a young boy, no more than six years of age, climbed off his mother's lap and shuffled over to a large plastic tub overflowing with toys. Two seats away, a large woman in a floral dress caught Aiden's eyes as he scanned the room. She frowned politely before returning to her magazine. A loud voice was coming muffled from one of the closed doors beyond the waiting room. It sounded to Aiden like an argument, at first, but he decided it was simply someone who talked too loudly. The voice was soon drowned out by the young boy rummaging around in the tub of toys. The boy's mother ignored the calamity her child was causing by channelling her attention into her phone. She sat with her legs so tightly crossed they were losing their colour. Aiden resisted the urge to take out his own phone, and instead closed his eyes and tried to block out the strangely impinging nature of his surroundings. All he could bring himself to think about was the encounter with the bald man at the café,

and then the fedora-wearing stranger with the piercing blue eyes who'd spoken to him so mysteriously in the lift.

Something hit Aiden in the shin. He opened his eyes in alarm, and saw the offending object was a large rubber eyeball that was now rolling around at his feet. The young boy stared at him from across the room with an oddly vacant smirk. Aiden looked back at the boy with his steeliest expression, hoping it might serve as a warning to cease tossing toys in his direction. The boy had pale, pointed ears that gave him a sickly, elfish appearance, and his dark black hair was buzzed haphazardly, as though he'd done the shearing himself. There was something ungainly about the kid's posture, too. The mother, still glued to her phone, was a thin blonde woman about Aiden's age, and unlike her son, she seemed completely ordinary in every respect, excepting the intensity of her crossed legs.

No further patients came into the waiting room for the half-hour that followed the eyeball tossing, and soon Aiden waited alone. When the magazine-reading woman in the floral dress had been called up into her appointment, Aiden had sighed and felt at last he was permitted to relax. Free to enjoy the unimpeded tract of his thoughts, Aiden thought first of the eyeball boy with the strange pale ears, and then his thoughts drifted to the broader issue of children. 'What sort of parent would I have been?' was the question he asked himself. Aiden tried to imagine attending to the subjugation of repeated nursery rhymes of a night, reading picture books at some infant's bedside, and comingled with the vagueness of the image this thought experiment conjured, he felt a kind of sweeping nausea. The loamy odour of soiled nappies invaded his nostrils, and then came the cloying sweetness of milky spew, crusting on the collar of his shirt. He'd experienced enough of such unpleasantness dealing with his younger sister's two small children. He could barely visit her now for fear of catching some stomach bug brought in from the playgrounds and day care centres the nieces inhabited. For no reason at all, the thought of children brought Leslie to mind, Aiden's ex. He saw her long red hair in his mind's eye, curling down around her soft smiling face like a break of daylight through a gathering gloom. He could hear her happy-hearted laughter in his inner ear, and smell the perfume of her body wafting toward him from some deep storehouse of experience. He breathed the memory of her closeness greedily in, the warmth of her arms around him. At least the need for children had never come upon Leslie, he considered. Though they had fought about it once. 'There was no question,' he'd told her. 'What kind of father would I be?' he asked with a snort. They had been sitting together, her legs stretched across his lap, on the couch, drinking pale white wine on a warm night in. 'That was irrelevant,' she replied. He couldn't remember the precise words spoken in the fight that followed, but it had ended in tears. Still, there'd been only that one dispute on the subject, and it was nothing fatal between them. His next unbidden thought was of the afternoon he'd found himself leaving Leslie's apartment with a drawer full of toiletries and a bag of clothes. He'd wandered dumbfounded into the street outside and sat in his car for hours, a strange sharp pain accumulating in his temple, like a splinter, skewering his skull.

A loud voice called Aiden's name and he started. The ophthalmologist stood before him, a tall, bearded man who seemed amused to have startled Aiden out of his reverie, perhaps thinking his patient had been caught napping. The doctor's name was Isiah Friedman, and he shook hands rather more firmly than Aiden expected. Dr Friedman led Aiden through a short hallway and into a small office before closing the door behind his patient, who he bid to sit beside a long bench. To be frank, Aiden confessed, he had not the faintest notion what an ophthalmologist was or why he had been sent here to see one. The doctor smiled at this admission, and replied, 'Don't worry, my friend. You don't yet need to know what I do or why you are here. I will explain it to you, and all will make sense.' The doctor slapped his own thighs and wheeled his chair towards a desk in the corner of the room, retrieving a pen, and then he rolled so close to Aiden that the two men's knees were touching. 'I want you to do me a favour,' the doctor said. 'I am going to hold my pen for you, and I am going to move it back and forth, like this, and I want you to keep it in focus, always. Try your best, and when it goes out, you must tell me, okay?' Aiden said he understood completely. The pen came closer, slowly, as did the earthy smell of the doctor's aftershave, and then, just as the pen was nearing Aiden's nose, it split into two blurred duplications. Aiden felt an immediate pain inside his skull. He winced and closed his eyes, tight. When the pain subsided, Aiden saw that the doctor was watching him very intently, and had wheeled back toward the desk in the corner.

'Let me ask you a question, my friend,' Dr Friedman said. 'Do you like to read books?' Of course he did, Aiden claimed, telling the doctor he was the most voracious reader he knew. In the last fortnight alone, Aiden explained, he had read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *Brideshead Revisited*. 'Just today,' Aiden said. 'On the drive out here, I was reading *Dubliners*'. The doctor narrowed his eyes at this disclosure, and asked, 'You read while you are driving, my friend?' Aiden thought for a moment and asked, 'It was an audiobook. Do they not count?' Dr Friedman smiled and shook his head slowly, 'No my friend, they do not, in this case.' The doctor explained to Aiden, using exhaustively simplistic terms, that an ophthalmologist specialised in treating people with defects of the eye, particularly relating to muscle weaknesses and complexities of coordination. 'The pain you felt,' the doctor said, wheeling himself toward a chart of the eye on the wall furthest from the door. 'The one that made you close up your eyes, it was a strain in your little muscle here.' Most people who had such a weakness, the doctor explained, found reading an exasperating experience. Very few would go on to be 'voracious readers', the doctor said, quoting his patient.

'I don't understand,' Aiden began after some consideration. 'You can diagnose a lifelong aversion to reading just by waving your pen in my face?' The doctor smiled and asked Aiden what the pain had felt like. 'Like something cold and sharp was pushed

into my skull,' he said. 'Like an acute case of brain freeze.' The doctor gave Aiden another of his ironical smiles and asked, 'Did you know your eye was trembling, my friend?' Aiden was almost offended at the suggestion, though he tried not to show it. 'Your brain was hiding this from you,' the doctor said with a short laugh. As it happened, the doctor claimed, there was a conspiracy between Aiden's eye and his brain. They were both in agreement, the doctor explained, to keep the truth from Aiden at all costs. This was very common for people with Aiden's condition, Dr Friedman assured him. The doctor began listing the symptoms that were typical of someone with Aiden's particular weakness. They tended to avoid reading. They tended to have trouble writing neatly. They tended to struggle with spelling. They were terrible at the accurate recall of minor detail. They tended to have problems with memory. They often struggled to pay attention. Their minds often drifted. All this, the doctor said, was because of the unconscious arrangement between the brain and the eye to keep the latter's infirmity from discovery.

'I'm sorry to interrupt,' Aiden said. 'It's only, the way you're describing this, well, it all sounds catastrophic, really. I mean, all those things you're talking about, these symptoms, you're saying all those things are part of my personality, simply because of one piddly little ocular imperfection? You're saying that the way I've perceived, pretty much everything, ever, my entire life, has been determined by a lazy eye?' The doctor interjected here, only to say that Aiden's eye was not lazy. A lazy eye was something else altogether, the doctor said. But regarding the situation more generally, the doctor confirmed, Aiden had the facts of the matter correct. Aiden's orientation to life, or lack of it, was largely determined by a single defect of the eye, the full consequences of which were beyond measure.

'Here's what I'm going to do,' the doctor said, and then proposed a series of simple exercises and strategies that would help compensate for, and ultimately remedy, the trouble with Aiden's eye. There would need to be regular appointments, of course, Dr Friedman explained, and then for several minutes he demonstrated some exercises he had already mentioned, most of them to do with waving a pen around and keeping it in focus. 'Are you a religious man?' the doctor asked. Aiden asserted that he was not. 'In my culture,' the doctor said in a sober tone, 'it is a very grave issue to miss the mark. That is why I take these matters very seriously, my friend.'

Dr Friedman shook Aiden's hand rather more gently as they left the office, and led him out to the receptionist, who was much more friendly now, and together they booked their patient into a regular Tuesday afternoon slot. Aiden thanked the doctor, and paid the receptionist, and as he did so he noticed the young boy and his mother leaving one of the offices further up the hall. The mother and son walked quickly out past reception in silence, and Aiden noticed there was a watery gleam in the woman's eyes. The child's head was bent toward the floor as he shuffled by, and his little red lips were rapidly moving, as though he was muttering a silent prayer.

When Aiden came out to the street, he found a gentle rain had settled over Bondi Junction, and the sputtering haze made the place seem agitated, and the darkness of the heavy clouds seemed a smothering oppression pressing down. People were hurrying by with hoods on, or with their heads bent double, jogging through a rain they were caught unprepared to meet. Aiden passed them without much notice of the changed conditions. His focus was on the realisation that all his life he had apparently been skewed by one minor defect. The words that had swirled on the page when he'd tried to read them at school, and later at the university, sitting in the library by the window between the shelves. He recalled a vague vision of light falling across the rooms of his school, as a young boy, the teacher looming over him to tap the page of his exercise book and insist Aiden write the letter 'b' over and over because he could not remember which direction the letter ought to face. Frustration filled him up, the pen pooled its ink on the pages. The rain began to soak through Aiden's shirt, dampening his skin as he retraced his path back to the carpark, unravelling a long chain of vague associations.

Soon he had made his way back up through the bowels of the Eastgate shops and was once again in the car. The unabridged *Dubliners* leapt back to life when the engine started. 'His line of life had not been the shortest distance between two points and for short periods he had been driven to live by his wits.' Aiden reversed out of his spot and thought of his family, mostly the troubles he'd had with his father, first as a boy, and then as a man. He had been unable to see what his father wanted from his son. Endless unbreachable difference, unspeakable and unspoken in equal measure. A confounding disappointment shutting the door of the family home. Too late to do anything about that now, Aiden thought, and he remembered the strange emptiness of the funeral itself, and the flat affect of his sister's tears. And then, with a bodily horror, he saw the misery of his life after Leslie. The long emptiness that had followed from the slow drive away from her house that distant afternoon. She'd sent him packing with his shirts and plants, and he'd watched the trees outside her house shake in his rear-view mirror, as though waving farewell. A sharp pain wedged in his temple. As Aiden drove out of the carpark and into the winding streets, he became conscious of the sound of his teeth grinding together, like a millstone in his mouth.

'A thought seemed to strike him.' At an intersection from which it was possible to glimpse the churning sea off Bondi's shore, Aiden eased into the turning lane, and let a strange thought press itself upon him. What if he were to drive to her now? Rather than going home, where nothing would be there to greet him, he could turn the car around this very moment, and drive straight to her house. It would be a romantic gesture. Aiden could see the trees waving outside her house in his inner eye, beckoning him in. Leslie would open the door, and there would be a flash of surprise upon the shining surface of her deep brown eyes, her long red hair curling down like fire. She

would say his name in a light-hearted way, to show she wasn't the least put off by his unexpected presence. He'd be invited inside, of course, and they'd discuss matters ordinary, and when the time was ripe, he could unmake all their troubles with the news of his diagnosis. 'As you can see,' he would say to her, 'you were quite right to break up with me, at the time, but now that we both understand that my right eye was the cause of all my deficits and deficiencies, there's simply no reason not to take me back!' There seemed no reason to hesitate. Aiden glanced into his mirrors, and seeing himself alone at the intersection, he spun the wheels of the car, and hurtled into a sharp U-turn between the red lights. The car's tyres squealed loudly, and he left a smoking smear across the middle of the intersection as he peeled around. Hurtling through the intersection in the opposite direction was a ute that Aiden had failed to see. The old man driving the utility swerved around Aiden's car by a margin so narrow that both drivers screamed obscenities and slammed to a screeching halt.

After a silent moment of stillness and shock, the two drivers pulled up beside one another, blocking the lanes in both directions. 'What the fuck are you playing at?' The old man driving the ute shook as he screamed through his open window, eyes wide in astonishment. 'You almost killed us both, you fucking tit!' Aiden wound his own window down and tried to explain himself. First he explained about the diagnosis of his eye, and then he told the old man about his ex, Leslie. 'Are you mental? What are you on about, you fuckwit!' The old man stuck his finger up out the window and drove off at high speed, still screaming insults as he went. Aiden put his blinker on, and very slowly pulled over to the side of the road. His heart was racing, and his testicles felt strangely sore. During the exchange between the two drivers, rain had smattered through Aiden's open window, and there was a slick upon his face. He exhaled and felt the moisture on his forehead, tried to wipe it away, and then closed his eyes and thought, smilingly at his own absurdity, 'I've just been baptised.' The pain in his head was gone, but an uneasy emptiness had taken its place. 'The proposal conveyed very little meaning to his mind, but, understanding that some spiritual agencies were about to concern themselves on his behalf, he thought he owed it to his dignity to show a stiff neck.' Aiden sat in the car for a while, breathing loudly at first, and then became quiet, and listened. Really listened. The narrator's voice continued to express the moist modulations characteristic of a professional actor, with a watery lisp that dampened the icy articulation of every sticky syllable, and the rain grew heavier upon the empty streets.

Luke Carman's latest collection of short stories is *An Ordinary Ecstacy*, published by Giramondo.

Michelle Cahill, 2022. Photo by Joy Lai

WORDS **Neha Kale**

Michelle Cahill

A novelist brings a marginalised character back to the centre.

Michelle Cahill believes that a letter isn't just a form of correspondence, a line of communication that joins one person to another. If you're a migrant, she says, it can be freighted with longing. It can symbolise the gap between dreams and reality. Or it can reflect a desire to connect. During a stint in London, the acclaimed Goan-Anglo-Indian writer and poet sent an email to fellow poet Judith Beveridge.

'I think I wrote something like: *I've come back to the centre but I'm still on the periphery,*' she says. 'Often, there is aspiration, which is the position of the migrant. They are writing an email or a job application to another country, to a fellowship or residency.'

She pauses, a beat between her precise and elegant sentences. 'There is a sense of anticipation and apprehension about what that will be and where the journey will take them.'

When Cahill and I meet on a stormy Sydney Thursday, our conversation turns often to the power of words. Their magic is reflected in our surroundings. We're speaking over chai lattes in the courtyard of Glebe's Sappho Books. Inside, shelves heave with rare volumes. Around us, young women nurse bohemian fantasies, scribbling obsessively in Moleskine notebooks.

In *Daisy and Woolf*, Cahill's powerful new novel, which was published in Australia in May and will be released in the United Kingdom in November, a character called Mina surrenders wholeheartedly to the life of a writer. Her mother has passed away and she's torn between artistic ambition and family obligation. She travels to London, to Lewes and then to Wuhan, where she gives a paper at a conference. She searches for traces of Shuhua Ling, a Chinese modernist writer and artist who was born in 1900 and whose memoir *Ancient Melodies* was published by Hogarth Press — founded by Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf — in 1953.

'I think that the reader can see that I'm not her even though there's so much of me in her,' Cahill says of Mina. 'She has her own trajectory in [readers'] minds.'

The driving force of Mina's life is Daisy Simmons, a character who appears briefly in Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Daisy is an Anglo-Indian woman and the married lover of Clarissa Dalloway's old suitor Peter Walsh, who has arrived in London after five years in India. She's sketched in the barest of strokes, described as 'dark' and 'adorably pretty'.

'I was reading *Mrs Dalloway* and came across a description where Peter is walking through London,' she recalls. 'An Anglo-Indian story within such a canonical text in English literature isn't common. It dawned on me that this was what I had been waiting for.'

In *Daisy and Woolf*, Daisy, who is also the subject of Mina's novel-in-progress, wrests back the terms of her representation. She speaks to the reader in letters and diaries. Cahill constructs her inner life — that obsession of modernists everywhere — and renders it on the page, sparkling and fully formed.

Cahill was born in Kenya in 1964. As a child, she migrated with her family to London where she attended primary school. She walked around Holborn, she tells me, thinking about Dickens, imagining his characters.

'I was aware of a voice — I remember growing up in London and having this sense of history, of stories of the past,' she says. 'I remember feeling that I was in my own story but also outside of it.'

Migration can be a source of psychic and geographic rupture. Cahill tells me that it put pressure on her family, who are part of the Anglo-Indian diaspora. 'We went through tough times financially,' she says.

‘I felt that in-betweenness all the time.’

After India achieved independence in 1947, it was common for the Anglo-Indian population, citizens of mixed Indian and British descent, to move overseas. The community, already a minority, was further fragmented politically and socially. When Cahill’s family relocated, again, to Sydney in 1975 it represented a second kind of splintering.

‘I felt that in-betweenness all the time,’ she says. ‘It silences you, you are awkward — if you are with the majority of Indians in Australia, you can talk about ethnicity in a much more direct way. My family was reduced by generational migration. I was relying on bits that I picked up. I was limited by those things because I couldn’t draw from an entire community and I wanted to be able to.’

As a teenager, reading was a salve. At first, the classics: Thomas Hardy, DH Lawrence, the Brontës and George Eliot. Cahill learned about syntax and style — the architecture of a good sentence — by rereading Jane Austen. At the University of Sydney, where she studied arts and medicine, she started to think of Austen — she writes to me, laughingly, over email — as ‘glorified Mills & Boon’. At university, Cahill, who speaks warmly about her parallel career as a general practitioner, was exposed to activist thinking. What could it mean to write ethically? Her tastes shifted toward Margaret Atwood, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Milan Kundera, Albert Camus, Doris Lessing.

‘[When] I was reading as a young writer,’ she says, ‘I started realising that a lot of my work would be about how to bring that minority narrative into the mainstream.’

Cahill published her first collection of poems, *The Accidental Cage*, in 2006. In 2017, she won the Glenda Adams Award for New Writing at the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards for *Letter to Pessoa*, which was also longlisted for the ASL Gold Medal and shortlisted in the Steele Rudd Award.

Pessoa, a Portuguese poet, wrote under 72 heteronyms. The work, Cahill’s first collection of short fiction, played with ideas of personae. It took the form of letters addressed to literary greats — like Jacques Derrida, Jean Genet and Vladimir Nabokov. Her ‘Letter to John Coetzee’, a writer known for working in the space between fiction and nonfiction, is written by Melanie Isaacs, a minor character in Coetzee’s 1999 novel *Disgrace*.

Vishvarūpa, a poetry collection originally released in 2011 by Five Islands Press and reissued in 2019 by UWA Publishing, was also formally inventive. What could multiplicity sound like? How can a writer speak many voices? *Vishvarūpa*, in Sanksrit, means to have many forms. One of the poems I like best, ‘Kali from Abroad’, begins: ‘Kali, you are a poster-goddess/ sticking out your black tongue/like Gene Simmons from KISS’. In its accretion of gem-like details and confluence of the mythic and the everyday, it reminds me most of bricolage.

Cahill says that *The Bhaghavad Gita*, the sacred Hindu text, has been formative for many Western poets.

‘People like Christopher Isherwood and TS Eliot have references to Indian mythology,’ says Cahill, who also won the 2014 Hilary Mantel International Short Story Prize. ‘To think about where the goddesses came from is a way of looking at literary traditions from my own perspective.’ She stops for a moment. ‘In Hinduism, there are many gods but there is one Brahma — so I felt like it was a way to complicate the idea of oneness. I was able to ask questions about my identity as someone who has been colonised — who is also a woman.’

The epigraph of *Daisy and Woolf*, taken from Virginia Woolf’s 1929 essay *A Room of One’s Own*, reads: *A woman writing thinks back through her mothers*. I confess to Cahill that, as much as I admire her, I sometimes think of Virginia Woolf as a sacred cow of white feminism. Lofty. Untouchable. Cahill agrees. ‘She is a formidable thinker,’ she says. ‘[But] I remember reading her work and not at all liking its elitism. In *A Room of One’s Own*, the history of women writers is restricted to English women; there’s one Anglo-Dutch writer mentioned, Aphra Benn. The exclusion of non-white women from the essay points to a persisting violence in Woolf’s legacy.’

Mrs Dalloway, which uses stream of consciousness to recreate its characters’ subjectivity, is widely regarded a modernist masterpiece. For Cahill, it’s also a novel about empire. She developed *Daisy and Woolf*, she says, as part of a doctorate at the University of Wollongong, where she received a research scholarship. She read Woolf’s letters and consulted her manuscripts at the British Library.

‘Woolf had these Indian connections,’ says Cahill, who in *Daisy and Woolf* alludes to the writer’s great-great-grandfather Chevalier Pierre Ambrose Antoine de L’Etang, who ‘fled the guillotine to become a horse trainer in Pondicherry’.

‘*Mrs Dalloway* is also a novel about imperialism in which India plays an important role. I felt a lot of anger about the way Woolf treats Daisy, but also how she treats India — it is there to make the British aristocracy seem impressive and powerful and civilised — and *civilising*.’

Cahill, through Daisy’s eyes, vividly evokes life as a mixed-race woman in colonial India. Daisy writes to Peter from Garden Reach, Calcutta, in 1924. She describes protest on the

‘Now that we have come close to the mainstream, the challenge is to hold that freedom.’

streets, ‘broken-spirited soldiers’ returning from war, attacks by the local Brahmin boys. She leaves her unhappy marriage to be reunited, in London, with Peter. She voyages on a ship, through Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Gulf of Aden and Malta, each place reshaping her inner world. Her journey is echoed, nearly a century later, by Mina who grapples with the tension between art and maternal duty, the indignities of freelancing, the crises of our moment: Trump, climate change, the cruelties reserved for refugees, migrants, and those who are rootless and itinerant.

Cahill’s family, like many members of the Anglo-Indian community, were historically involved in transport. ‘There’s the idea of people coming to the centre with their bags and suitcases,’ she says. ‘I gave Daisy an interior journey of her own — I love that she is a voyager, or passenger. I think she changes, she goes through transformations as a character.’

The epistolary form is significant. Cahill talks passionately about the value of the paratext — letters, emails, diary entries — that testify to the lives of women who aren’t published, who aren’t always afforded cultural space.

‘I wanted to give Daisy a voice, I wanted her to speak,’ says Cahill. ‘Initially, the novel was all of Daisy’s story followed by all of Mina’s. Cahill’s editors suggested the integration. ‘I like to challenge conventional structures of narrative because they represent a unity and a stability that does not reflect my story whatsoever.’

Daisy and Woolf, a novel about the writing of a novel, can perhaps be read as metafiction. It’s a story about how stories are told and whose lives are erased in the process, about how the cultural forces that extol certain figures, without criticism, can easily relegate others to a footnote.

‘Every mention of Daisy is “dark” and in 100 years of literary criticism there’s been no discussion of that,’ Cahill says. ‘I read one paper that was published in 2014 that [refers to] Daisy as the Englishwoman Peter Walsh plans to marry. How can that be commensurate with the way Woolf describes her?’

Writers of colour, I point out, aren’t necessarily rewarded for taking artistic risks. Often, they are confined to memoir.

‘There’ve been so many attempts to push Daisy back,’ she says. ‘It’s about [preserving] the dialogue between white feminism and modernism, white feminism and experimentalism. I don’t come from a majority community. The pressure is on us to tell our story and I want to tell it without being censored.’

When Cahill co-founded *Mascara Literary Review* with the Singaporean-Australian poet Boey Kim Cheng in 2007, she started making space for other writers’ stories. *Mascara* expanded the realm of what was possible — aesthetically, intellectually — for that field clumsily known as migrant literature.

‘The relationship with Boey Kim Cheng was pivotal because it made me think about what it meant to be Asian-Australian,’ says Cahill, who took on the role of *Mascara’s* artistic director after the founders parted ways in 2010. ‘I didn’t know if I could do it alone and it has taken a lot from me. But I also know that the work we have done is significant in the way we have focused on individual writers. One I can think of is Mexican poet and translator Mario Licón Cabrera.’

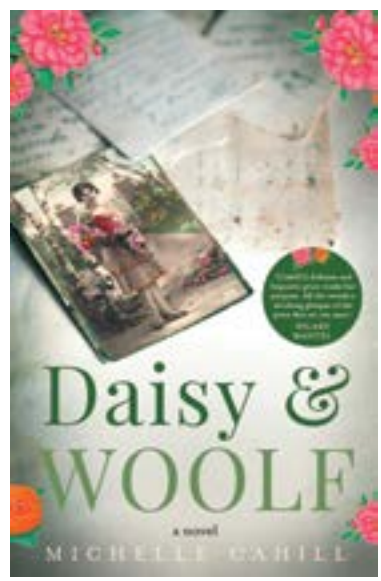
Cahill and I meet as she’s in the thick of editing *Resilience*, an anthology, co-edited with Anthea Yang and Monique Nair, coming out with Ultimo Press in November.
As the publishing industry proclaims its commitment to ‘diversity’, Cahill says that *Mascara’s* struggle revolves around being true to what it stands for.

‘Now that we have come close to the mainstream, the challenge is to hold that freedom,’ she says. ‘The struggle for all minoritised people is to have equal value.’

It’s a statement that could apply just as much to bringing Daisy’s story to life.

‘When I look back on it, I was really prioritising *Daisy and Woolf* and just to have that ambition is a large thing when you have a body and a life and needs,’ she says. ‘Writing is powerful. It takes you to places that are sometimes scary.’

Neha Kale is a freelance writer based in Sydney.



THE BLUE ROAD

The untold story of French novelist Hélène Bessette and her poetic novel, *La Route Bleue*, a love story set in 1940s Sydney.

Hélène Bessette in 1945.

WORDS **Stan Correy**

In April 1960, Gallimard, the most influential literary publisher in France, released a new novel, *La Route Bleue* (*The Blue Road*). Gallimard promoted the novel as a migration romance set in a strange land — Australia.

La Route Bleue's author, Hélène Bessette, was an award-winning but controversial French avant-garde novelist, poet and literary theorist. Her Sydney novel is based on her own experiences living and working in the city between 1948 and 1949. In the first six months of 1949, Bessette lived in a boarding house not far from Hurlstone Park railway station, in Sydney's Inner West. Every morning, Hélène rose early to travel by tram along New Canterbury Road to work at the Colgate-Palmolive factory in Balmain.

In her nine months living in Sydney, Hélène Bessette crisscrossed the city from east to west and north to south, walking or travelling by car, train, tram and ferry. The urban geography and landscape of Sydney is embedded into the literary structure of her novel. There are sections called '*Le banc de Nelson Park*' (Nelson — rather than the correct Nielsen — park bench) and '*Le Botanic*' (Botanic Gardens), where main characters Emera and Joris have some of their most intense conversations. Smaller chapters nestled within those sections have names including Maroubra, Balmain, Parramatta, Pymble and the misspelt Eartwood. A very floral, leafy North Shore features: *Chatswood, Roseville, Killara, Gordon, Pymble, Turramurra. Autant de fleurs dans la verdure. Autant de jeunes filles en fleurs. Autant de villes en fleurs parees pour la douceur de vivre.* ('So many flowers within the greenery. So many young girls in bloom. So many suburbs in bloom, adorned to be ready for life's sweetness.')

In the novel, as in real life, the 'poetic romance' between two young French migrants, Joris and Emera, is doomed to fail. The bisexual Joris is not only involved with Emera, but with Jeff, an older Australian man, and Maggy, a young Australian woman. Emera, exhausted by the sexual and emotional complications of the relationship, takes '*la route bleue*' — the long sea voyage back to France.

Who was Hélène Bessette and why was her Sydney novel forgotten in Australia?

There's really no mystery because, until the early twenty-first century, Hélène Bessette's literary career was also forgotten in France. In August 2021, the French newspaper *Le Monde* published a double-page profile of Bessette headlined, '*Hélène Bessette, ecrivaine avant-gardiste devoree par ses demons*'. ('Hélène Bessette, avant-garde writer devoured by her demons.') Journalist Luc Bronner noted that she died at the age of 82, anonymous after a poor, sick, forgotten end of life without a line in the newspapers, including *Le Monde*, where his article about Bessette appeared. In his final paragraph, he repeated one of Bessette's memorable comments to her children: '*Je serai reconnue cinquate ans apres ma mort*'. ('I will be recognised 50 years after my death.')

Bessette published 13 novels, books of poetry, a radio drama and a play. In 1954 she'd won a literary prize, the Prix Cazes, for her novel *Lili Pleure* and been twice runner-up for the prestigious Prix Goncourt. In the 1950s and 1960s, she was a prominent member of the post-war French literary avant-garde, but her work often frustrated her supporters. Novelist and critic Alain Bosquet wrote in 1959 that Hélène Bessette did not have 'the patience to write like everyone else', which may or may not have been a compliment.

After her death in October 2000, her children found boxes of unpublished poems, stories, letters, memoirs and photographs. Since her death, her literary reputation has been restored by a dedicated group of writers who call themselves 'Bessettians'. One prominent member, critic Julien Doussinault, wrote a biography of Bessette, published in 2008. In late 2019 he told me that if I wanted more information about Hélène Bessette's time in Australia I should contact her son, Patrick Brabant. Patrick was only a baby in 1948 when his mother left him, and his older brother Eric, with a Kanak nanny in Nouméa. Hélène had arrived in New Caledonia in 1946 to live with her husband, Protestant missionary Rene Brabant. (In Sydney she went by her married name Brabant.) She obtained permission from Baptist missionaries in Nouméa to travel to Australia for medical treatment after a miscarriage.

Among her letters is a remarkable literary and personal correspondence with an older woman she met when she lived in Sydney. Anne-Marie Haslett, Swiss born and French speaking, lived with her husband, Thomas Haslett, in Roseville on Sydney's North Shore. After Bessette returned to France in late 1949, she corresponded with Haslett about the origins of her Sydney-based novel, and her personal problems, for the next 20 years.

The Hasletts were Presbyterian social activists involved in the Young Christian movement. Former missionaries in Shanghai in the early 1930s, where they ran a school, they left because of political turmoil caused by war and revolution. In Bessette's memoirs she describes the impact of their time in China, mentioning the Chinese furniture in their home, which she said lent '*une ambiance de haute culture*'.

Tom Haslett was headmaster at Knox College for a short period and later taught at another exclusive boys' school, Scotch College. Hélène's relationship with the Hasletts takes us into a powerful and little-known world, '*le Protestante voie*' — the Protestant way. Since the 1930s, Tom Haslett had been the Sydney contact for the seemingly endless number of Protestant missionaries heading for the South Pacific to compete with Catholic missionaries for the souls of the people there.

In June 1958, Hélène wrote to Anne-Marie about what she was writing. She had settled on a name for a new novel of 200 pages, 'uniquely about Sydney', she said. Contrary to her friend's advice she said she wanted to stick with the approach of her earlier books and thought she might 'risk doing something interesting if I continued in the same vein'. That book with its surreal, poetic and what we might call queer overtones was, of course, *La Route Bleue*.
For many decades, I worked at ABC Radio National as an investigative journalist and documentary maker. I started there in 1975 and, in those pre-internet days, doing research meant lots of phone calls, and digging at libraries. One day, idly browsing while waiting at the UNSW library, I spotted a now-defunct Monash University literary journal, *Margin*. What attracted me was an essay by Patricia Clancy, an Australian academic and translator in French studies, called 'Hélène Bessette's Land of Smiles: The Utopian Image of Post-war Sydney in *La Route Bleue*'. Clancy's description of the novel, with its wildly utopian vision of Sydney after the war, fascinated me. Who was Bessette and why wasn't the novel better known?

Clancy wasn't to blame for the lack of biographical background about the subject of her article because, as I would discover, by the 1980s Hélène Bessette had become a literary non-person in France.

I searched for a copy of the novel in second-hand bookshops without success. Given *La Route Bleue* was set in Australia, I knew one place where I was certain to find it: the State Library of NSW. The Library was my first employer and funded my university education while I worked there during summer vacations between 1970 and 1972. Sure enough, the Library is one of two libraries in the country that holds a copy of *La Route Bleue*. The stamp on the inside cover notes the book was acquired in 1962, just two years after its publication by Gallimard.

I could now read what Patricia Clancy had described as a 'utopian image of post-war Sydney'. But as the decades passed, I filed away 'Hélène Bessette's Land of Smiles', expecting that someone with better knowledge of the French language than me would pick up Clancy's brilliant article and write something more about this unusual surrealist prose poem. Even though Bessette's book is written in French, it is interspersed with her unique version of Australian colloquial English.

Patricia Clancy had written in her 1986 article that Bessette was 'not interested in presenting a realistic picture of Sydney'. Actions, and descriptions of people and place, are not presented realistically or systematically, but through disconnected scenes, impressionistic writing, fragmented thoughts and conversations.

Clancy was less interested in taking apart Bessette's literary style than in finding out how Bessette had created her 'Land of Smiles' in post-war Sydney. Of Bessette's happy workers, singing and dancing on the factory floor, or the general happy disposition of every Australian or 'English' person, as Bessette called Australians, Clancy wrote 'All this is written with no hint of irony' but 'rather with a sense of wonder that such a simple, happy existence could be possible.'

Hélène Brabant's passport, with New Caledonia stamp. Courtesy Patrick Brabant

The Hasletts at their Roseville home, date unknown. Photographer unknown

Scene from the Colgate-Palmolive factory from *Pix* magazine. Photo by C (Les) Lynch

Hélène Bessette (right) with Anne-Marie Haslett on the streets of Sydney in 1949. Photographer unknown

Characters Joris and Emera's angst about their life as outsiders in Sydney is compared to the Australian middle and working classes, who seem to be smiling and happy all the time. Clancy concluded that Bessette is 'idealising and romanticising life in and around a big city in a settled country, albeit the Antipodes, whose remoteness allows for the exotic in the French mind, even today'.

Clancy considered *La Route Bleue*'s 'Balmain' chapter to be the most romanticised in the novel, calling it 'Almost a poem with questions and answers in English'. At the time, the Colgate-Palmolive factory in Balmain, now an apartment complex, was one of the largest employers in Sydney. In early 1949, Hélène Bessette wrote to her sister in France, 'Did I tell you I'm working?' '*Je suis ouvrière chez Palmolive.*' Her job, she said, was filling jars of cream.

Bessette got the job through her close friend Andre Cayrol who, although registered as a student, worked at the factory along with other French New Caledonian migrants. Work started at 8 am and Hélène had to make the journey by tram from Hurlstone Park to Balmain.

In 1949, the year Hélène worked at the Colgate-Palmolive factory, the Australian photo magazine *PIX* ran an article called 'The Make-Up Factory' that shows a young woman filling pots with cream. This task was allocated to all new workers and, because of Hélène's lack of English, it was the only job for her.

She stayed at the factory for six months because, she said, 'I felt good there'. But when she arrived, Bessette had a lot to be unhappy about. Her letters to her sister talk about her plans to bring her two boys to Australia, and how her relationship with Andre was complicated by his other friendships, male and female. But Hélène enjoyed working at the Colgate Factory, and her enjoyment is reflected in the Balmain chapter of *La Route Bleue*, where Bessette's version of Australian English clashes with stream-of-consciousness thoughts in French about the meaning of love:

> Emera sings a song and every girl sings a song.
> With the wareless.
> 'Let us [missing word] the rest of the world go by'
> A marvellous song.
> Listen the girls working in music ....
> D'nt work anymore dear, that's tea time.
> Dear! I am so tired ! D'nt work anymore.
> Come on love, we are your friends.
> Toute la vie a 'Palmolive factory'
> Balmain, Sydney, NSW

Having read Bessette's own letters and memoirs, it's difficult to disagree with Patricia Clancy's depiction of Bessette's utopian image of post-war Sydney. Blackouts are mentioned but there's no sense of political or social divisions and tensions, no mention of the poverty — food rationing, strikes, the rising fear of communism.

Remarkably, the Library has another source of information that supports Bessette's interpretation of life in the Colgate factory: oral history interviews done with workers. Oral historian Rosemary Block wrote an essay based on the interviews she did called 'Everybody had a Cousin at Colgates'. She writes about industrial accidents, machinery breakdowns with hot soap overflowing onto the factory floor, union disputes and strikes. These problems may not appear in *La Route Bleue*, but Block's interviews suggest that Bessette's depiction of life on the factory floor isn't utopian, but close to reality.

Like all good writers, Bessette listened to what was happening around her — talk of romance, storytelling and music from the factory floor in industrial Balmain in the 1940s. The oral history interviews contain stories of women discussing relationships—'Don't put up with this, with men' —and ways to avoid pregnancy. An interview with Joyce Isaac, who would have been at Colgates when Hélène was there in 1949, describes the fun in the toothpaste-packing room:

> One of the girls who was a good storyteller might recount the plot of the latest romance she had read. Later they used to have the wireless on for the girls to listen to and they would write in to Don Arnott's program and request a favourite song to be broadcast ... So we would get a favourite song. Well when your song came on, you would be singing away and tubes would be going everywhere. We'd play around for a while.

La Route Bleue attracted positive reviews in France when it was published in 1960. Claude Mauriac and Alain Bosquet, both novelists and literary critics, wrote respectively that Bessette was 'at the forefront of French authors' and of 'her fundamental originality'.

Another significant reader and critic of *La Route Bleue* was Anne-Marie Haslett in Roseville. Bessette had sent a copy to the Hasletts and must have expected a reaction as, thinly disguised, they feature as characters, one of the 'happy bourgeois couples' Patricia Clancy described. Anne-Marie's critical style echoes Clancy's comments about Bessette's literary method. She herself employs 'fragmented thoughts and conversations' to illustrate what she and her husband think about the novel:

> Roseville 1960
> Thank you for your letter which just arrived this week. To be exact, only the day before I'd finished the last page of 'La route bleue.' It's a book which we both found very interesting! We read it separately, we read some pages out loud, like the ones where you describe the Palmolive Factory, Sydney NSW. That chapter is wonderful ... and some of those descriptions of nature while you are out on your walks are so charmingly evocative. I took great pleasure in them.

Anne-Marie suggested, however, that if Hélène wanted to use English in her novels, she should get the assistance of someone who understood the language and could correct her mistakes, including the examples of wireless instead of 'wareless' and quiet time instead of 'quite time'. She then added a harsh critique of Bessette's autobiographical approach to literature:

> Indeed, it would be better not to talk about 'La route bleue' with people who might recognise themselves in it! Just flicking through the book, I see them appear – It's a real shame.

In her literary archives, there's a scribbled note in French and English which captures how Hélène Bessette saw herself and her writing, which she described elsewhere as '*auto-biographie realiste, non fantaisiste*': The biggest novel of the world by the smallest novelist of that world.

Stan Correy is an investigative journalist and documentary maker who worked for ABC Radio for 45 years before retiring in 2020. He was one of the founding producers of Radio National's investigative program *Background Briefing* in 1980.

Photos of Nellie Small from *People* magazine, 1952.
Photographer unknown

WORDS **Alana Valentine**

Send for Nellie

Singer, performer, toast of the town.

There was a catch call in show business circles in those days. When a show was not quite strong enough, they would say 'send for Nellie'. It was always a sure cure.

I am at the Paddington home of Bobby Limb, a legendary Australian entertainer. The Nellie to whom he is referring is Nellie Small, singer, performer, toast of the town and a 30-year show business stalwart who wore an impeccable top hat and tails on stage, and casual male attire in everyday life.

Was she a lesbian? I asked.

Didn't know, wouldn't care, he said evenly. *She was a total professional, a beautiful singer and she used her hands expressively as she sang. Later you'd see Shirley Bassey and Lana Cantrell do that but when I saw Nellie it was the first time I'd seen that. There was something about Nellie that stopped the show every night.*

It's 1991 and I am an aspiring playwright. I know nothing about anything. As green as bottle glass. I don't know what a 'catch call' is, I don't know what it means to 'stop the show'. All I know is that the theatre seems like a hostile, rarefied, impenetrable business but still, I want to be a part of it. I'm both out and proud but not yet able to shake the shame of my homosexuality. I think it's going to be a barrier to admission to this cosseted club of theatre makers. I know that female playwrights are still so rare as to be branded with the diminutive epithet 'lady writer'. I don't have family or friends in the business, I wasn't taken to the theatre as a child and I can barely afford to go now. But the longing to be a playwright is in motion within me as strongly as wind whipping the white caps of the sea.

That's when I read an obituary of Nellie Small. But instead of using words that someone else says about her, let me begin as I mean to continue and tell Nellie's story using her own words pulled from the archives and those of her contemporaries who I interviewed all those years ago.

I am West Indian on the male side of my family but my great-grandmother settled in Australia way back and my grandmother, my mother and myself were all born in Sydney. My grandfather and father belonged to Barbados and my great-grandfather came from Antigua.

I started in the business when I won an amateur trial in a little theatre in Oxford Street — we used to call it 'Clays Variety'. In December 1931 I was told that they put on novelty attractions as part of the Christmas shows. I couldn't see that I was a novelty, but it was pointed out to me that my colour was a novelty. So I went in with Connors and Paul, [theatre producers who revived the Tivoli Circuit], got a job with them, that was one of the few times that I wore a frock in a production. I was singing 'Am I Blue' and Queenie Paul got the idea that she should dress me up as a mammie. So away I went, bandana around the head, basket of cotton on the stage. Then when I was on stage for Connors and Paul in 1932 in Melbourne, I'd go out on stage in my male attire and I'd be in my own clothes in the street and people couldn't reconcile the two. So Queenie Paul suggested I wear male attire on the street. And I was a bit nervous about it, because of laws and all, but I thought I would try it for a week and every time I stopped at a corner, or went into a shop to buy something, people would say 'there's Nellie Small'. So then I never looked back.

Nellie said she didn't go back into female 'drag', as she called her hospital issue frilly nightgown, until she was close to death in 1968. Along the way she

played the Theatre Royal and the Tivoli in Sydney, and the Tivoli in Melbourne, singing blues and jazz standards 'On the Sunny Side of the Street', 'Dinah' and 'Stormy Weather'. During the Second World War, in 1942, she played the Booker T. Washington Club in Albion Street, Surry Hills, which was patronised by both African-American servicemen and First Nations Australians, and later she headlined at Sammy Lee's in Woollahra.

Nellie played with me and the Port Jackson Jazz Band on our tour of the outback, Jimmy Sommerville told me when I interviewed him in October 1991. *She was amazing but don't kid yourself about how hard it was for her. In some of the regional places, the hotel owners wouldn't let her stay on the premises. Or they'd make her go through the back, the servants' entrance. In Brisbane she wasn't allowed into the GPO to pick up her own mail. Then rumours went around that we were all communists so that gave us more grief.*

He shook his head and laughed. *The closest any of us came to being communists was using the Eureka Hall to rehearse in because it was so cheap!*

Jimmy, a talented piano player, told me that Nellie rarely talked about politics and racism, at least not to him. *The journalists never shut up about it, always asking her what it was like to be black, did she get heckled? Honestly if they had a brain they'd be dangerous. I mean, this is an artist who played the Ziegfeld Club in King Street, famous for its drag acts, but which had cast-iron music stands across the front of the stage so that the punters couldn't get to the performers. I was there this one time when some drunken fool just stood in front of her, staring, and Nellie gives him that incredible smile and says, 'Come sit by me, friend, we don't eat people anymore!'*

Jimmy Sommerville was a magnificent raconteur, proudly showing me photos of himself with long hair, scandalous at the time. Later, Jean Wein, the senior access officer at the National Film and Sound Archive, confirmed Jimmy's outback tales with a reference to Nellie in the book *Black Roots, White Flowers: A history of jazz in Australia*. It was Jimmy who first told me about Nellie living with a white family in North Sydney. *We all went there for a party, the whole cast of* Annie Get Your Gun *were there*.

The family Jimmy was referring to was that of Nellie's friend and unofficial manager, Mrs Edith Meggitt, wife of a Sydney furrier. Nellie lived with the Meggitts for more than 20 years and the intriguing Edith Meggitt could apparently be seen in the front row of every one of Nellie's Sydney performances. An article in *People* magazine in 1952, 'The Gentleman is a Lady', went so far as to suggest that Nellie has a 'weakness for gaudy ties and socks, which are chosen for her by Mrs Meggitt'. The same article claims that 'religion has been one of her greatest consolations, an armour against poverty and humiliation'.

I next interviewed June Neary, one of the 'ballet girls' who performed behind Nellie at Sammy Lee's. She recalled Nellie singing 'St Louis Blues' and said that Nellie always arrived dressed so she didn't share the dressing room with June or the other chorus line dancers. She was at pains to tell me that Nellie wasn't 'odd'. I travelled to Baulkham Hills to see Mike Sutcliffe, who had an important journal called the *Australian Record and Music Review* and who generously provided me with a cassette tape (remember, this was 1991) of 'St Louis Blues' sung by Bessie Smith. I found a copy of Nellie's ABC TV 'Artist's Engagement Card' listing her nine ABC TV appearances. Archivist Amanda Hickie tried to find copies of Nellie' appearances on *Hal Lashwood's Minstrels* and *Alabama Jubilee* but, sadly, they had all been destroyed.

Finally, I travelled to the Performing Arts Museum in Melbourne in January 1992 where archivist Elizabeth Bernard could find no reference to Nellie but allowed me to look through the archives. I knew that Queenie Paul had worked with Nellie so, on a whim, I looked through her papers. Imagine my delight when I found a handwritten reference to Nellie in an old address book. There was also a wonderful exercise book which had been indexed with sticky-taped markers on one edge. The book contained a list of all Queenie's engagements, with their venues, and a chronological list of the costumes and dresses she had worn. I imagine this meant she could make sure she never wore the same dress to the same venue at too close an interval. I was learning what it meant to be a 'trouper'.

I gathered up all my research and wrote the first draft of a stage play called *Small Mercies*. Open Season at the Performance Space in Redfern offered me a staged reading in July 1992. The play was

Photo of Nellie Small, *People* magazine, 1952

a two-hander about Nellie Small and a First Nations performer, performed by Maroochy Barambah and Lydia Miller. It was directed by Gae Diller-Anderson. I sent it to the Melbourne Theatre Company and received a very polite rejection: *As with everything we have read by Alana, good writing and interesting ideas, intellectually and theatrically. But we do not think it would have a wide enough appeal for us to mount a successful production.* I sent the play to several other companies, but it never got up. So I moved on to other plays, other projects, other material. Then, in 2022, my phone rang.

Is that Alana Valentine?

Yes.

This is Catherine Freyne. I'm the Pride(R)evolution Creative Producer at the State Library of NSW. An intern working with us on the exhibition, Madeline Roche, found a small clipping in the archives from 1992 from a publication called Lesbians on the Loose *about a play you wrote called* Small Mercies. *I understand it features a singer called Nellie Small.*

Laughing, I said, *You should give her a job as a librarian, that's quite a find!*

Catherine laughed and said, *The Library has recently acquired an amazing set of photos of Nellie, from* People *magazine, and I wondered if you'd like to come in and speak to us about bringing Nellie back into the limelight.*

I obliged, as Shakespeare would have it, 'faster than spring-time showers comes thought on thought'.

Nellie's last gig was at a club in Surfers Paradise called The Playroom in 1964. By that time, she had been living for years on a pension and suffering from ill health which, Bobby Limb told me, was sarcoidosis, an inflammatory disease that affected Nellie's voice and sent her blind. In a newspaper report about her comeback Nellie admitted that she was 'financially scraping the bottom of the barrel'.

As part of its *Pride(R)evolution* exhibition, the Library will be celebrating Nellie's 33-year career in her own words, through archival recordings and newspaper interviews, as well as the words of her contemporaries, many of whom I interviewed more than 30 years ago.

Nellie Small left an incredible legacy of achievement and made a dynamic and opinionated cultural contribution. Speaking about Dorothy Hall, an Aboriginal dancer who had recently had a season at a Sydney nightclub, Nellie told *People* magazine in 1952, *They turn up their noses at this little girl, yet she's got more culture in her little finger than they have in their whole bodies.* On Adelaide radio in 1954 she mused, *I've had a lot of arguments about my colour because as soon as they see me people think I must be an American. I played for the Americans during the war and many a time a chappie would come up to me and say, 'Didn't I see you in Detroit?' and I'd say 'No, you did not'.*

I imagine Nellie Small tapping her top hat in place and smiling. *My best moments are when the audience goes* Oo-ah! *as soon as I appear in the spotlight.*

Ooh ah, Nellie. Oooh oooh ah!

Alana Valentine is a Helpmann-award winning dramatist working in stage and screen. In 2022 she was co-writer, with Stephen Page, of Bangarra's dance opera *Wudjang: Not the Past,* and co-writer, with Christos Tsiolkas, of the Adelaide Festival oratorio *Watershed: The Death of Dr Duncan*. Also in 2022, her play for Belvoir, *Wayside Bride*, was in repertory, and she was the writer for Erth Visual and Physical Theatre's *arc* at the Sydney Opera House.

In May 2023, as part of the Library's PRIDE (R) EVOLUTION exhibition, Alana Valentine will curate an evening of storytelling and music inspired by Nellie Small.

BETWEEN THE SMOKE AND THE STONE

White-Vented Crow, c 1790, watercolour.
One of 31 watercolours of Australian
fauna by Sarah Stone

WORDS **Bronwyn Rennex**

A writer finds ways to make sense of loss, through objects found in fragmented family memories and official archives, and some that fly.

At times, I felt the words my father might have spoken about his time in Vietnam emerged from deep within him, as smoke.

Until a few years ago, I'd never considered myself directly impacted by war, even though my father was sent to serve in Vietnam when I was a baby and, like many veterans, he returned a changed man. He became a heavy smoker during his war service — a habit he maintained until his sudden and premature death from a heart attack at the age of 52. I was a teenager when he died and, despite feeling I had been robbed of a father, I didn't associate my loss with his war service. I knew very little about his time in Vietnam. It wasn't discussed in our house. Whatever I understood I had cobbled together from fragments and speculation — a photo here, an offhand comment there.

At times, I felt the words my father might have spoken about his time in Vietnam emerged from deep within him, as smoke. And, while his ineffable story was told in smoke, the war stories I saw around me — on TV, at school, in the statues of soldiers in parks — seemed written in stone. These stories felt unrelated to my life. They wedged all the uncertainty, difficulty and nuance I experienced into neat concrete parcels.

My book, *Life with Birds*, arose out of a desire to understand how the conversations around war — within my family and, more broadly, within my culture — had so completely suppressed and invalidated my private legacy of conflict. *Even to myself.* How could I find those experiences and absences that resisted telling? How could I write about them in a way that reflected *my* experience? I needed to find a space between the smoke and the stone in which to work.

Life with Birds reflects my attempt to write what could only ever be a *possible* testimony. It is constructed from fragments of family narratives, photos, letters, and other objects taken from the private domain and from public narratives. It was important to me that the structure of the work reflect my experience. I wanted to explore the disjunction between how war is discussed and remembered publicly, and how it is lived privately, by situating history — *military history* — in the home and in the suburbs. I was hoping to redress what Australian historian Joy Damousi described in her book *Living with the Aftermath* as the 'legacy of war beyond the public arena, and of women's place – long neglected – within national narratives about war'.

For many veterans and families, dealing with the administration of war post-conflict becomes a significant part of their experience. One of the first questions I had when I started my research was 'What did my mother write in her claim for a war widow's pension?' She'd left school at 14. Since then, as far as I knew, she didn't write very often. To my knowledge, her claim for a war widow's pension was the only time she tried to articulate her loss, in written or spoken words. She submitted her claim to authorities, and it had to be validated before she could be compensated — the enormity of the loss of life had to be transformed into verifiable facts or data. At home, my mother expressed that loss in tears, in gesture, and in retreat. I understood it in atmosphere, rather than in articulation.

I turned to all sorts of archives — personal, bureaucratic and public. I brought together material that had drifted — or been filed — apart. I found objects, photos and reflections. Some were mine, some not. What did they mean and how did they fit together? The answer was not always clear to me. I wanted to engage the reader in the act of trying to piece them all together, just as I had to.

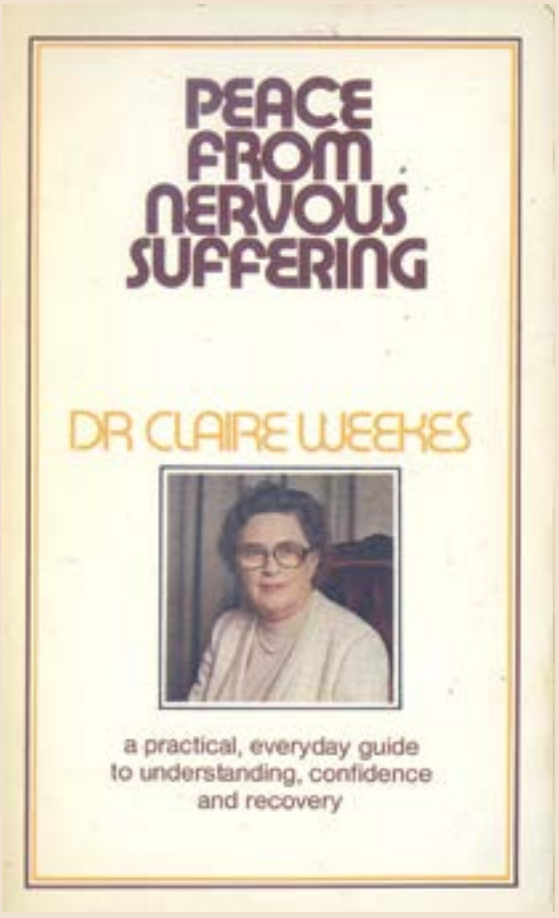
I came to think of the book as a suburban lyric, a collection of artefacts that conveyed emotional truths rather than a narrative arc. As an affective history of life in the suburbs, a record of ordinary events and emotional currents, *Life with Birds* would not need to make connections between the textual elements explicit. It freed me to record lives, but also allowed my material to remain slippery and open-ended. I wanted to describe a network of associations and experiences, rather than tell a life story, resisting the urge that Joan Didion described in her 1979 book *The White Album*, 'We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "idea" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.' I was heartened by her qualification: 'Or at least we do for a while.'

In *Life with Birds,* the placement or juxtaposition of text and image emphasises and extends meaning. Instead of trying to write directly about my mother's grief, for instance, I use her words rather than mine. I place her love letters to my father alongside her claim for a war widow's pension. The shape of her loss lies between them.

I use images in this way too. When I place the covers of my mother's and father's secret books — Dr Claire Weekes' *Peace from Nervous Suffering* for her and Richard Mason's *The World of Suzie Wong* for him — on facing pages, again without comment, it seems to me that an immense space and meaning emerges between them, to be filled by the reader. Like me, they must regard the collision of a bespectacled woman wearing a cardigan and pearls with her sultry, thigh-revealing, pole-leaning counterpart and form their own conclusions. They must imagine what four-cornered shape is between my parents and the two very different women on the covers. Vernacular images, like faded family photos and pictures in newspapers, appear too. So much a part of everyday life, these gave shape to our family's reality and responses as much as words did; they got to the places the words couldn't reach.

I enjoyed the unexpected coincidences between material: I found the teenage diary where I wrote in capital letters one day 'NOTHING HAPPENED' (quite accurately I thought). Later, during my research, I found the diary of a commander in Vietnam where a whole day had been labelled 'N.T.R'. (Nothing to Report).

I googled the synopsis for the episode of *Prisoner* we would have watched the night my Dad died and found that one of the characters collapses, is put to bed and can't be woken the next morning, just like Dad. Even nature got in on the act. I read widely about birds, then discovered a family of currawongs nesting outside my partner's window. I watched their family take shape while I wrote about mine.



Side by side with no comment: Richard Mason's *The World of Suzie Wong* and Dr Claire Weekes' *Peace from Nervous Suffering*

Life with Birds is about suburbs, and neighbours, and birds, as much as it is about the aftermath of war. It is about working out what my legacy is rather than doing battle with it or trying to find closure. It aims to balance a desire for some sort of testimony with questioning how we talk about war.

I didn't try to understand the role of birds in my project. They were there before most anything else. I wrote about the pet birds of my childhood, borrowed facts about bird habits and collected advertisements from people trying to sell parrots. I didn't know how they made sense, but I collected them anyway, feeling that they did. As I wrote, I came to see that birds could be a mirror to people. We are like them in so many ways. Through birds, I could perceive and attempt to speak with lyricism about loneliness, about horniness, about suffering, birth and death — the big topics. I could get nearer to thoughts and feelings that are difficult to put into words, and that archival material couldn't reach.

In the suburbs, the birds entered so deeply into us that we didn't notice their constant presence. Yet, we lived like birds — we ate, we nested, we shat, we mated and sang. The birds opened me up to nuances of language and hope and survival. Through them, I could think about being invisible, yet in plain sight — much like the wives and families of veterans. In the suburbs we lived among birds, but we hardly acknowledged them.

Writing *Life with Birds* encouraged me to unearth some of the silences in my life. Were it not for working on it, I doubt whether I would have spoken to my sisters about my father's death for the first time in over 30 years. Nor would I have discovered my mother's letters, or my father's last words. That I couldn't retrieve my father in any satisfactory way became part of the story, perhaps the most crucial part. My failure describes my loss.

While *Life with Birds* is a personal reflection on my experience, there are others for whom that metaphorical space between smoke and stone exists too. My aim is that we see ourselves as part of a shared history, one in which we aren't invisible, but one where our humanity, individuality and agency feels recognised and where our loss is acknowledged.

Bronwyn Rennex is the author of *Life with Birds: A suburban lyric*, published by Upswell.

An assessment on *The Tempest*

My Year 12 students
writing furiously

about ether, magic, release:
the sound of their pens

like a sudden downpour
on a dry lake bed...

You whispered, *I'm dreaming*
of concert hall applause.

And I could only think
of Ariel's sharp, transparent wings

fluttering and humming
over rising black seas.

Lorne Johnson

Lorne Johnson lives in Newtown, Sydney, and teaches at Ascham School. He is fan of punk rock, Jim Jarmusch, classic American cars, coffee, bushwalking and birding. A widely published poet, Lorne released his collection *Morton* with Pitt Street Poetry in 2016.

Illustration by Rosie Handley

WORDS **Kath Kenny**

Betty jumps high

Fifty years ago, a group of women made history on and off the stage.

At a consciousness-raising meeting in a share house in inner-Melbourne's Fitzroy, a young schoolteacher called Helen Garner is trying to focus. A visiting American actress, Maggie Helmer, is leading the assembled group of women through improvisation exercises. 'Start with the phrase, "As a woman I feel like ... " and finish it in your own words,' she instructs. Helmer is a member of Caravan Theatre, a radical group that staged the first women's liberation play in the US, and the exercises are from audience workshops she led after their shows. Garner feels so uncomfortable she gets up to leave but, somehow, finding the will to stay, imagines herself as 'a piece of elastic that is stretched and stretched and stretched'.

In another exercise, Helmer asks the Melbourne women to act out their fears. Kerry Dwyer, Helen Garner's friend from their student days at the University of Melbourne, is newly pregnant. 'I'm worried I'll stick a nappy pin into my baby's belly,' she confesses. She's also afraid she will lose her place in the Australian Performing Group (APG), the collective of writers and performers she had helped found a year earlier, in 1970, with her partner Graeme Blundell.

Garner acts out bringing her own baby, Alice, home from hospital. Dwyer plays her husband, Bill Garner. He's been rehearsing at the Pram Factory, a warehouse the APG had moved into with a plan to stage new Australian plays, and staying out at the pub late into the night. His wife, at home with the baby, feels left out and lonely.

The artist Micky Allan, a friend of both Garner and Dwyer, attends her first women's meeting the same night she separates from her husband. The couple had returned from London, where her painter husband had set up his studio in their living room while she worked as a relief teacher during the day. She had a little studio in the flat's closet. She tells her friends that she had turned down paid work at the Pram Factory because it meant she wouldn't be home in the evenings to have tea on the table for him. But, as David Bowie sang, things were starting to change.

Bowie's song 'Changes' was part of the extraordinary soundtrack to the early 1970s. Like Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On' and Helen Reddy's 'I am Woman', it spoke to a time of upheaval and transformation. In the West, a generation rebelled as bombs pounded the Vietnamese. Draft cards were incinerated, the I Ching thrown and Germaine Greer's explosive words from *The Female Eunuch* shattered domestic worlds.

Kerry Dwyer and her friends had dressed up as Viet Cong and run through moratorium marches in Melbourne, performing street theatre. But while men had recently stepped on the moon, and Bowie wondered whether there was life on Mars, Australian women couldn't even step into public bars. There were separate columns in the paper for men's and women's jobs. In Canberra, not one federal electorate was represented by a woman.

Garner, Allan and Dwyer belonged to a generation of women who'd slipped, almost imperceptibly, through the windows that were opening up to higher education in the 1950s and 1960s. They entered classrooms in old sandstone universities and the new modern campuses filling up with students supported by a Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme. As she walked into the University of Melbourne in 1961, Dwyer recalled feeling shy and unsure of herself, but found herself drawn to student theatre. When an actress in Ray Lawler's play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* became sick, Dwyer was cast in the role of Pearl.

From *John and Betty*: *The earliest reader for the little ones*, illustrations by Marjorie Howden. Published by the Education Department of Victoria, 1951. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

By 1967, she had enough experience to win a scholarship to study theatre in France, where she took a life-changing class with the experimental Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski.

When she returned to Melbourne in 1968, Kerry joined an acting workshop her friends from university had started at La Mama, a little theatre that moved into an old shirt factory in Carlton. The group was inspired by overseas experimental theatre, and Kerry taught them Grotowski's theory of 'sacred theatre'. One day, they try facing the wall and throwing their thoughts backwards, and the workshops usually end with dancing or everyone falling in a heap together on the floor, limbs flailing like one huge game of Twister, as if the Hindu gods have become mortal and libidinous Melburnians. The La Mama group staged plays that were by shut down by vice squad detectives when actors uttered strings of expletives.

When the workshop, now called the APG, outgrew La Mama, they moved into a former pram factory around the corner in Carlton. They scoured decades of grime and dust away with fire hoses and industrial floor sanders and set about building a new arts culture. *Marvellous Melbourne*, the APG's first Pram show, is about the city in the 1880s, but Dwyer's rage at the play's focus on the white, Anglo men of Melbourne's history grows. She storms out of rehearsals.

Inspired by Maggie Helmer's visit, Dwyer, Garner and Allan invite women from all over Melbourne to a planning meeting at the Pram Factory to discuss a play about women's lives. Young and middle-aged women come, South Yarra office girls and frustrated housewives, teachers and students. Winsome McCaughey (later to become Lord Mayor of Melbourne) is there, as is folk singer Glen Tomasetti.

They break into small groups to discuss issues the play might cover: the conflict between caring for children and having an intellectual life, lesbianism, sexism in schools and the oppressive notion within heterosexual relationships of women needing to 'keep their man'. One man attends, brandishing a couple of scripts he's written. The women ask him to join the large circle, but he storms around the edge and, in a striking example of what we would now call mansplaining, shouts from the top of the rostra: 'Damn it all! I don't know how you are going to achieve anything at all if you won't accept help and advice from us.' Dwyer writes in her diary, 'he kept trying to interpret women's lib for us, but wouldn't join'.

The group decides to close future meetings to men, and over the following weeks a small group of committed women forms. They settle on a name for their play, *Betty Can Jump*, a reference to a school reader about two children, John and Betty, playing with stereotypical toys. Roles are cast: Helen Garner, who had no acting experience but was known for writing brilliant letters; Yvonne Marini, who'd left her Greek family home to join the Pram Factory; Jude Kuring, who'd performed in La Mama shows; and Evelyn Krape and Claire Dobbin, who had joined the APG from the drama course at the nearby Secondary Teachers' College.

Allan is responsible for the set. Two other women, Laurel Frank and Kay Hamilton, undertake research into Australian women's history, travelling to Sydney to visit the Mitchell Library. While Dwyer and the cast use consciousness-raising exercises to explore their lives, Frank and Hamilton open archives and discover stories about non-Indigenous women in colonial settler Australia; about the early suffragists Vida Goldstein and Louisa Lawson; about Female Factories, and the auctions where female convicts were married off like cattle.

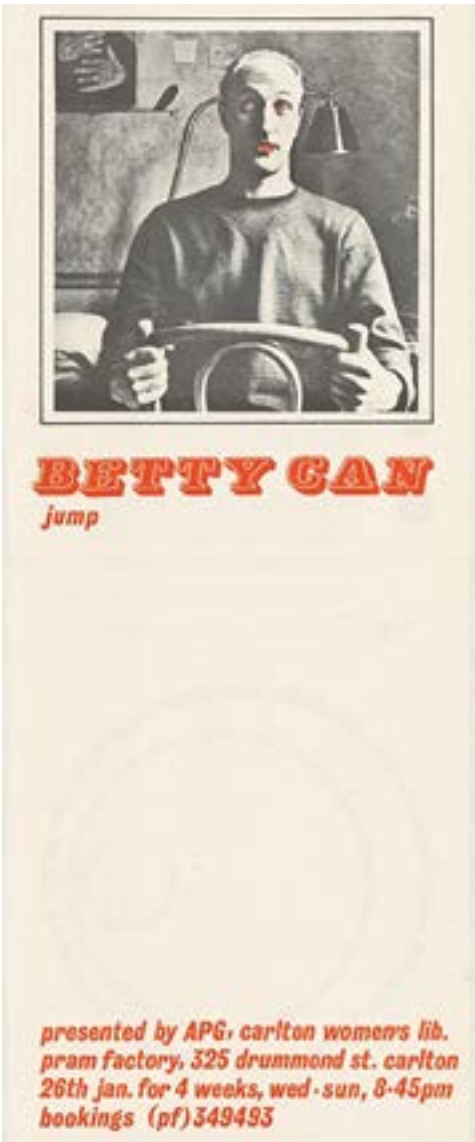
Exploring these archives was an 'amazing experience for us that none of the other women participated in', Laurel Frank tells me, when I visit her home and studio in East Brunswick. 'We were in the library going, "Look at this, look at that!", discovering and photocopying madly and trying to structure some sort of female history.' Frank comments that journalist and writer Anne Summers landed on the same material they had found in the Mitchell Library and elsewhere, using it for her classic book *Damned Whores and God's Police*.

Photos of *Betty Can Jump* performances by the *Betty Can Jump* collective

Opposite top: Helen Garner on stage during *Betty Can Jump*

Opposite bottom (left to right): Jude Kuring, Claire Dobbin, Helen Garner, Yvonne Marini and Evelyn Krape

Below: Evelyn Krape and Claire Dobbin. Courtesy of John Helmer



Left to right:

Betty can jump program, front and back, designed by Micky Allan

Photo of Maggie Helmer. Courtesy of John Helmer

Nearly half a century later I had to turn to the Mitchell Library archives too, to learn about the *Betty Can Jump* women. Growing up in Victoria in the 1970s and 1980s, and living in Carlton and Fitzroy as a student, I had heard of the Pram Factory, but when I thought about the theatre, images of tall men like David Williamson and Bruce Spence came to mind. I knew nothing of the women there. But as I researched their story, I discovered their work was, in many ways, more radical and avant-garde than that created by the Pram men.

I first heard about *Betty Can Jump* in 2017 when I started a doctorate on the Australian women's liberation movement. Kerry Dwyer now lives in Sydney, and when I tracked her down on the phone, she told me her records of her Pram Factory years were held in the State Library of NSW. They had not yet been processed, so I needed her permission before the archivists would let me read the material behind the glass panels in the special collections area. When I opened the first of seven boxes in the silent reading space, I kept my excitement to myself when I found not only what seemed to be a *Betty Can Jump* script (I'd read that no written record of this improvised play existed) but Kerry's production diaries, and the lengthy interviews she conducted with the *Betty* collective three years later. The material told a story of a time that was exhilarating and exhausting, frightening and exciting.

Dwyer's diaries record how Helen Garner (who had started yoga classes with Mrs Mangiamele on Lygon Street when her marriage broke down) led the group in stretches at the beginning of rehearsals. Evelyn Krape, the group's singer, led vocal warm-ups. Dwyer's diaries describe the actors' interactions: 'Helen is always the one to see a new opening … Jude always on the ground in the middle of it all.' Evelyn and Yvonne, she writes, 'riff off each other' with improvisations that 'are nearly all funny'.

In interviews, Evelyn Krape described how collective members took on different roles. Helen 'was like the mind and was allowed by the group to express ideas'. Jude, tall and loose-limbed, was 'like a solid, rather passive base'. 'You seemed impenetrable,' Evelyn told Kerry Dwyer in the 1975 interviews. 'Sitting there with your legs apart and your hands on your knees, smelling of Johnson's baby oil and looking like a pregnant buddha.'

The archives described a marathon rehearsal that went to midnight, when the cast played convicts being whipped and raped by an officer played by Perth actor Victor Marsh. The group had decided they needed a man to play male roles and cast Marsh, who arrived in Melbourne with his partner, a 23-year-old psychology tutor called Carmen Lawrence. Dwyer recalled that with her 'brilliant mind', Lawrence helped to knit the historical and contemporary scenes together while watching rehearsals from scaffolded seats above the stage.

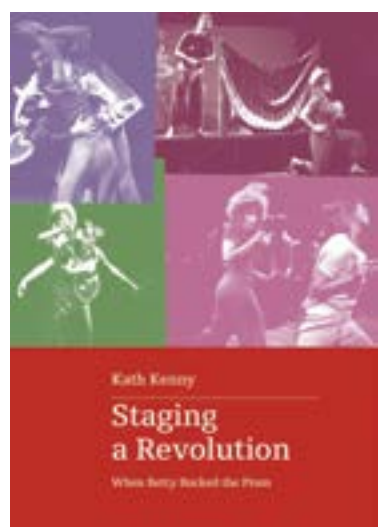
The rehearsal period ricocheted between feelings of sisterhood and 'bad vibes', as Garner later wrote, which emerged because of the daytime meetings where a smaller group made decisions. Evelyn Krape described the show as an 'exhilarating opening up' at a time when her life was changing. Helen Garner remembers it as a time of turmoil: she was 'freaked out' by her marriage break-up but was also falling 'hopelessly in love with one of the other women in the cast'. When I met with Helen Garner she told me now she 'can hardly think about those years without a sort of angst'. But they were formative. 'It blew my mind to find that it was possible to set out things that had been on my mind for a long time, things about myself … to find and act out single images of myself as a woman,' she told Kerry Dwyer in the 1975 interviews.

Betty Can Jump transformed the APG, although not without rancour and at least one spectacular resignation.

Dwyer recalls the APG men filing in 'stony-faced' for the show's first run-through at the beginning of 1972. Claire Dobbin remembers feeling full of doubt. 'Shit, we're right out of gear … Where's the dramatic action?' Helen Garner feels that the play is a failure. But *Betty* is a huge success.

Women in the audience cry, critics rave, the four-week season is extended by two weeks and the show makes more money than any other APG production that year. *Betty Can Jump* transformed the APG, although not without rancour and at least one spectacular resignation. As I show in my book, the play helped set the scene for a vibrant women's theatre movement. The *Betty* women become known for their influential acting, directing and writing work for stage and screen, for founding Circus Oz, and for making political history — Carmen Lawrence later becomes the first woman elected as Premier of Western Australia. Helen Garner's books about what it feels like to be a woman will be read around the world, making her one of Australia's most celebrated writers.

Kath Kenny is an essayist, arts reviewer and researcher. Her book *Staging a Revolution: When Betty rocked the Pram* has just been published by Upswell.



ENEMY ALIENS

Artworks — never before seen — by some of the '*Dunera* boys' will soon be on display in Orange, the place where many of the works were created.

A rare, sympathetic portrait of a Lascar crew member of the *Dunera*

WORDS **Kate Garrett, Andrew McNamara and Seumas Spark**

When Winston Churchill came to power in Britain in May 1940, one of the first decisions of his government was to arrest, intern and ultimately deport thousands of 'enemy aliens' to Canada and Australia for fear that they might secretly help to orchestrate an invasion of Britain. On 10 July 1940, the British troop ship HMT *Dunera* departed Liverpool, Britain, with about 2120 male 'enemy aliens' on board. Many of the internees were Jewish and had fled to Britain as refugees from Hitler's regime. Others had been there for years and had made their lives there. Though the *Dunera* internees did not know it when they left England, they were destined for Australia. This group of men, aged from 16 to 66, would later become known as the '*Dunera* boys'.

Conditions on the *Dunera* were dire. The ship was grossly overcrowded, with men crammed into appalling living quarters below deck. A few internees found hammocks, but most were forced to sleep wherever they could find space, including on tables and the ship's floor. Toilets overflowed, further poisoning the stale air. British soldiers assigned to guard the *Dunera* internees treated their charges with brutality, abusing them and stealing their possessions. Several internees aboard the *Dunera* were stabbed by British bayonets. The artist–designer Georg Teltscher reported having a panic attack in the stifling conditions; when he raced up to the deck for fresh air, he was severely beaten.

Somehow, the artists on board found time and space to depict their surroundings, though their materials were rudimentary. With paper in short supply, many artists were forced to draw on toilet paper. One internee, Robert Hofmann, was a renowned portrait artist from Vienna. His keen eye for faces shows in a rare and sympathetic picture of a *Dunera* crew member, a lascar. Lascars were sailors from India and South-East Asia employed as crew on British merchant ships. Lieutenant Colonel William Scott, the officer in charge of the British guards aboard the *Dunera*, blamed the lascars for the looting that occurred on the ship, though he knew well that it was his soldiers who were responsible.

The *Dunera* docked in Sydney on 6 September 1940. By next morning, the majority of the internees had been transferred to the remote, rural town of Hay in the Riverina region of New South Wales. The harsh climate, and their surroundings, shocked many of them. Hay was in drought and everywhere there was dust. Dry, relentless heat and swarms of flies added to the internees' sense of dislocation. So unfamiliar was the landscape to European eyes that many labelled the Hay plains a 'desert'. Not even the presence of the Murrumbidgee River, which meanders past Hay, tempered the idea that the Jews had, once again, been led into the desert.

Many artists wasted no time in trying to capture this new and alien world. Wide skies and the flatness of the landscape, studded with seas of fence posts, are common themes in artworks done in Hay, such as in a landscape painting by Georg Teltscher (page 63). Teltscher was fond of disguising words and messages in his work: the weeds caught in the wire at the left of the picture appear to spell out 'G'day'.

In 1941, Australian authorities decided to move the *Dunera* internees from Hay to Tatura, in Victoria's Goulburn Valley. In May of that year around 400 men were taken first to Orange, because the Tatura camps were not ready to accommodate all the internees. Some of the 400 were chosen for Orange so that they might recover from sickness and general ill health; older men especially were pleased to have the chance to spend time in a 'European-like' climate. Artist Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack wrote to his daughter after arriving in Orange: 'It is a great relief for all of us to see green grass again after having lived such a long time in desert-like country.'

Many of the most accomplished *Dunera* artists were among those interned for around six weeks at Orange. While this was a coincidence, the effect was profound. They produced a remarkable visual record of their time at Orange. Indeed, their artworks have revealed more than the documentary record about internment at Orange. Probably some artists were inspired by the landscape, more familiar to the European eye than that around Hay. Where flatness was a characteristic feature of works done at Hay, the opposite is true of Orange. The peaks of the hills and the grandstand at the Orange Showground — a popular motif — gave artists a new frame for their surroundings. Others may have been stimulated by the measures of freedom allowed at Orange. Numerous artworks reflect vantage points beyond and above the camp. At Hay, the internee artist invariably looked out through barbed wire. In Orange, we see more varied perspectives.

Many artists in internment depicted scenes of everyday camp life. In the absence of cameras, the hundreds of sketches and paintings that Robert Hofmann created of his fellow internees function as our best pictorial record. Many of these portraits are dated and labelled, Hofmann's meticulousness a boon for historians seeking new knowledge of camp life. Elsewhere, internee artists depicted everyday activities, such as in Erwin Fabian's watercolour where men peel potatoes. Fabian was adept at capturing the monotony of internment, a skill that won praise from a fellow internee: 'in a few battered tins, logs of wood, ash, and rubbish, he gives the whole atmosphere of our dismal surroundings'. For Fabian, depicting the internee experience meant capturing not only the drabness, but also precious moments of relief, humour and beauty.

Camp education scenes were another part of the artist's everyday work. Many Second World War internees turned to education to sustain their lives behind barbed wire, and the *Dunera* boys were no different. As soon as the *Dunera* left Liverpool, internees began to offer lectures and classes in their fields of expertise. Their educational enterprises continued in Australia, where informal camp universities were established. Courses were taught on languages, philosophy and art history, among many other subjects. Georg Teltscher was one of the teachers at Hay. The young artist Klaus Friedeberger recalled attending his classes on modernism and the Bauhaus. Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack offered classes in printmaking and colour theory at both Hay and Orange. For Hirschfeld-Mack, the lectures, alongside activities such as 'camp-fires, cabarets, choirs, concerts', provided diversions and entertainments 'to keep up morale'.

An intriguing feature of the artworks produced in internment is the many images of the camps after dark. Daytime works record everyday life and the mundane realities of internment, while the night-time images are often more confronting in their explorations of internees' psychological moods. These images began early in the *Dunera* boys' experiences of Australian internment. When the internees arrived in Hay on 7 September 1940, they were greeted by a massive dust storm that rolled across the flat like a tsunami, swallowing people and landscape in its path. Hirschfeld-Mack created two frightening depictions of this dust storm, which he portrayed as a demonic figure.

Fabian was another artist whose works differ from day to night. Though a young and relatively inexperienced artist, his skill was such that he was able to create a new, specific genre: nightmare images of camp life. These works convey the sense of dislocation and loss that afflicted many internees. At night, surreal and frightening landscapes are populated by demonic, beast-like figures that roam freely around the camp. By combining expressionism and surrealism, Fabian was able to capture a psychological reality that was not necessarily surreal. Refugees and internees did not need horror or ghost stories to ignite their imaginations. As Hannah Arendt later noted, their minds were flooded with the distress of their everyday reality.

The most famous image of internment in Australia was created by Hirschfeld-Mack. His woodcut print, originally untitled but subsequently known as *Desolation*, depicts a solitary figure in a long coat silhouetted against a barbed-wire fence. This lone figure peers into the void, perhaps reflecting on the vast distance between him and the world he once knew — a world thrown into turmoil. An inverted Southern Cross constellation hangs in the night sky beyond. In a simple, direct style, the work concentrates the psychological impact of being bundled across the world with no prospects and few liberties.

In contrast to Hay and Tatura, internment life at Orange is not extensively detailed in archival records and personal histories. Information about living arrangements, for instance, is relatively scant. There were two compounds at Orange, with twelve huts in one and eight in the other, and a common kitchen shared between every four huts. The huts were made of corrugated iron and accommodated 25 men, who slept on bed boards and straw mattresses on the floor, a less comfortable arrangement than the bunks they had at Hay. The Orange camp was less spacious than Hay, which disappointed some internees, though most warmed to the town itself. 'A marvellous place', one internee observed of Orange in his diary.

In July 1941, the 400 or so *Dunera* internees who had been sent to Orange joined the remainder of their cohort in Tatura. Most were at Tatura for relatively short periods. Some were released for civil work in Australia; others returned to Britain, or took other paths to freedom. From early 1942, internees could win their freedom by enlisting in the 8th Employment Company, a labour unit in the Australian Army. Hundreds enlisted, determined to contribute in some way to the war effort and to the anti-fascist cause.

After the war ended, less than half of the approximately 2100 *Dunera* men remained in Australia. In the years that followed even more departed the country; only about 700 remained in Australia long-term. Of those who stayed, a relatively small number, perhaps 50 or so, won fame and success, and their stories have had a disproportionate effect on *Dunera* memory. In modern Australia, the *Dunera* story tends to be rendered as a triumph. This narrative ignores the stories of the vast majority of *Dunera* internees, which remain all but unknown. Some men were broken by their *Dunera* experience, while others melted into Australian post-war life, content to leave their devastation and discomfort in the past.

The recent *Dunera* acquisitions made by the State Library of NSW, mainly from the private collections of friends and family, will help to produce a fuller, more complete picture of the *Dunera* internees. These artworks give us glimpses of their triumphs, to be sure, but more importantly they tell also of the tragic and the mundane aspects of their story. Eight decades on, this art is returning to the place it was created.

***Enemy Aliens: The Dunera boys in Orange, 1941* opens at the Orange Regional Museum November 2022.**

In powerful artworks, internees convey the experience of internment rather than the reality of its lived experience. In this artwork by Georg Teltscher, ghostly hands seem to be disappearing in an unsettled ocean, or rising up from a foaming landscape.

A portrait by Robert Hofmann of one of his fellow internees. The many layers of clothing (and burgundy coat) suggest it may have been done in Orange, where the climate was notably cooler than in Hay.

The flatness of the landscape is a prominent feature of artworks created in Hay. Here, Georg Teltscher juxtaposes a sea of fence posts against the flat horizon: the barbed wire or weeds caught in the bottom left of the fence line appear to spell out the word 'G'day'.

Kate Garrett is a German translator with a particular interest in the translation of Second World War documents and correspondence. Her poetry translations appeared in *Dunera Lives: A visual history* and she provided the translations for *Shadowline: The Dunera diaries of Uwe Radok* (both Monash University Publishing).

Andrew McNamara is an art historian who has worked on the internment experience of former Bauhäusler Hirschfeld-Mack and Teltscher for *Bauhaus Diaspora and Beyond* (Melbourne University Publishing). His essay on night-time internment imagery, 'When the reality is Unreal: Camps, Towers and Internment', was published in *Realisms of the Avant-Garde* (De Gruyter).

Seumas Spark is an historian with a particular interest in the *Dunera* internees. He is co-author of the two-volume history *Dunera Lives* (Monash University Publishing, 2018 and 2020), and co-editor (with Jacquie Houlden) of *Shadowline: The Dunera Diaries of Uwe Radok* (2022).

WORDS **Shankari Chandran**

The library that made me

My footsteps slow when I pass a library. Any library. I am pulled inwards, to its endless stories and the possibilities they hold.

The public library of a country houses that nation's stories, even the contested ones. It is a monument to the storytelling we call history. The political history of Sri Lanka is especially contested. Which race arrived on the island first, which warring faction committed the most atrocities, how many people died and how many remain missing. These are the narratives we still fight over. New ones have emerged — how corrupt was the previous regime, how many billions did they steal, how much do we owe China and how many children will starve as a result of it.

Libraries hold stories, but for me, one library also began a story. My novel, *Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens*, was inspired by the burning of the Jaffna Public Library. It uses this act of cultural erasure to explore racism in my ancestral homeland, Sri Lanka, and my chosen homeland, Australia.

The Jaffna Public Library sits in Jaffna (Yalpanam), the ancestral capital of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka. It was constructed between 1953 and 1959, and its domed ceilings and gleaming white stucco walls stood proudly over the city, more like a palace than a library. It stored one of the largest archives of Tamil culture in the world — at its height, the collection contained 100,000 books, ancient manuscripts and historical records about Tamil civilisation in Sri Lanka.

It is — or was — a place of almost mythical cultural significance to the Tamil people.

In 1981, the Jaffna Public Library was burned to the ground by Sri Lankan government security forces. Two thousand years of Tamil culture, history and language were destroyed. Some texts were the only copies in existence and have been lost forever.

The Jaffna Public Library told a story about the place of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. The political authorities of that time wanted to suppress this narrative; burning the archive was a quick and conclusive way to do it. For many Tamils, this biblioclasm was the culmination of decades of laws that disempowered the Tamil people. And it foreshadowed the civil war that was to come, two years later.

That war led to the forced migration of Tamil people to many parts of the world, and for my family, to Australia. It also led to the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of Tamil people.

I was born and raised in the Tamil diaspora. For decades, my parents were afraid to return to Sri Lanka because of my father's political activism. We moved to London and then Australia (where I was raised) in 1977, a few years after the end of the White Australia Policy.

I call Australia my chosen home because I have left many times and I always long to return. I am deeply happy and connected to both people and place here. From the strength and safety of Australia, I use fiction to interrogate the injustices that drove my family from one home and challenged them to create another.

Fiction allows me to assert myself in the present, and to understand how that present has been shaped by the past. At a recent literary panel, someone asked me if I felt my fiction was constrained by my ethnicity and our history. This was my answer: I stride into the future with stories, and it is vital to me that I take my history with me. I am uplifted, not burdened, by it. (At the same panel, a reader told me that my latest novel's assertion of racism in Australia was deeply offensive. I smiled politely and said I find racism deeply offensive and destructive. I wanted to add — but didn't — 'Your local library will have a copy of *White Fragility*'.)

When the Jaffna Public Library was burned, I became bereft of a history, an archive of the past that helped anchor my place in the present. It is a moment in time that I have memorialised in all my writing.

As a writer and storyteller, all my work returns to the burning of books and stories. I cannot let go of the burning of books, the burning of the bodies and the burning of truth that followed.

Shankari Chandran at Vinayak Grocery Store, Killara. Photo by Joy Lai

Two thousand years of Tamil culture, history and language were destroyed.

Through fictional stories about Sri Lanka, I have tried to record our path to war and the terrible mistakes made by both sides. Through fiction, I've tried to understand how so many were killed and why there will not be justice for the living or the dead.

On my last trip to Sri Lanka in January 2019, I returned with three generations of my family. We went to our ancestral villages and saw the continuing effects of the war. My parents took their children and grandchildren to all the places they had loved and left behind. We saw how much had been erased by genocide, how much of our history had been erased by the post-war 'rebuilding' of the north.

We took our children to the new Jaffna Public Library, built on the ruins of the old one. It is still a stately building, its architecture an homage to the original design, but its archive will never be the same. We assembled the Chandran grandchildren in front of the library and took a photograph of them with their grandparents, recounting some of the stories that had been destroyed. We whispered the words, because although we were in the Tamil heartland, history had taught us to be afraid. We choked on the words because we felt the grief rise up through our bodies and threaten to overwhelm us. Finally, we pressed and we kissed the words into our children because the stories of their ancestors will help them write their own.

Standing outside the new Jaffna Public Library, on the hard, red earth of our ancestral homeland, I felt completely at home, while completely dispossessed of home. And I felt the yearning I always feel to return home to Australia and begin a new story.

Shankari Chandran's most recent book is *Song of the Sun God* and she is also the author of *Chai Time at Cinnamon Gardens*. Both are published by Ultimo Press.

WORDS **Millie Thomas**

Festive baking time

Shortbread

¾-lb. flour
¼-lb. ground rice
½-lb. butter
¼-lb. of sugar
1 yolk of egg

Work all together thoroughly with the hand. When well incorporated, roll to the thickness of ½-in. Cut into shape. Bake on buttered paper in a moderate oven for 20 minutes. Place carefully to cool.

For as long as I can remember, I have baked Christmas shortbread. Throughout the year, I save jars for the annual bake when I spend a day or two creating festively shaped shortbread biscuits for friends, family and colleagues. You could say I know my way around a biscuit. This is thanks to my late grandmother, Luffy, who always baked them when I visited her in New Zealand.

So, it didn't take a whole lot of convincing for me to try my hand at baking something festive from the Library's collection, and it was entirely unsurprising that the recipe I picked out was shortbread. It came from *The Keeyuga Cookery Book* by Henrietta C McGowan, published in 1911. Despite its vibrant cover, the no-nonsense recipes are straight to the point; there are no details when it comes to method, and certainly no handy tips or tricks. I will admit, though, it's refreshing to not have to trawl through a long-winded story blog to get to the recipe!

The first thing I noticed about McGowan's recipe was the egg yolk. While initially confusing, the reason for it became clear when I saw the flour-to-butter ratio. I can only speculate that the rather large amount of flour might be to do with ingredient availability at the time, but it made for a drier dough than I am used to. While I was tempted to pull out my usual Kenwood mixer to handle the kneading, the recipe specifically called for mixing by hand. So, I begrudgingly stuck my whole hand into the greasy butter and started working!

What I did do differently was to work the butter and sugar together first, before adding the flour (sifted of course) and yolk. Unless you're baking a cheesecake, it's generally a good idea to not throw everything together at once. I also swapped regular sugar for icing sugar for no other reason than I had so much of it on hand!

As I expected, the dough turned out quite dry and crumbly. A rolling pin wasn't going to be effective so, with a little persistence, I combined the mixture one small ball at a time and spread it thin by thumping it down with my fist. I was pleasantly surprised at how well the shapes kept together!

The recipe called for a 'moderate oven'. This surely speaks to the amount of knowledge that is assumed, but as a baker it makes sense. Every oven is different; 200 degrees in an electric oven is going to be hotter than 200 degrees in a gas oven, and even then there's room for variation. My general philosophy is that a little less heat, and a little less time, is never going to hurt. If the recipe calls for 30 minutes at 150 degrees, I'll be doing 20 minutes at 140 degrees. I am happy to report that for my parents' Miele oven, 18 minutes at 140 degrees was optimal!

They might not have quite the melting moment quality of Luffy's recipe, but I'm pleased to say that the biscuits came out rather well. A coarser texture, but still sweet and moreish!

Photo by Joy Lai

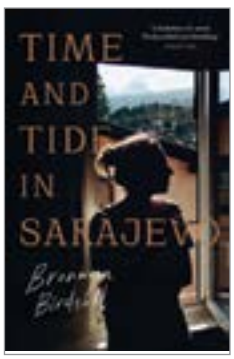
European Vision and the South Pacific

by Bernard Smith

Miegunyah Press

European Vision and the South Pacific is undoubtedly one of the most significant works of cultural history written in Australia. When it was first published in 1960, it was a startlingly original conceptualisation of the impact of the Pacific on European visual culture in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In this third edition from Miegunyah Press, 62 years later, its relevance remains undiminished; if anything, contemporary scholarship has caught up.

There was little to presage its publication. While not a history of Australian art per se, *European Vision* did closely engage with colonial art up until 1850 in a more sophisticated way than, say, William Moore's two-volume *The Story of Australian Art* (1933) or Herbert Badham's *A Study of Australian Art* (1949). Smith was forging his own path: art history was only established as an academic discipline in Australia after the Second World War. The sheer command of resources and scholarly depth of *European Vision* remain breathtaking: it has always struck me as the perfect argument for the long gestation for books. Smith began thinking about *European Vision* in 1945 when he was writing his first book on Australian art, *Place, Taste and Tradition*. Indeed, such a deeply considered work as *European Vision* could probably



Time and Tide in Sarajevo

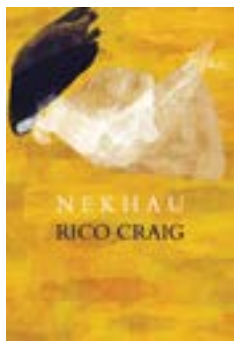
by Bronwyn Birdsall

Affirm Press

Bronwyn Birdsall's *Time and Tide in Sarajevo* felt like a quick immersion into the heart of the city. The novel comes with a good taste of the local politics and of change and stasis in a present still influenced by the siege of the 1990s. I think it has that immediacy because it draws on the author's personal experience of the city.

The book circles around an incident in which a teenager has been murdered, but the tension is more about the wider ripples that this tragic event threatens to cause, and the interconnectedness of people in the city. The main character is a young Australian teacher, Evelyn, finding her way and starting to feel like she belongs, but this also creates feelings of obligation to those who have employed her, befriended her and offered her hospitality. The teacher is drawn into the crime and the novel becomes gripping as her talented young students have their promising futures threatened.

Cathy Hammer



Nekhau

by Rico Craig

Recent Work Press

These affective poems weave through a present, the past and possible futures with a fondness for water, dreams, light, skin and love, especially of the romantic kind. The iconography of fish amulets (nekhau) from Ancient Egypt, plaited in the hair to protect wearers from drowning, links narratives and imagery across the collection.

There is a surrealistic slant in the passionate imagery, with repeated phrases and symbols circling around fish, drowning, nights, bodies and words: 'I've been gathering/the hands we left hidden in our pockets, words lingering/in lungs/all our parched bones.' Some poems capture a dystopian world, still recognisable but made strange. The local and suburban, with rubbish bins and pot plants, are glimpsed among the mythological. In style and voice the poems are similar, many written in the first person. *Nekhau* captures the feeling of waking from a dream and finding something vital has altered or disappeared.

Jane Gibian

not be written on today's academic treadmill of publishing or perishing.

European Vision was positively reviewed from the moment it was published. Its excellence was immediately apparent. The first copy I owned — heavily annotated, as to be expected for a foundation text of anyone writing in this area — was an Oxford University Press paperback, subtitled *A study in the history of art and ideas*, which seems to have been discarded in later editions. It was reprinted by Yale University Press in a second edition, in 1985, which integrated its extensive illustrations into the text.

This third edition from Miegunyah Press, instigated by Dr Sheridan Palmer to 'reframe this important work for a new audience and a new generation', begins with a brief and thoughtful introduction by Palmer, and Professor Greg Lehman, which argues that Smith's 'investigation of art, science and imperialism not only explored the conditions of frontier contact, it opened up the dialogue on decolonisation, allowing us to "think beyond or after it."' Smith's cross-cultural, interdisciplinary arguments are extraordinarily prescient in today's postcolonial scholarship.

Unfortunately, however, this smartly produced edition is devoid of nearly all of its original illustrations. Palmer reports that it was 'not practical to use all of Smith's extensive number of illustrations', which is very disappointing in an art-historical text that draws on a diversity of unfamiliar imagery that cannot be easily located elsewhere. Much is made instead of Valerie Sparks' moody and striking *Prospero's Island — South West*, reproduced on the forbidding cover, which is said to deal with 'themes of displacement and globalisation': relevant concepts certainly to Smith's work, but poor compensation for the lack of images.

Despite these significant reservations, it is still a pleasure to have new generations of readers introduced to one of Australia's most enduring and important books.

Richard Neville

Against Disappearance: Essays on memory

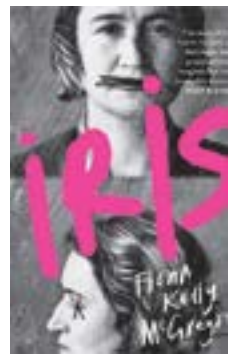
Edited by Leah Jing McIntosh and Adolfo Aranjuez

Pantera Press

Against Disappearance features 20 longlisted essays from the 2021 Liminal and Pantera Press Non-Fiction Prize. The complexities of history, memory and identity course through this collection by First Nations writers and writers of colour.

Split into three parts — 'Inheritances', 'Archives' and 'Opacities' — the essays share many overlapping themes that tie together beautifully. 'Inheritances' is a meditation on communing with your past. In 'Archives', writers reckon with the power of recorded history and challenge singular narratives of the past, while 'Opacities' goes deeper into the slippery connections between place and identity. Bursting at the seams with a fierce originality, *Against Disappearance* is a gorgeous showcase of the future of Australian writing.

Annie Tong



Iris

by Fiona Kelly McGregor

Picador

Iris tiptoes across a tightrope, balancing the nuance of Sydney's history with a bombastic style that sprints through the city's streets. Named after the titular Iris Webber, the book examines the life of 'the most violent woman in Sydney' with a delicate clarity that reaches beyond the headlines. Instead, McGregor weaves between the lines to offer a more personal look at a woman wrestling with a world that never quite lets her in.

Beginning within the four walls of a police interrogation room, the novel bursts out into the rich and complex underbelly of the 1930s. McGregor juxtaposes the intimate moments of Iris' self-determination with a maze of opportunities and individuals that threaten to take the tram off its tracks. While the pages leave little reprieve, now when I walk through the streets of Sydney I find myself looking past each corner for the same signs Iris once saw.

Luke Stefanac

WORDS **Jennifer O'Callaghan**

Surf shooters catching a wave

A recently acquired vintage photograph by an influential early-twentieth-century photographer shows one of the first depictions of bodysurfing. Harold Cazneaux's photograph 'Surf shooters catching a wave', taken around 1929 at Bondi Beach, is a close-up action view of around 20 'surf shooters' riding a wave together through the foam, their arms outstretched. The iconic image, which captures the physicality of what we now call bodysurfing, reflects Australia's burgeoning love of beaches and outdoor, summer recreation. At the time, it was only the brave who dared to 'shoot the breakers' and even fewer did so on boards.

During the early twentieth century, bathers flocked in great numbers to beaches, as cities became more congested, roads and transport improved, and restrictions on men and women swimming in public were lifted. There was a resulting increase in drownings and accidents because, as much as swimming was becoming glorified, many novice bathers hadn't yet learnt how to do it. In 1907, the first lifesaving club opened in Bondi, and later that year the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales was established. However, many beachgoers still preferred to splash in the shallows or sunbathe, as it was called, on the sand. It was only the 'young and strong' who would venture out into the surf.

Cazneaux took a series of beach photographs that featured in the March issue of the popular *The Home* magazine in 1929; this one may have been part of the same series. His photographs accompanied an article written by Jean Curlewis, daughter of writer Ethel Turner, 'The Race on the Sands: Showing What Surf and Sun are Doing for the Inhabitants of the Australian Coastline', which featured scenes of sunbathers, crowds in the shallows and 'surf shooters' at Bondi Beach.

Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953) was a pioneer photographer whose pictorialist style influenced Australian photographic history. Born in New Zealand, he settled in Sydney in 1904 and started exhibiting his work at the Photographic Society of New South Wales. By 1909 he had his first solo exhibition, which was also the first solo exhibition of photographs staged in Australia. He was a founding member of the Sydney Camera Circle in 1916, and the leading photographer for *The Home* magazine from the early 1920s. *The Home: The Australian Journal of Quality* was designed to reflect modern trends and Cazneaux's photographs captured the spirit of the times. As a regular contributor to national and international exhibitions, photographic societies and journals, Cazneaux was unfaltering in his desire to promote photography. His own photographs are considered to be some of the most memorable images of the early twentieth century in Australia.

This rare, vintage photographic print is titled and signed by the photographer. It is an iconic view, quite different to Cazneaux's other beach images and a notable addition to the Library's extensive twentieth-century photography collections. It's also a wonderful celebration of summer.

Jennifer O'Callaghan is a Specialist Librarian.

Surf shooters catching a wave, Bondi, c 1929, vintage silver gelatin photoprint. Photo by Harold Cazneaux

BILLYCART BOYS

Photo by Sam Hood

WORDS **Megan Hicks**

A researcher finds that the catalogue doesn't always get it right

Who could not like this picture of a bunch of cheeky boys lined up for the camera with their hessian bags and billycarts full of wooden blocks? In the old days, carts like these were a necessary accompaniment to a boy's life. Descendants of goat carts (hence the name 'billy' cart), these long-handled boxes on wheels were used for family errands and newspaper runs, and for hauling around whatever it was that boys liked to haul around.

The photograph was taken in April 1935 and a digitised copy of it can be found in the State Library of NSW's Sam Hood 'Home and Away' collection. It has a title that I've always thought puzzling: 'Block boys at St Peters'. Sam Hood was a commercial photographer, already successful when he opened a studio in Sydney's Pitt Street in 1918, expanding his business from portraits and weddings to press photography and, later, advertising. Some years after his death in 1953, the Library purchased a huge collection of the studio's photographic negatives from Hood's family. Now digitised and publicly accessible, the 'Home and Away' collection is an astounding record of people, places, events and everyday life in Sydney during the first half of the twentieth century. It is exciting to learn that an even larger collection of Hood's photo prints and negatives, purchased by the Library more recently, is currently being digitised.

I came across the billycart picture some years ago while pursuing my interest in roads and pavements. I was dubious about the title 'Block boys' because I knew this term referred to the youths who were once employed to sweep Sydney's streets. The picture is popular and has been reproduced on history websites and Facebook pages; most repeat the misleading 'Block boys' title. Several years ago I even discovered that the décor at The Henson pub at Marrickville, in a nod to local history, includes a beautifully framed blow-up of the picture. It has a label stating that the boys 'are helping to build roads using a method called woodblocking'. Interesting, but not true. It turns out that even though the real story is just as interesting, it does not carry connotations of illegal child labour.

As an occasional volunteer cataloguer of a local history collection, I know how difficult and time-consuming it can be to write a meaningful explanation of an unidentified photograph. Possibly there are clues about when it was taken and where, and something in the picture might give a hint about what's going on. It's enormously rewarding to unlock the key to a photograph's story, but it's also easy to misinterpret the clues. I am quite sure that even professional curators and cataloguers experience similar difficulties, so I am careful when poring through image databases for my own research and keep in mind that catalogue indexes can't always be believed.

The images in the 'Home and Away' collection were each researched and indexed individually by Library staff, with the help of surviving studio registers and the assistance of Sam Hood's photographer son, Ted Hood. It must have been an enormous project. But when the boys and billycarts photograph was being named, I think the stumbling block may have been the woodblocks themselves. Somewhere along the line, the concepts of 'block' and 'block boys' and 'woodblocking' were elided and these kids were saddled with occupations they didn't actually have.

Looking for confirmation of my misgivings, I searched Australian newspapers, a task made possible by the National Library of Australia's wonderful Trove database. Sam Hood worked as a freelance press photographer for several newspapers and I found what I was looking for in the *Labor Daily* of 4 April 1935. On page 8, this very picture is reproduced under the heading 'Its An Ill Wind——' with this caption:

> Cement is replacing wood blocks on Cook's River Road, near St. Peters station, and the boys of the neighbourhood took advantage of the occasion to collect cartloads of fuel for the winter.

Bingo! The boys are not constructing a road. On the contrary, they have been hanging about while the road is broken up so they can collect the discarded woodblocks and cart them home. Incidentally, that thoroughfare in St Peters is no longer called Cook's River Road but is now part of the Princes Highway running south from Sydney.

Woodblocks were once the preferred material for paving the streets of Sydney. Until the late 1800s, roadways were generally unsealed but the 1890s saw woodblocking come into widespread use by municipal councils. Hardwood blocks steeped in tar were laid like bricks, hammered close together and top-dressed with more tar. By the 1920s, this method of road building was no longer used and councils started ripping up the worn woodblocks and replacing them with asphalt or concrete, often in large-scale Depression-era programs that provided employment for out-of-work men. The project went on for well over a decade. Those tar-impregnated woodblocks would have burnt well and they were prized by householders as free fuel for fires and stoves. The Sam Hood picture was taken during the hard times of the 1930s and the local boys are contributing to their families' wellbeing in a practical way.

There are several other photographs in the Library's collection that were taken by Hood on the same day. Even though there has probably been some staging for the camera, these give a clearer idea of what is going on — workmen with pickaxes are prising up woodblocks from the road beside the tramlines; a cluster of boys, and a girl as well, are milling about ready to purloin them. No doubt similar scenes played out wherever woodblocked streets in the city or suburbs were being rebuilt.

So who were the real block boys? From the late 1800s, the City of Sydney employed a small army of youths to sweep up the tonnes of manure deposited by horses on the city's streets. Officially known as 'block boys' because each was assigned to a city block, they were also jokingly called 'sparrow starvers'. But by the early 1930s, the coveted job of block boy had been phased out. Motorised vehicles outnumbered horse-drawn vehicles and it became unsafe for youths darting in and out of traffic with their brooms and wheeled scoops. Of course there was less manure to clean up too, so street cleansing was subsumed into the more generalised duties of the council's other outdoor workers.

Streetscapes all over Sydney were changing during the 1920s and 1930s as roadways — and the vehicles that drove on them — changed. In the heart of the city the once-familiar patrols of block boys began to disappear, while ragtag troops of boys with billycarts and gunny sacks stood by to grab the woodblocks that the block boys might once have swept.

Megan Hicks researches and writes about public space with a particular interest in paved roadways and footpaths and the stories embedded in them.

Photo by Sam Hood

WORDS **Lisa Murray**

I feel like a Tooheys ... or two

Research in the Library's manuscripts collection can be thirsty work. Especially when the records you are researching are beer related. The *Tooheys Limited collection* comprises some 300 volumes of business records covering the period 1881–1979 and extends over 60 shelves. It has been an untapped resource in the Library's collection but is now beginning to reveal its riches.

If you drank a beer in a pub in New South Wales prior to 1980, likely as not your ale, lager, stout, pilsner or bitter would have been manufactured by either Tooheys Limited or Tooth & Co (with Reschs becoming part of Tooth & Co in 1929). The hotel you were in would have been tied, or tethered, to a particular brewery and only that brewer's beers would be available on tap. This was called the 'Tied House' system. Draught beer loyalties were shaped, no doubt, partly by a drinker's taste, what their mates drank and the atmosphere of the pub. But the beer's availability was determined entirely by the breweries and the financial dependence they cultivated with publicans.

For the past 18 months, in and out of lockdowns, I have been immersing myself in the complicated world of beer manufacturing and retailing through Tooheys' tied hotels. Big leather- and cloth-bound ledgers, made up of hundreds and hundreds of pages of double-entry bookkeeping, track financial commitments and obligations, profits and losses. My impression is that today's accountants have it easy compared to the manual world of running a business in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Each week I would don my cotton gloves and pinafore to carefully turn the pages and puzzle over financial records, publicans' names and hotel addresses. As the subject matter and role of each ledger became apparent, so too did Tooheys' ambitions to grab market share through the expansion of their network of tied hotels across the state.

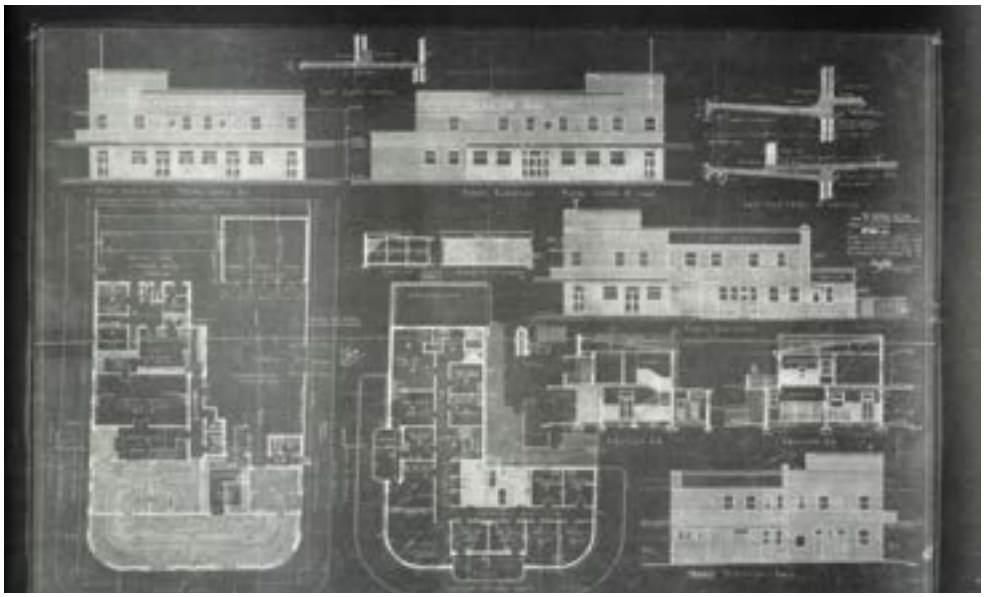
Most of the Tooheys records that break down financials according to individual hotels relate to money advanced to publicans. This system of private mortgages to publicans leveraged the whole 'Tied House' system. The advance ledgers were critical financial records for the company, and these ledgers also contain basic information about publicans and leases.

So how did the 'Tied House' system work? The breweries advanced money to assist publicans to purchase a hotel lease and licence, or to renovate the hotel, provide new furniture or install a beer-cooling plant. Publicans entered into agreements with Tooheys Limited to pay back the advanced amount in instalments across the lease term, at a fixed interest rate. In return, the brewery was guaranteed that the publican would deal wholly and solely with the company for all their beverages: beers (both draught and bottled), wines, spirits and other liquors, cordials, and mineral and aerated waters.

To understand pub culture in New South Wales, and its relationship to the major breweries, it is necessary to understand the changing face of the Tied House system. The Tooheys Limited collection at the Library is therefore a valuable new source of data that verifies the company's hotel interests and can be used to visually demonstrate Tooheys' market share and geographic clustering of hotels. Although Tooheys Limited was a clear second in terms of market share compared to the behemoth Tooth & Co, the brewery actively pursued market penetration in regional areas including Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, Orange in the central west, and the north coast. Tooheys were innovative in their products, packaging and marketing campaigns. They leveraged sporting connections and sponsorships to broaden their appeal, which ultimately led to the iconic MOJO advertising campaign of the 1980s 'I feel like a Tooheys ... or two'. Unlike its rival, Tooheys still exists as a major brand today and, following tradition, continues to brew at its second Sydney brewery in Auburn.

Dr Lisa Murray is the Library's 2021 Dr AM Hertzberg AO Fellow.

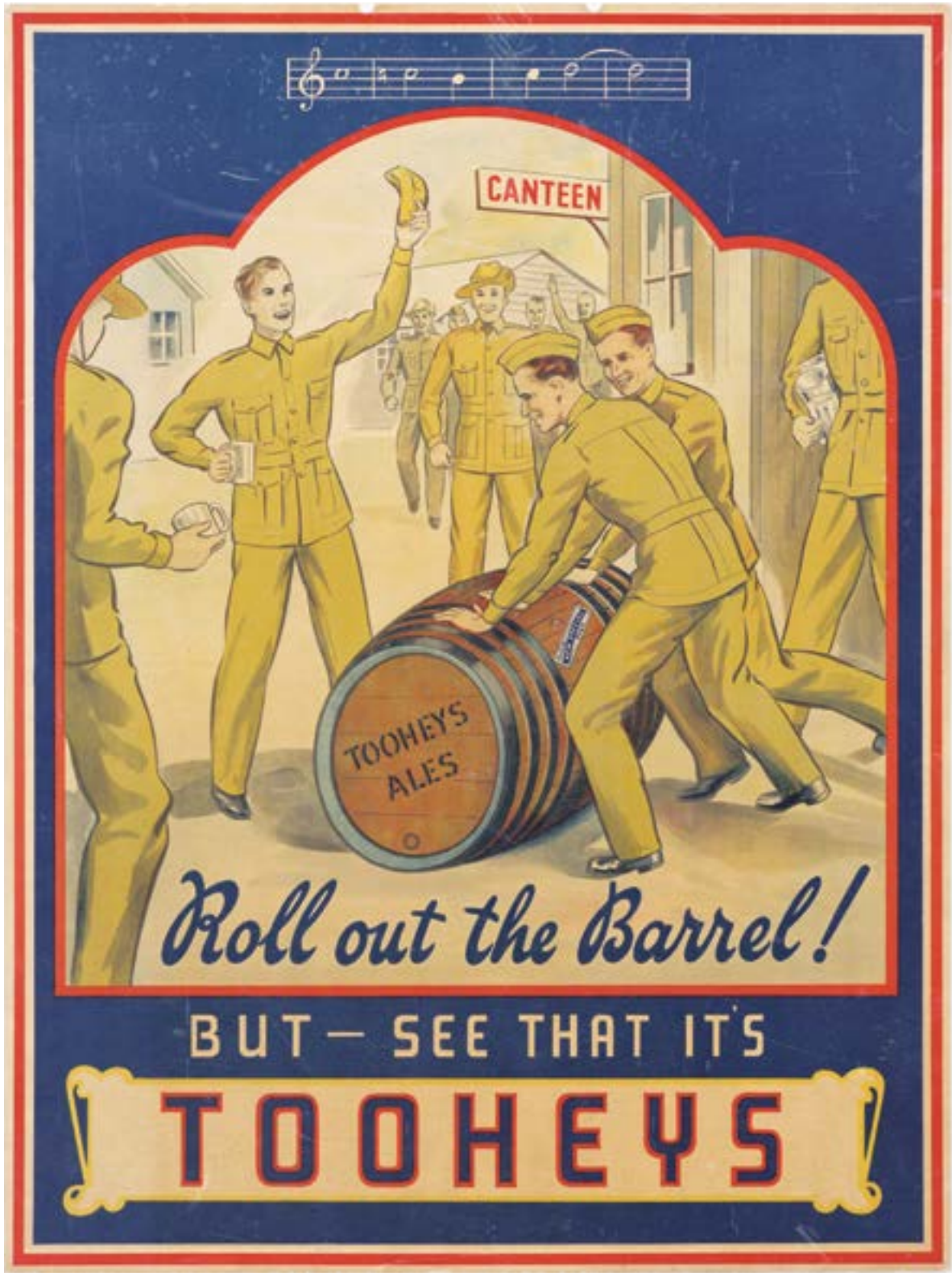
Tooheys projected a sophisticated image for their bottled beers in the early 1960s. Two women enjoy a summer's day on a modernist sun-terrace. Toohey's popular Flag Ale, poured in a stemmed glass, promised cool, glamorous refreshment. Beside it on the silver tray stood Toohey's Pilsner. This promotional photograph featured in the 1960 annual report.



Glasgow Arms Hotel – elevations and floor plans, Tooheys Limited records

A series of photographic negative prints of architectural plans are contained in a large volume — 201 plans in total, representing the 147 hotels that were renovated by Tooheys Limited between the 1920s and 1950s. The new modern Glasgow Arms Hotel in Carrington, Newcastle, a Tooheys tied-hotel from around 1916, was rebuilt by Tooheys Limited in 1939. The new hotel was built on a prominent island block across the street from the old premises. It was designed by the well-known Newcastle architectural firm Castleden & Sara in the modernist style, with geometric tiling beneath the concrete cantilever awning and a curved tower that addressed the corner. The hotel name was set projecting from the wall face, providing shadow and emphasis. The long curved public bar ran the 20 m length of Young Street, maximising serving capacity.

Glasgow Arms Hotel – interior of public bar



Tooheys secured defence contracts for supplying beer to overseas canteens and messes during the Second World War. This advertising poster from the 1940s referenced the popular polka song 'Roll out the Barrel', which became a smash hit during the Second World War. The barrel is labelled on the side 'Tooheys New Special beer', which was introduced in 1931.

Gumly Gumly, NSW.
Photo by Russell Perkins

WORDS **Russell Perkins**

Call history

I used a large-format camera and film, an analogue medium for an analogue device.

In the tiny village of Brungle, New South Wales, stands a phone booth. It is shrouded in morning mist and illuminated from within by a warm yellow glow. It's the classic rectangular box with an orange lid. Nothing stands behind it but acres of fields.

When I was returning from a family holiday in 2020, something about that phone booth piqued my interest. *You don't see those too often these days.* That sentiment lingered as we returned home and soon found ourselves at the beginning of a global pandemic and a national lockdown. Although, actually, you do see phone booths around. There's one around the corner and up the street from where I live. You may pass by a few on your commute to work. After a bit of research, my thoughts about not seeing them frequently morphed into *we don't pay any attention these days.*

My photographic project, *Call History*, is a personal one. I wanted to pay tribute to these metal and glass boxes that continue to provide the same essential service they have for decades. I focused on their locations throughout New South Wales, and documented their place alongside other local services — typically, post offices and pubs. I used a large-format camera and film, an analogue medium for an analogue device.

I want to document phone booths as they have stood, before they are either removed or transformed with contemporary technology. Each time I arrive at a location, I consider its history, the characters who have fed in coins and picked up the handset to place a call, and what those calls may have been about. As the project builds, I will reach out to Telstra to discover what payphone data they have for these locations.

Payphones reached their peak in the early 1990s when there were reportedly more than 80,000 of them throughout Australia. We built infrastructure around them, installed footpaths, handrails, fencing and streetlights to keep their patrons safe. By August 2022, there were around 12,000 payphones spread across Australia.

The humble phone booth still plays a critical role. In times of natural disasters, such as Australia's most recent bushfires and floods, they provide a critical link for people to let family and friends know they are safe. In 2020, even during a global pandemic, Australians made 11 million calls via payphones; 230,000 were calls to emergency services such as triple zero. For remote communities, they serve as a vital communication tool between families. They act as lifelines for those in need of communications that are not connected to the home, such as sufferers of domestic abuse. In mid-2021, Telstra made calls from its phone booths free.

The decline of the phone booth as a technological service cannot be refuted. But this does not mean that access to communications from the places where booths currently reside will become extinct. Telstra plans to convert as many phone booths as possible into free Wi-Fi hubs, accessible for all, building upon the communications services these booths have provided for over 30 years.

I'm excited to continue working on *Call History* over the coming years as opportunities arise to travel across the state. It's definitely not a project I will be putting on hold.

Russell Perkins is a photographer, and one of the Library's digitisation and imaging officers. While he is privileged to use some of the most advanced digital technology available at work, he has an affinity for film photography and analogue cameras when pursuing his own personal photography projects.

Bogan Gate, NSW.
Photo by Russell Perkins

Alectown, NSW.
Photo by Russell Perkins

Melanie La'Brooy

Openbook asked writer Melanie La'Brooy about the experience of shifting genres.

THE WINTRISH GIRL IS YOUR FIRST NOVEL FOR CHILDREN, AFTER FIVE SUCCESSFUL ADULT NOVELS. WHAT PROMPTED THE CHANGE?

I've done lots of different kinds of writing throughout my life; aside from my romantic comedy novels, I also used to write political columns for *The Age*. *The Wintrish Girl* is an action-packed adventure set in a magical world, for readers aged 8–12, but, in many ways, it's not a drastic change from my previous work. All the hallmarks of my writing are there: snappy dialogue, humour, and a deep interest in politics and social justice. The book is filled with fantasy elements, of course — magic, fabulous creatures and impossible escapes. But it also tackles real-world issues: racism, fractured families, unjust power systems and gender stereotypes. (The main male character's 'superpower' is kindness and there's a princess who has to save herself.) My aim was to write a funny, exciting story that would spark thinking on serious issues.

IN YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS YOU SAY IT WAS THE HARDEST BOOK YOU HAVE WRITTEN. HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO CREATE THIS EXTRAORDINARY FANTASY WORLD, AND TO WRITE IT?

I already had a well-stocked novelist's toolkit: I knew how to structure and plot, and writing dialogue is one of my favourite things in the world — I can do that all day. But I'd never written action scenes or had to embed clues that would lead to revelations in future books. (*The Wintrish Girl* is the first book in a planned series.) The most difficult element, by far, was the world building. I failed many times before I finally got it right. When you invent an entire world, you have to consider *everything:* geography, history, laws, how magic works, the system of government, dress, what dragons eat ... It's endlessly fascinating — but also endless! Slowly, my Empire of Arylia filled up with fantastical places like the Librarynth, a cross between a library and a labyrinth, and invented creatures such as Gargoths, Bundlers and Smungles. Sadly for them, the Smungles solved the problem of what dragons eat.

DID ANY OF THE BOOKS YOU READ WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD YOURSELF, INCLUDING FANTASTICAL ONES, COME BACK TO YOU AS YOU WERE WRITING THIS ONE?

Yes, absolutely. Like every other bookworm kid, I loved the Narnia books, but my heart truly belonged to *The Chronicles of Prydain* by Lloyd Alexander. *The Black Cauldron, The Book of Three, Taran Wanderer* ... there are five books in that series and I loved them all. I set out to create something with a similar feel: a high-fantasy quest where a band of misfits journeys through a fantastical land. *The Wintrish Girl* is funnier and more irreverent though, because I subvert and poke fun at a lot of fantasy tropes. I'm definitely more influenced by Terry Pratchett than Tolkien.

PENN, THE HEROINE AND THE 'WINTRISH GIRL' OF THE TITLE, WHO LIVES IN ARYLIA, IS DISTINGUISHED BY HER GREY HAIR. YOU OBVIOUSLY HAVE FUN PUSHING AGAINST THE IDEA THAT THE WAY WE LOOK DOESN'T HAVE TO DETERMINE OUR DESTINY, BUT IT MAKES A SERIOUS POINT AS WELL, DOESN'T IT?

What really determines our destiny is a fundamental theme of the entire series. Eleven-year-old Penn is certain that the brown skin and grey hair that mark her out as one of the Wintrish, a cursed traitor race, will forever condemn her to a miserable fate as a lonely servant. But Penn discovers that she has far more control and influence over her own destiny than she has been brought up to believe. She's also wrong to think that her race is the only reason she's not in control of her fate. She gradually realises that the Arylian kids, born into privilege and power, are also imprisoned by a system that doesn't allow them to choose their own destinies.

HOW HAVE YOUNG READERS — INCLUDING YOUR OWN CHILDREN — RESPONDED TO YOUR BOOK?

I've already had lots of messages demanding to know when Book 2 is going to be released, which is a very good sign! I do school visits and the feedback from kids there has been amazing. Several schools have contacted me to tell me that their students are reading the book together in class and discussing the issues it raises, which fills my heart with happiness!

My own kids were a huge help — they were ruthless in telling me if they didn't like something, insisted that certain jokes not be cut and picked up on things that adult readers entirely missed. In one draft, for example, I had a place called the Bone Pit until my youngest son pointed out that was the same name as a fighting arena in a popular video game. My knowledge of video games is non-existent so this insight was invaluable.

ONE MAJOR PLOT DEVICE IN THE BOOK IS TALISMAN DAY, WHERE EVERY CHILD IS GIVEN AN OBJECT THAT IMPARTS SPECIAL POWERS AND REVEALS THEIR DESTINY. DO YOU HAVE YOUR OWN TALISMAN?

My writing talisman is the battered old thesaurus that belonged to my grandmother. She used it to do cryptic crosswords, which she loved. It has all these old, almost extinct words and phrases that never pop up on the modern thesaurus on my computer. The font is so tiny I have to read it with an extra-bright light and a magnifying glass. It's held together with tape, but I would never consider getting a new one.

However, I was bequeathed this thesaurus as an adult — it didn't choose my destiny for me! This is one of the crucial themes of *The Wintrish Girl*; while the idea of magical Talismans seems very exciting at the start to kids — pull a sword out of the Casket of Fate and you'll become a great warrior! A compass means you're destined to be a famous explorer! — by the end of the book it's clear that the Talisman Ceremony is flawed and open to manipulation. I wanted readers to question a system that tells kids what they will be when they grow up, rather than letting them choose their own path.

YOUR BIO SAYS YOU'VE LIVED IN AFRICA, ASIA, EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST. IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU THINK ALL THESE PLACES HAVE INFORMED YOUR WRITING?

For the past 12 years, we've been fortunate to live and travel all over the world so I have an incredible trove of unusual experiences and a flow of new ideas to draw on. I know what minus-25 degrees feels like, I've heard the noise a cheetah makes in the wild (it sounds like a bird) and I had the opportunity to meet someone who lived through the Cultural Revolution in China. But I think living in different cultures has impacted my writing the most through a feeling of being an outsider. Being a perpetual observer is an incredibly useful experience for a writer. I'm constantly taking mental notes.

THIS IS LABELLED *TALISMANS OF FATE BOOK 1*. WHEN CAN YOUNG READERS EXPECT THE SECOND BOOK IN THE SERIES?

Book 2 is scheduled to come out towards the end of 2023, assuming that everything goes smoothly, which is not always the case when it comes to any creative endeavour! I'm currently writing a chapter where a rescue attempt has gone horribly wrong and Penn has toppled headfirst into a deadly muddy swamp. I have absolutely no idea what's going to happen next — the best part about being a storyteller. Where's the fun and adventure in any quest if you already know the ending?

Melanie La'Brooy.
Photo by Stu Williamson Photography

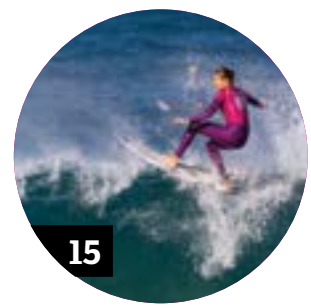
20 questions

1. Which First Nations Country are you on if you're in Bathurst or WaggaWagga, NSW?
(a) Bundjalung (b) Kamilaroi (c) Wiradjuri
2. Name the Australian poet whose book *Songs of Love and Life* was published in 1917.
3. How many visits to Australia did Queen Elizabeth II make?
(a) 10 (b) 16 (c) 20
4. What year did women gain the right to vote in Australian federal elections?
(a) 1894 (b) 1902 (c) 1904
5. What are the ingredients of a negroni cocktail?
6. What was the title of the second novel in Hilary Mantel's Cromwell trilogy?
7. Which NSW town is known for its ancient fish traps?
And what river runs through the town?
8. Name the two presenters of the ABC Radio National program *The Bookshelf*.
9. Hélène Bessette's *La Route Bleu* was published by which French publisher?
10. What film received eight awards including best film at the 2021 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Awards?
11. Which colonial figure has Australian writer Kate Grenville based a novel on and compiled a collection of letters?
12. Which Australian picture book author–illustrator won an Academy Award in 2011 for best animated short film?
13. Which three Australian writers were given state funerals in 1922, 1962 and 2019?
14. Who was the first Muslim woman to enter any Australian parliament?
15. Which Australian surfer has won the women's world championship a record eight times?
16. What are the titles of the two most recent novels by First Nations author Melissa Lucashenko?
17. Which singer is headlining the Sydney WorldPride23 opening concert in The Domain?
18. Which well-known Australian writer performed in the play *Betty Can Jump* in Melbourne in 1972?
19. What is the name of the author of *Aunts Up the Cross*, who died in 2022?
20. A character in which Virginia Woolf novel inspired Michelle Cahill's *Daisy and Woolf*?

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


5


6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14

Drinks are on us!

We're giving one lucky new subscriber the chance to win an evening at the Library Bar with five of their closest friends.

With its spectacular views of the Harbour and across the Domain, the Library Bar is the place to be this summer! Enjoy sunset cocktails on the bar's newly extended observation deck. The prize includes drinks and nibbles in your very own VIP area.

To be in the running to win, simply subscribe to *Openbook* or become a Friend of the Library by 19 December 2022.

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Book cover detail, *Circle*, Jeannie Baker, 2012–16

IMAGINE ...

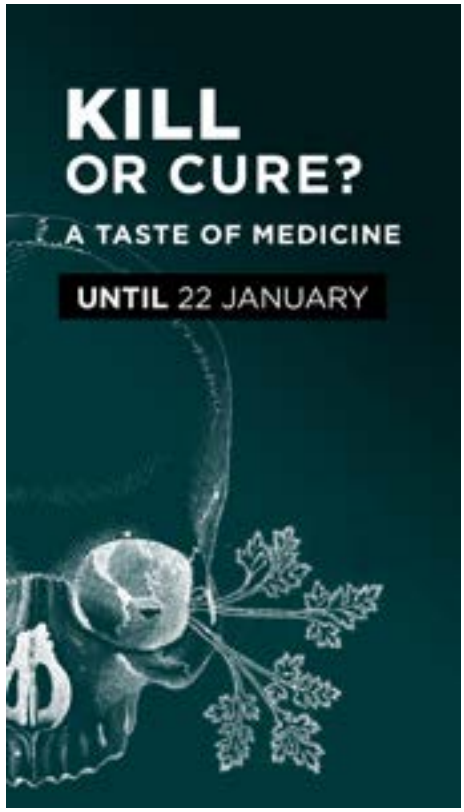
THE WONDER OF PICTURE BOOKS

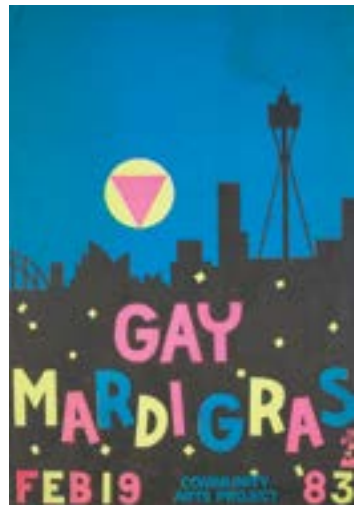
UNTIL 9 JULY

KOORI KNOCKOUT

UNTIL 24 AUGUST

Photo by Barbara McGrady





1983 Mardi Gras poster, Allan Booth

PRIDE [R]EVOLUTION

FROM **18 FEB**

Openbook magazine is published quarterly by the State Library of NSW

Summer 2022
ISSN: 2652-8878 (Online)
ISSN: 2652-886X (Print)
E&D-5919/2022

COVER PHOTOGRAPH
George Byrne
Lap Swimmer, 2021
Courtesy the artist & Olsen Gallery

EDITOR
Phillipa McGuinness

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

DESIGN & PRODUCTION
Evi O Studio

SUSTAINABILITY
Printed in Australia by IMMIJ Group using Spicers Paper Monza Recycled Hi Gloss 250 gsm and Monza Recycled Satin 115 gsm. This paper stock is FSC® certified and is made from 100% recycled post-consumer waste.

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Christopher Street Liberation Day, NYC
1977 Photo by David McDiarmid

DAVID McDIARMID

'The Air is Electric': David McDiarmid in America. Exhibition at Bondi Pavilion Gallery

10 FEB–26 MAR

Sydney Living Museums

QUEER IN WARRANE PROJECTIONS

22–26 **FEB**

Still Here and Thriving by Dylan Mooney to be projected onto Hyde Park

Ben Graetz as Miss Ellaneous. Photo by Anna Kucera

SYDNEY WORLDPRIDE 2023

A global family reunion of LGBTQIA+ people and their allies, coming to Sydney.

sydneyworldpride.com/events

17 FEB–5 MAR

LIBERATE!

Celebrates 45 years of community-led social change Exhibition at Customs House

FROM **17 FEB**

C Moore Hardy, *Lemons*, Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras 1997, City of Sydney

Map of the Pacific, for American President Lines. Drawing completed around 1939, by Lucienne Bloch


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> All liberty required was that the space for discourse itself be protected.

Salman Rushdie, *Joseph Anton*

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ISSN 2652-886X