openbook

Pip Williams
profile

Suzie Miller
library that made me

Luke Patterson
poem

Eda Gunaydin
self-portrait

WINTER 2023

Flooding along the Hawkesbury River, on 31 March 2022 (detail). The flood level reached an average of more than 13 metres and was the catchment's wettest nine-day period since records began.

From series *Australian Floods in Infrared*

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.

Photograph from *Here, The Doors Don't Know Me*
© Mohamed Mahdy

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Illustration by Rosie Handley

Why so much Shakespeare, doth you ask?

Creativity does not necessarily require an easel, a quill or an elusive muse transmitting inspiration from some mysterious realm. As novelist Charlotte Wood writes in her book on creativity, *The Luminous Solution*, 'The joys, fears and profound self-discoveries of creativity — through making or building anything that wasn't there before, any imaginative exploration or attempt to invent — I believe to be the birthright of every person on this earth.'

A library full of books in bindings new and old, with manuscripts published and not, and countless photos, drawings, paintings, letters, maps and plans is surely the ultimate repository of creativity. Winter *Openbook* analyses creativity, but mainly celebrates and promotes it. Ashley Kalagian Blunt's essay focuses attention on whether engaging in creative activity, and even the act of reading itself, might nourish our physical and mental health. Another writer, Adele Dumont, starts a drawing class and reflects on how it makes her see the world, and her own creative practice, differently.

Bookbinding is another theme that evolved serendipitously. Even though I am a former book publisher, I confess that my knowledge of the long history of bookbinding was, well, loose. My Library colleague Mathilde de Hauteclocque introduces us to Isabelle McGowan, a busy bookbinder who is a master of the craft. She happens to be Mathilde's own teacher, and readers who wish to follow in the footsteps of the Library's long history of book-making will have a chance to see and learn from Isabelle up close here on 26 August. Nicole Abadee profiles bestselling author Pip Williams in this issue — I had commissioned this piece before realising that her new novel, *The Bookbinder of Jericho*, really is about bookbinding. What's more, the novel starts with its protagonist folding printed pages of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* for binding.

Winter *Openbook* has not one, but two, essays about Shakespeare, both unexpected in their own ways. Scholar Stuart Kells engages in some Shakespearean myth-busting and John Zubrzycki writes about Australian troupes who performed Shakespeare's plays across Asia, particularly India. Why so much Shakespeare, doth you ask? *Openbook* hardly needs an excuse, but it's the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's First Folio and, of course, the State Library of NSW holds the only copy of it in Australia. The Folio will be on display from July as part of the Library's broader celebration of the Bard. Meanwhile another poet, Gamilaroi man Luke Patterson, weaves counterfactual possibilities in his playful but raw poem.

So sing, paint, cook, write, sew, garden, sculpt, perform. Or just stare into space and let your imagination wander. Because as this rich issue of *Openbook* reminds us, our creative potential is boundless.

Phillipa McGuinness

***Openbook* Editor**

Quiz answers page 90 **1.** Champagne **2.** Nutmeg is the national symbol of Grenada **3.** The suitcase she had when she emigrated from England **4.** The logo of the Matterhorn can no longer be used as the bars are now being manufactured outside of Switzerland **5.** The hardness of minerals, from 1 to 10 **6.** The warmth of the sun in winter **7.** Owl and Lion **8.** Eyebrows **9.** Vermilion **10.** *Yellowstone* **11.** *The Winter's Tale* **12.** The temperature at which books burn **13.** Pieter Bruegel the Elder **14.** The 2023 Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play, for *Prima Facie* **15.** The Sargasso Sea in the Atlantic Ocean **16.** Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs **17.** One – the State Library of NSW **18.** Mustafa Kemal Atatürk **19.** a) 1960s, specifically 1965, in the US **20.** Currency, including coins, tokens, paper money, medals and related objects

openbook *obsessions*

Inspired by Shakespeare

Above: Pages from *Shakespeare in the Forest*, by Jennifer Gibney

Above right: The cast of *Succession*. Courtesy Alamy

These two images represent two artworks that could hardly be more different.

The first is an artist's book in ink and watercolour, drawn and painted on handmade paper with deckled edges. Held by the Library, *Shakespeare in the Forest* is the work of artist Jennifer Gibney, who lives and works in Victoria's High Country. The phrase 'My soul is in the sky', comes from Bottom's mock-heroic lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Or, as a teenager might say in response to something hilarious, 'I'm dead.'

The other image shows the cast of HBO's *Succession*. The series may be about a venal billionaire media mogul and his family, but the title evokes a ferocious battle (over four seasons, rather than four acts) to be king. Or queen.

This Shakespearean-style drama is about power. About preparing for battles that take place not on bloody fields but in boardrooms and private jets, at country estates and Tuscan villas and in the back of chauffeured limousines. Together, Logan Roy, the aged, shrewd but occasionally confused patriarch, his children with their shifting allegiances and all the loyal lieutenants and hangers-on, evoke *King Lear* perhaps more than any other play.

But the line that we are reminded of most often is this one, spoken by Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*: 'The villainy you teach me I will execute.'

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN VALLANCE

State Librarian John Vallance has announced his retirement. *Openbook* editor Phillipa McGuinness invited him to reflect on his tenure at the Library. Here he is in his own words.

WHAT DID YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WHEN YOU STARTED AS STATE LIBRARIAN SIX YEARS AGO?

To open up the Library as far as possible to serve the whole community. For many years the State Library had been seen primarily as a research library. It is, of course, but it is so much more.

It seemed to me that the Library was an unsung treasure that, in a paradoxical way, had its back to the community that loves it. I wanted to see things turned around. One way of doing that was to try and reach a point where anyone off the street, even if they're not a researcher, reader or a writer, could wander around and get a sense of what sort of place it was, what sort of things we had in our collections. And be made welcome.

We're still in the early stages of realising this ambition to open up, to improve access — of course it's not the work of any one individual. In technical terms, this ambition has involved some complex work — improving the public wi-fi and digital access systems, developing the online catalogues through the Collection Experience Project, supporting the development of the National edeposit scheme, Trove, expanding our physical and digital conservation and preservation capacity, expanding public programs, the John B Fairfax Learning Centre, the Children's Library and so on.

Finally, I was keen to improve relations with the thousands of philanthropists and benefactors whose support for us is as close to altruistic as I've seen in a cultural institution. Members of our Foundation aren't trying to buy social prestige — they simply love the Library.

Throughout my time I've had the benefit of an extremely supportive Library Council. So the scene was set from the start.

WHAT ABOUT THE REFURBISHMENT OF THE MITCHELL READING ROOM?

I really wanted to see the Mitchell Reading Room restored to something close to its original appearance. I never liked the 1980s hole in the floor. I thought that the old carpet tiles were ugly. And the furniture ... at one point in the 1990s there were all these old metal filing cabinets. We seemed to have lost respect for the beauty of the room. There was also a sense that in order to keep up with the rest of the world, you had to fill the place with technology. I had thought for a long time that this didn't reflect what the community at large thinks about its oldest library. There was a high-profile campaign when I was on the Library Council in 2014 about retaining the Mitchell Reading Room as it was, rather than moving special collections into what's now the Gallery Room.

Photo by Annie Tong

DID THE SUCCESS OF THAT CAMPAIGN GALVANISE YOU WHEN YOU BECAME STATE LIBRARIAN?

Yes, it did. Well, first, I was pleased to see that people really did love the Reading Room as much as I did. We weren't just mouthing elitist platitudes about beauty and tradition. Secondly, that people really do like physical books, and reading. You only need to go to a bookshop or join a book club to see that people adore reading and holding books in their hands. The book is not dead — it was never going to be dead. I remember when I was an academic at Cambridge in the 1990s, there were people in my college saying that the physical book would not exist in a few years and that libraries wouldn't need to be big anymore. All you needed was a screen and a hard disk. It's hard to imagine people ever getting things more wrong.

I remember there were iterations of the Mitchell Reading Room during the 1980s where it was all broken up with little carrells — as they were called then — cubicles like you might find in a polling booth. There was a computer in each one and this was called innovation. Today, the Reading Room is generally full of people, nearly all under the age of 25. They've got laptops of course, but it's a plain room with fine furniture and lovely new carpet. And it's full. There are more tables — its capacity has increased by about 70 or 80 seats.

TELL ME ABOUT THE CRITICS' PICKS SHELVES.

There are still people who think they have had a State Librarian who's not a librarian himself and therefore didn't get it, but I hope I've been able to bring a fresh pair of eyes to the business of actually *using* the Library. I knew that a lot of people felt that it was the sort of place you could use only if you knew what you wanted before you came. That's a problem. It's the same with all the big research libraries, for instance the British Library and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. You can't just drop in to browse. The trouble is, if you're going to be asking governments for more than $100 million a year of public money to support libraries across the state, they're going to need to be persuaded that there's broad public benefit. A pure research library on that model isn't going to fit that bill. Fortunately, there was no binary decision we had to take. You can have a great research library which is also accessible to a wide public.

Back in 2017, there were remarkably few books on public access. I thought it would be good if we could find a way of acquiring selected books that had been reviewed in the main English-language review journals. (And we are building collections in community languages.) We started looking at The *Sydney Review of Books*, the *Australian Book Review*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *London Review of Books* and began hoovering up books that were being published and reviewed. Colleagues developed a brilliant way of cataloguing them quickly and getting them out on the shelves.

Now we have a constantly refreshed collection of some of the most influential new books published in English around the world across all the discipline areas of interest to curious people. I don't know of another state library that does something quite like Critics' Picks. We've got two floors full, on public access, and then they go down to Stack Five after they've been out in the open air for a little while. So that's a general resource that the Library hadn't had in quite the same way before.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST WHEN YOU STARTED WORKING HERE AS STATE LIBRARIAN? GOOD AND BAD!

What surprised me most was ... it's complicated. My colleagues at the Library are experienced and professional and they have strong views about how things should be done. But at some level they'd been told that they couldn't take on major decisions or projects themselves. There was a culture of outsourcing important creative work. (In fact, I think that it happens across the whole of the public service.) So the Library spent millions of dollars on outside consultants doing work that staff of the Library could not only do but, in my view, could almost invariably do better.

Critics' Picks

'The shelves are visible from the street. People can actually see books, face out — it's visually appealing, almost like retail. The idea is that people come in during their lunch break, grab a book — a bestseller or an important new book — and read it. They can't borrow it, but they can come in anytime and the book will be there.'

— Kim Thomson, Manager, Information and Access

Photos by Joy Lai

WHAT KINDS OF WORK?

Here's one example. When we received the generous donation to build the upstairs eastern galleries in the Mitchell Building from the late Michael Crouch, outside consultants were engaged to work out how best the new galleries could be used. I'm not criticising any of my colleagues — it's important to stress that — but it's part of a general public-service culture that when a large amount of money arrives you think, 'Oh I don't want to be made responsible for spending this.' And so the Library commissioned outside consultants. One of the first decisions I made when I came was to cancel the outside consultant's plans for these galleries because I realised that we already had brilliant exhibition and curatorial staff who were keen and able to do the work themselves.

The idea for the Picture Galleries came into being in a similar way. These galleries were basically funded out of money that we saved on consultants' fees. That money allowed us to repolish the floors, fix the walls so they were strong enough to hold paintings, get started on the restoration of the pictures and face the challenge of how to hang them. The Picture Galleries are emblematic of the creative strength of the staff of the Library. The salon hangs were conceived, the pictures and frames were prepared, the handbills, the curatorial work were all done by staff at the Library.

HAD YOU ALWAYS PLANNED TO DO THE PICTURE GALLERIES?

Yes, ever since someone took me down to see the underground framed picture store. I will never forget that day.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT OVER THE TIME YOU'VE BEEN HERE EXHIBITIONS HAVE BECOME MORE AMBITIOUS?

I do think that. What's more, they've been produced against a background of Treasury-imposed efficiency dividends. The Library has exploded with activity, but we've had no more staff. Sometimes I sit up in bed and think, 'How on earth have they done this?' It's not as if we've taken on an army of people to run these new galleries. But the exhibitions and curatorial people really are perfectionists and whenever there's a new show — *Dead Central*, *Imagine*, *Kill or Cure* — they are so thoroughly thought-through, curated, designed and executed. Only a first-class library could put on the current *Pride (R)evolution* exhibition. You couldn't imagine that exhibition being produced anywhere else.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

A lot of exhibitions in galleries and museums have a particular generic character and a certain kind of presentation. The Library's shows have a deep-rooted narrative, archival element which grows out of the unique nature of our collections. On top of that, the way that colleagues have been prepared to put their own personal lives on show in *Pride (R)evolution* gives it a social, personal impact that many more formal exhibitions don't have.

We have the Charles Rodius exhibition coming up. They are redoing the Objects Gallery downstairs. The new Photography Gallery is opening. It's a mind-boggling amount of work that's being done by a small number of people.

DO YOU THINK IT'S SUSTAINABLE?

It's sustainable in the short term because of the enthusiasm and motivation of the people who work here. Even the people who get grumpy, it's not just a job for them — it really matters. To be fair though, I think we are going to need to invest more in specialist staff working in these curatorial and exhibition areas if it's to be sustainable in the longer term.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR SUCCESSOR?

I doubt that my successor will want any advice — but I would hope that the next State Librarian loves the collections and respects the skills of the people who work here. And doesn't see it as a purely process-driven job. A lot of libraries run on the back of process and little else.

When I arrived, I raised a few eyebrows because one of the first things I did was ask for a pass so I could go down on my own into the stacks. Not that many State Librarians had done that before because they tended to sit in meetings from dawn until dusk and sign bits of paper.

Photos by Joy Lai

Paintings from the Collection

The State Library of NSW manages one of the largest pictorial collections in Australia, far larger than any art gallery. The collections comprise nearly 1300 oil paintings and more than 168,000 prints, drawings and watercolours. Of course, the rationale for the Library's collecting is very different to that of an art gallery, whose focus is necessarily aesthetic excellence. Paintings comprise one of the smallest genres of art-making in the Library's collections, but also one of its most important. And of course, each generation of librarians and curators builds on the work of their predecessors.

— Richard Neville, Mitchell Librarian

Praise for the exhibition *Pride (R)evolution*

Such a joy to be back at @statelibrarynsw to explore the new Pride Revolution exhibition for Sydney WorldPride.

Detailed, lovingly curated, beautifully presented — will leave you both uplifted and bereft. This exhibition is exactly why we need well-funded state libraries.

A must-see! Fabulous, moving #PrideREvolution exhibition @statelibrarynsw recognising the beauty of #LGBTQI+ #Pride and the bigotry it had to challenge.

Photos by Gene Ramirez

Every day I've spent at least half an hour in the stacks on my own just strolling about looking at things. That has been a pleasure that I hope my successor will discover as well.

WHAT HAVE YOU DISCOVERED DOWN THERE? WHAT SURPISED, DELIGHTED OR SHOCKED YOU?

There's plenty that shocked and surprised me. But one of the things that I loved most was a collection of — not quite ephemera but not far off it — old telephone directories, magazines and comic books from the time of my early childhood. Move over Proust and the dipped madeleine — take a trip to Stack One and rediscover your past.

To tell the truth, there's so much, I wouldn't know where to begin.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WISH THAT THE LIBRARY HAD IN ITS COLLECTION?

I'm excited about our new rare book acquisition program that's just underway. When we talk about ourselves as one of the great libraries in the world it's almost like whistling in the dark — as if we don't quite believe it. But we are. And with a relatively small number of key strategic purchases, we could put ourselves easily in the top ten great libraries of the world.

CAN YOU NAME WHAT SOME OF THOSE ACQUISITIONS MIGHT BE?

I've been told not to because dealers might inflate prices if they know we are after particular items. We started with a shopping list which we've now got through, thanks in good part to our benefactors. There's more to come, supported by the Library's extraordinary Foundation.

I have a particular interest in music and I'd love us to expand our holdings of printed music. Some people think it's not appropriate for the State Librarian to be imposing a personal interest on collecting. But I'd say it's been happening throughout the history of this and every great collecting institution. An institution always reflects the concerns of the people who are running it. It's no accident that the Picture Galleries were the first to open because the Library's pictures are a real love of mine.

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED LEAST?

Meetings.

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST?

This job has been an extraordinary privilege and I do realise how lucky I've been. There's not much that I haven't enjoyed. I don't like bureaucracy. I don't like meetings. I don't like dealing with certain outside agencies. I find that very tricky. But there's very little here that I haven't enjoyed.

And I have learned a huge amount from my colleagues — far more than they might think I have.

One of the things that's given me a huge sense of satisfaction, perhaps the most important stuff I've been involved with, is the work with public libraries. Getting public library funding fixed up has been central. The PLS (Public Library Services) team are simply extraordinary. We've seen government funding for public libraries across the state more than double. Public libraries are really enjoying a bit of a renaissance at the moment, and those PLS colleagues are firmly driving this.

A colleague in PLS took me on a trip to the remand centre in Silverwater a couple of years ago. Various people have been working to get tablets and ebooks into NSW prison cells. With our strong support, Corrective Services have now got nearly 7000 tablets issued to prisoners. I'm really proud of that.

The Indigenous Engagement team is also working on family history projects in prisons with Indigenous prisoners. Things like that don't hit the headlines but have a huge impact on the everyday lives of the many thousands of people incarcerated in our prisons. More than a third of the prison population is Indigenous.

Finally, I've loved seeing *Openbook* grow to the point where it is now a rich window into the life and culture of this very special place.

WITH HINDSIGHT, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY?

I know that I have made mistakes along the way, but time marches on.

The Children's Library

We wanted to have all the best children's and YA literature available for people to come and browse. We had never had a nominated space for children's collections. There had been a family space and we had Learning Services programs, but groups of people would ask during school holidays, 'Where are the children's books?'

The idea was to build a children's library that was more than a children's area in a public library. We wanted it to be a destination, a tourist spot for people coming into the city, something whimsical and quirky that people wanted to see. The shelving is arranged in a maze shape. You wind your way through and discover the collection. It was John's idea to have this maze. And there is some beautiful Bronwyn Bancroft imagery.

One of my great memories was the opening of the Children's Library. Hundreds of families, authors *and* crowds down the street lining up for *Bluey*. It was a great day.

— Kim Thomson

Photos by Joy Lai

This job has been an extraordinary priviledge.

WHAT ABOUT THE LIBRARY BAR? DO YOU THINK IT HAS PUT THIS BUILDING ON A DIFFERENT KIND OF CULTURAL MAP?

The Bar's an interesting one. When I arrived here, the government wanted to build a function centre on the roof of the Mitchell Building.

We managed to persuade the government that it wasn't their building — even though it is their building — that it was actually the Library's building. Our last premier (Dominic Perrottet) was very interested in animating the city, as is his successor. We didn't want to get involved in mass catering, but we discovered small bar licences, with a limit of 120 people. So a small group of us thought, why don't we do that on the roof? It won't cost very much.

In the end the Bar, like the Children's Library and the Galleries, was fundamentally designed by staff of the Library. We had to get an architect in to do some of the technical stuff, but we all got together. It was very much a kind of extended family thing.

Some people were cynical about it. But I think it's a lovely little bar. It's been successful and is increasingly being used for events. In its current form it will perhaps have a life of three or four years and will then either expand or be rebuilt. But I think we've proved that it can graft on nicely to what we have and build communities very effectively.

YOU COULD NEVER HAVE PREDICTED COVID LOCKDOWNS. BUT YOU WERE COMMITTED TO REOPENING THE LIBRARY AS SOON AS YOU POSSIBLY COULD.

I think we were the first government agency to reopen on 1 June 2020. It's quite funny — I remember writing to the Premier's Department for permission to reopen. And we got a letter back saying that they'd received a request to reopen the Library, could we please advise them! So, I wrote back and said I think this is a terrific idea. And then I got a letter saying yes, we can reopen.

Every time we reopened after a lockdown period, I'd find a queue of people outside waiting to get in at opening time. One of the most moving things of all was discovering after our last lockdown that one of our regular readers (who died recently) has left us nearly $3 million, which we're about to use to refurbish the reading rooms in the Macquarie Street Building.

It shows how important this institution is. When I was growing up, if you wanted to go somewhere where you knew you'd be treated with respect, you'd think of a church. That's changed. The Library is now the place where it truly doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, what colour you are ... anything. And this Library leads the way in how it looks after everyone from scholars and writers to homeless people — who, it must be said, sometimes turn out to be one and the same.

I EXPECT SOME PEOPLE WHO VISIT ARE SURPRISED BY ALL THE HOMELESS PEOPLE WHO USE THE LIBRARY.

Back in 2018 we were asked by the authorities to switch off the wi-fi at night because it attracted homeless people. We refused. A lot of people who sleep around the Library sleep near outdoor power points and areas where there's good w-fi. The digital team rebuilt the wi-fi system and we went from having a very patchy, unreliable system to one of the fastest around. We try and look after people whether we are open or closed. And they often return the favour.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NEXT?

I'm not saying because that might jinx it. It's often a mistake to tell people what you're going to do. Better just to do it.

Self-portrait by Dr John Vallance

Eda Gunaydin

What's ironic is that I am a memoirist who can't remember. Friends note this often: *you have such a poor memory for someone who makes their living off writing their memories down*. I usually scoff, not at the remark about my memory, but at the fanciful notion that what I make from this is money.

It's true that I don't remember any of my birthdays. I don't remember what I liked doing when I was young. When my psychologist probes, once, I answer that all I know is that when I was four years old I used to watch the 1978 tragic epic Turkish film *Sultan* every day. My girlfriend can, off the top of her head, recite the events of the preceding week in order. If you ask me what I did yesterday I have to consult my calendar. The reason that I write memoir is precisely because I can't remember without documentation: I have kept a line-a-day journal, a small book in which I jot a brief note capturing the flavour of the day, for the past 1790 days. Without that book I — a contiguous, maturing 'I' — would not exist.

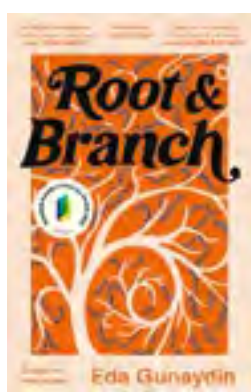
I developed this habit when I was young, both of forgetting, and writing in order to work against my penchant for it. On days when I'd been particularly wounded (threatened, confined to a room, been the reason someone smashed something), I would resolve, before I slept, to make this day fuzzy, to blur it over, like applying a Bokeh filter to a photograph. The next morning, as hoped, it would always be a challenge to recall exactly who had said or done what. To find the record I'd have to strain to locate it, and doing so served no purpose for my immediate survival. The majority of these memories I have relinquished, failed to arrest them as they have flowed away from me, like sand grasped in a fist and trickled back into a wave. Others I have made effort to hold on to, writing them down in childhood diaries, on scraps of paper, whispering them groggily into the phone only hours later when they have already been nearly obliterated by the garbage disposal of my mind.

Over the years, I have become the family historian or witness. Where the memories are hard to retrieve I have developed strategies for finding them, inside of objects — journals, family trees, old photos — and reconstructing them through narrative, imposing sequence, crafting meaning and ultimately integrating them into the story of myself. When my sister picks it up, my book feels irrelevant to her: *I'm sure our childhood happened*, she says, *but I just don't remember any of it*. She describes putting up the same block that I did, except the wall she erected is higher, or less porous, than mine. More importantly, she prefers not to go looking. She discards the book at page 30; she's sorry, but she's busy with other things, the business of day-to-day living.

I write the short story that saves my life, one of the times I need it, at 2 am in 2010. I am up because I can't sleep because I feel suicidal. I have walked down the corridor of my high school's English department and noticed a poster tacked to the corkboard outside the staff office advertising the *Sydney Morning Herald* Young Writer of the Year Award. The theme that year is silver. I note it before I head down to the assembly hall where senior students are partaking in a peer bonding day, completing cutesy exercises like telling each other what we like about one another. I fumble, trying to think of something to say to the girl I am paired with, someone I know nothing about other than her name, and land uncreatively on the realisation that I think she's quite happy, based on the fact she is smiling. She has not much to say back to me, and says that I seem happy too. The remark makes me want to throw up: I feel viscerally denied, mis-portrayed. I am not happy.

Later, students are required to tape a piece of paper to our backs so that we can walk around with markers and scribble anonymous compliments. I write a few, call one girl who I think is pretty pretty, with some embarrassment. I don't remember what is written about me exactly, only that when I look over the document I feel it compares poorly to others', that it's sparse, that my defectiveness outstrips theirs, and that there's nothing that anyone could say that would be enough to make me feel good about myself.

That night I distract myself a little with writing, a story that features silver. It makes me feel better. It wins a prize. It teaches me that every time I feel ill, if I write a little, I live a lot longer.



Eda Gunaydin is a Turkish-Australian essayist whose writing explores class, race, diaspora and Western Sydney. Her book *Root and Branch: Essays on inheritance* won the 2023 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for non-fiction.

Lifeline 13 11 14
Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

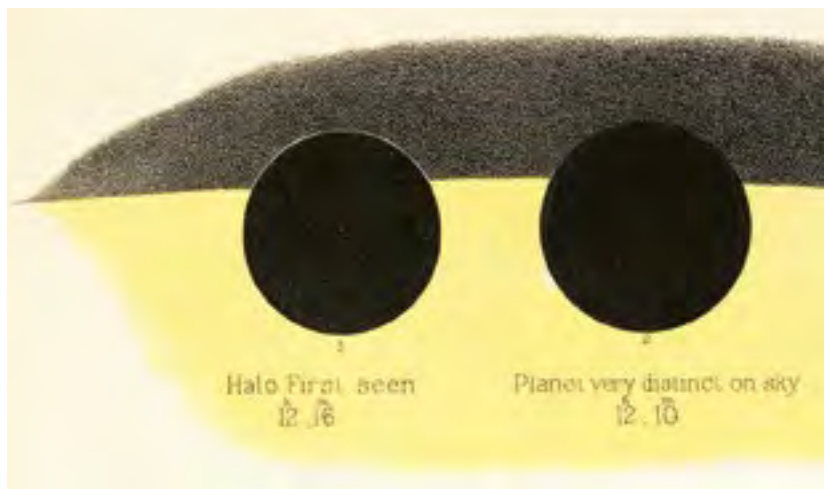
Eda Gunaydin outside Petersham Bowling Club.
Photo by Joy Lai

Take 5 STARGAZERS

WORDS **Margot Riley**

Measuring

People have looked up to the stars to aid wayfinding for thousands of years. This engraving shows a navigational tool known as a cross-staff. It was published in 1686 by Joseph Moxon, English printer, globe maker and hydrographer to Charles II. Moxon worked to popularise astronomy by producing instruction manuals to increase knowledge of the subject, and through the astronomical instruments he made and sold at his London establishment. The cross-staff was used to measure the angle between the horizon and a celestial body such as the sun or stars. With this knowledge a navigator could determine his latitude and direction. The stance of the cross-staff user — holding the end of the staff to the eye with one hand and grasping the sliding measuring gauge with the other, like an archer taking aim at the sun — gave rise to the phrase 'shooting the stars'.



Clockwise from top left: Cross-staff engraving by Joseph Moxon, 1686

Women known as 'astrographic computers', *PIX* magazine, 1941

Radio telescope at Potts Hill, NSW

Observation of the Transit of Venus (detail), NSW, 1874

Globe manufactured by the Carey Brothers, around 1800

Charting

The idea of making spherical models of the heavens and Earth originated with the ancient Greeks. Printed globes as we know them today emerged in the early sixteenth century and became steadily more accurate as new discoveries were made. Pocket globes were an extremely popular luxury item from the early-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, designed to be held in the hand and to demonstrate the wealth and intellectual pursuits of their owners. Celestial globes like this rare example, made by England's best globe makers the Cary Brothers around 1800, shows the 48 constellations charted by Roman astronomer Claudius Ptolemy. New constellations were added as star catalogues were compiled and updated.

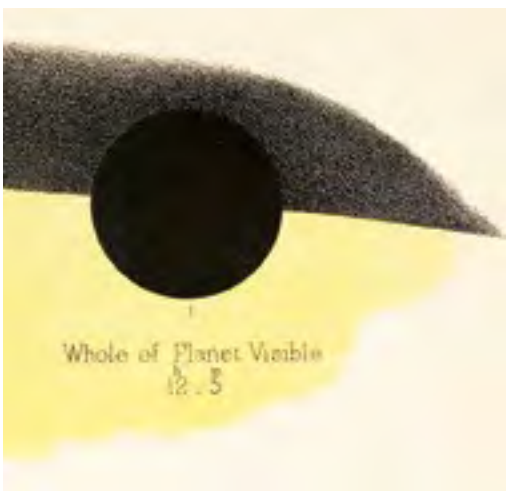
Tracking

The passage of a planet between a star and Earth is called a transit. As we see in this colour plate, printed in 1874, when the orbit of Venus brings the planet directly between the sun and Earth, it appears to stargazers below as a black dot tracking across the bright surface of the sun. Known as the Transit of Venus, these rare events occur twice, eight years apart, and then not again for over a century. Careful observation of this transit has allowed astronomers to measure the distance between the Earth and the sun and

Mapping

The Astrographic Catalogue was arguably the most significant astronomy project undertaken in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sydney Observatory was part of an international consortium that worked together to map the stars using photography. Over 740,000 stars were recorded there because of the star-rich zone allocated to the Sydney Observatory. The stars were photographed using special 'astrographic telescopes', and more than 1400 photographic plates were produced. A group of 22 women, known as 'astrographic computers', worked between 1916 and 1968 to painstakingly measure the stars, calculate their positions, and identify double stars and other irregularities on the glass plate negatives.

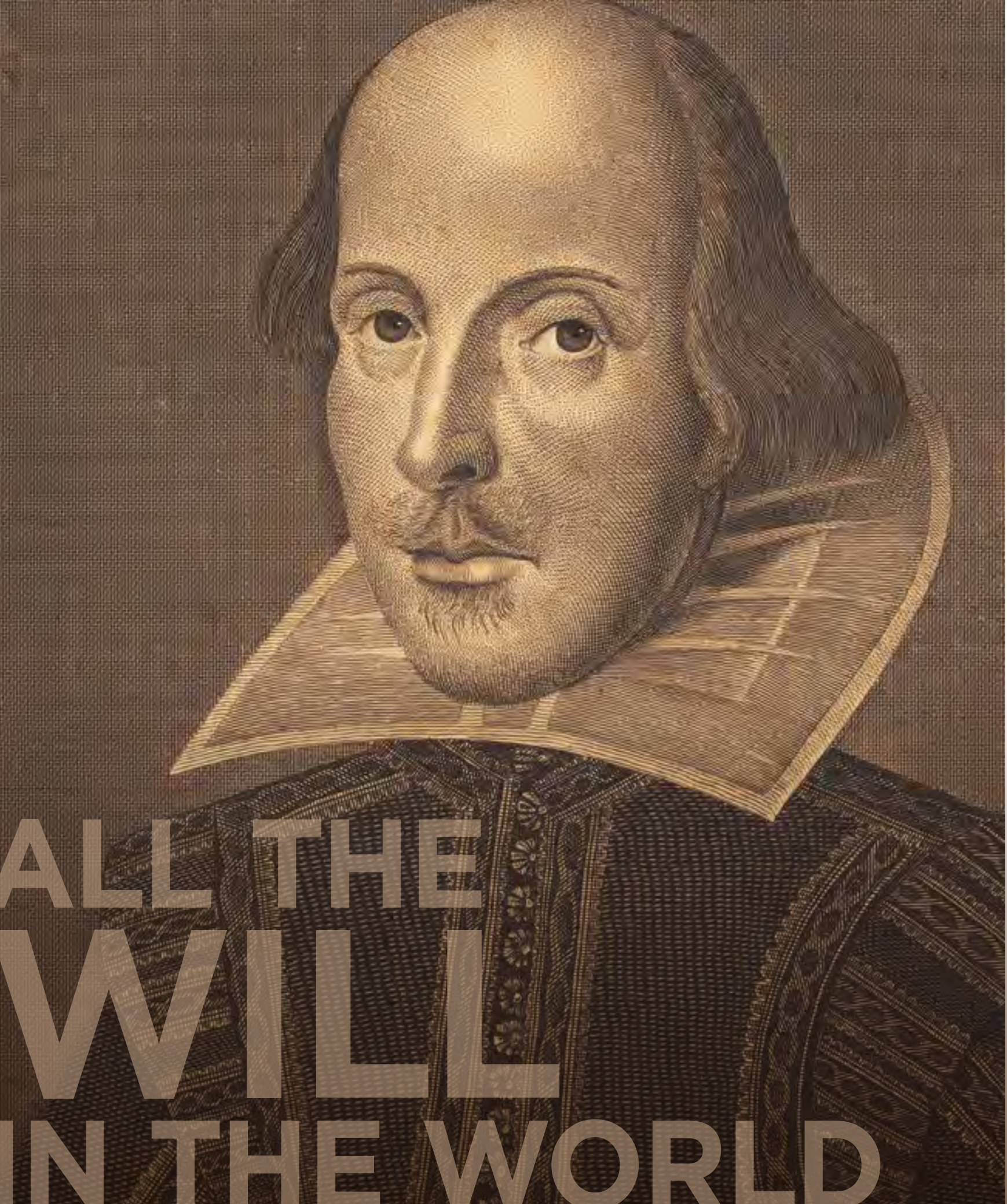
This photograph, taken by Charles Wakeford for *PIX* magazine on 10 February 1941, shows Mary Allen (right) and Ethel Wilcocks (left) using the astrographic plate measure machine to map the distance between the stars and record their brightness.



to calculate the size of the solar system, which assisted in nautical navigation. Captain James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage to observe the transit from Tahiti, in June 1769, meant that the transit played a crucial part in the first European visit to Australia's east coast. The Transit of Venus will not happen again until 2117.

Listening

Australians have been at the forefront of international radio astronomy since the emergence of radar technology during World War II. This 11-metre (36 foot) diameter transit parabola radio telescope was photographed by Kerry Dundas soon after it was built in 1952 at the CSIRO's Potts Hill field station in Sydney's western suburbs. The largest steerable radio telescope in the southern hemisphere at the time, and the second largest in the world, it was used for listening in on the behaviour of hydrogen gas clouds between the stars. First detected as a radio 'hiss' in the 1930s, it was later concluded that this cosmic noise was radio waves coming from the centre of the galaxy. When Harvard University scientists first detected the 21 cm (1420.4 MHz) hydrogen emission line (known also as the H-line) in 1951, radio physicists around the world quickly mobilised to confirm the discovery. The initial confirmation was made by Chris Christiansen and Jim Hindman, who worked at the Potts Hill station.


ALL THE
WILL
IN THE WORLD

WORDS **Stuart Kells**

The 1623 volume, *Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies*, aka the 'First Folio', is 400 years old this year. Why is it so special?

I should begin by putting all my cards on the table. I'm fascinated by Shakespeare and his books, including the First Folio. In the immediate pre-Covid years, I took my family on an international library tour. Perhaps what made for an even more unexpected family holiday was that it was also a First Folio tour.

We called first on the Weston Library in Oxford and saw, up close, the famous Bodleian copy — unceremoniously offloaded by the Bodleian Library in the seventeenth century, then eagerly repurchased in 1905.

We also visited the British Library's substantial Shakespeare holdings and the even larger collection of First Folios at Meisei University in Tokyo. Our tour included the largest Shakespeare collection of them all, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, home to a remarkable 82 First Folios. (There are 233 known surviving copies, although some are damaged or incomplete, and others have pages from later editions added.)

Some people ask if the First Folio should even be attributed to the Bard. My position on this controversial yet tedious question, 'Who wrote Shakespeare?', is entirely orthodox. All the 'secret author' theories — which nominate Francis Bacon, Henry Neville, Edward de Vere and any number of others as the 'real Shakespeare' — are emphatically and demonstrably baloney.

All the same, my attitude and orientation towards Shakespeare diverges from some writers in this crowded field. I've made a career out of irreverent — and sometimes spicy — writing about respectable and even nerdy subjects. Perhaps more than any other subject in my chosen categories of libraries, publishing, finance and legal history, Shakespeare invites — even demands — irreverence and spice.

Moreover, as an Australian writing in Australia about Shakespeare today, I feel I can write from a sceptical distance. Four centuries plus 17,000 kilometres adds up to a lot of objectivity.

From this viewpoint, far away from Stratford-upon-Avon, three nested myths — assumptions that underpin Shakespeare's global cultural status — stand out starkly. The first is the myth of Shakespearean genius. The second is the myth of solo Shakespearean genius and the final myth is of Shakespeare as a solo and an English genius. Let's look at each in turn.

The idea of Shakespeare as an authorial genius is ripe for rebuttal. This is because his method consisted mostly of adapting texts that already existed. In Shakespeare's time, people could read about the doomed characters of Hamlet, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet or Antony and Cleopatra without going near anything he wrote.

Hard as it may be for us to comprehend, during his lifetime Shakespeare was not a major literary figure. The foremost poets and playwrights of his time disparaged his writings as clumsy hackwork. And to the extent that he had a reputation as a poet, he was known as a purveyor of libidinous verse — ideal as an aid for what Michael Schoenfeldt in the *Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Poetry* termed 'solitary pleasure'.

Shakespeare's posthumous reputation depended on arbitrary twists and turns that were not preordained by his genius. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Romantic poets and critics such as Coleridge,

Portrait of William Shakespeare, from the First Folio, copper engraving print by Martin Droeshout, 1623

Hazlitt and Keats adopted him, as did theatre entrepreneur David Garrick, who pumped him up spectacularly with the 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee.

But Garrick and the Romantics could easily have chosen to boost another early-modern author — perhaps one of Shakespeare's contemporaries Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, Francis Beaumont or John Fletcher.

It is worth recalling that some of the marvels of 'medieval' architecture that people visit today were actually built, or substantially rebuilt, over the past few centuries. (Cologne Cathedral is an example, as are large parts of Mont Saint-Michel.) So too with Shakespeare: his modern standing rests on waves of revisions, including those carried out by eighteenth– and nineteenth–century editors who removed some of the cruder parts of his plays and added happier endings.

Many of the plays published in his lifetime were decidedly uneven and not nearly as sublime or 'Shakespearean' as the ones we know today. As with the version that the Romantics and Garrick embraced, the Shakespeare that we appreciate is not the sixteenth or early seventeenth century Shakespeare but one that was recast and reinvented later.

As for the second myth, scholars now accept that several of the plays were not written alone but were collaborations, co-authored with men such as John Fletcher, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Nashe and George Peele.

Shakespearean authorship is complicated in other ways, too. More than once during his lifetime, his name appeared on texts he did not write. And even on editions of his own plays, his name appears in different ways, which suggests different connotations about the extent of his involvement.

Modern ideas of Shakespeare as an author writing alone in his attic, removed from the world, arise in part from the assumptions we make when we see a name on a title page. But Shakespeare wrote at a time when authorship, originality and plagiarism were differently understood. Our assumptions about a name on a title page overwhelm what printers and publishers actually meant when Shakespeare's name appeared on a book. The Shakespeare plays that we know today should be thought of as the textual output of a literary and dramatic milieu, not just a person.

'To hear the sea-maid's music' from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1908. Illustration by Arthur Rackham

And to bust the third myth, Shakespeare is seen as quintessentially English, and British scholars are wary of any suggestions to the contrary. But the truth is that Shakespeare relied on source texts and exemplars from Italy, France, Denmark and elsewhere.

John Florio, an accomplished Anglo-Swiss-Italian man of letters, maintained a lifelong connection with the Shakespeare publisher Edward Blount and may have played a significant part in the whole Shakespearean enterprise. (Among other things, Florio's *First Fruits and Worlde of Wordes*, along with his translation of Montaigne's *Essays*, were important Shakespeare sources.)

Shakespeare's plays do not belong to England but are better thought of as a textual output of the European Renaissance with global influence.

Today, First Folios are treated as sacred objects. The sole First Folio in Australia, held in the State Library of NSW, is a case in point. It is the apotheosis of Australian Shakespeareana. A gift from Birmingham industrialists Richard and George Tangye, the volume came in a finely carved box — made, it is claimed, of oak from the forest of Arden.

(Shakespeare relics supposedly made from the playwright's own mulberry tree are revered in the same way as fragments of the True Cross, and they suffer from the same implausibility. If all the fragments were to be added up, they would imply an unbelievably large tree and an equally enormous cross.)

In colonial Australia, the three myths that I've unpicked, of the solo English genius, delivered a laundered version of Shakespeare that served a social and political purpose. Shakespeare became the perfect signifier of Englishness, hence the profusion of Shakespeare Societies and Shakespearean productions, all of which allowed people in the New World to stake a claim in the Old – sometimes with racial and imperialist overtones. As feminist scholar Emer O'Toole remarked in 2012, 'Shakespeare is full of classism, sexism, racism and defunct social mores ... Shakespeare was a powerful tool of empire, transported to foreign climes along with the doctrine of European cultural superiority.'

Produced by London printer William Jaggard, his son Isaac, and the publisher–stationer Blount, the First Folio was advertised as forthcoming in the 1622 catalogue of the Frankfurt Book Fair. The book is a 'folio' because in its production the original sheets of paper were folded only once, making for a large book.

According to the standard story of the First Folio, it was put together by Shakespeare's fellow actors John Heminge and Henry Condell in accordance with his wishes. Thus assembled, the First Folio, it is said, is the best and most authoritative edition — 'Published according to the True Original Copies' — and the first published collection of Shakespeare's plays.

That story is widely promulgated in high schools, undergraduate university courses and Shakespearean monographs. But it is full of holes. Heminge and Condell had no experience in the careful work required in preparing texts for publication. They seem to have done nothing more than to amass some of the plays and convey them to the publishers and unnamed editors. (The First Folio does not claim Heminge and Condell edited the plays, only that they 'collected' and 'gathered' the works.)

To say the First Folio was published 'in accordance with Shakespeare's wishes' is nonsense. A thousand decisions were made about how to present the plays in print that had nothing to do with him, given he died in 1616. He was likely not involved even in the very first decision, to prepare a collected edition of his plays.

The First Folio's claim that the plays were printed from the 'True Original Copies' is also nonsense. Just as Shakespeare's versions were adaptations of earlier plays, so too his own versions were continually revised, both in performance and for publication. Playscripts are not closed texts. The reference to 'True Copies' is much more about marketing than about any textual or editorial integrity.

Today, the most authoritative editions (such as the Arden, Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeares) draw from multiple sources: the Folio, plus the best quartos, with sundry other corrections and improvements.

Ben Jonson's *Workes*, published in the year of Shakespeare's death, was the first volume of plays to emerge from London's professional theatres that was published in the folio format. At that time, plays had the status that pulp fiction enjoys today. But Jonson's literary reputation and personal charisma were strong enough for him to break a taboo: despite criticism, he got away with treating plays as worthy of publication in a significant collected volume. (Unlike Shakespeare's folio, Jonson's includes poetry.)

Jonson's book provided a direct model and impetus for the First Folio. But I can break another myth, this time about the publication rather than the playwright: contrary to what is often said, the First Folio is not the first collected edition of Shakespeare.

In 1619, three years after his death, William Jaggard and stationer Thomas Pavier produced the 'False Folio' of ten plays attributed to Shakespeare. It is described as 'false' because many of the plays bore false imprints. Also it is not a folio. Copies of the False Folio are now vastly rarer and more valuable than the First Folio. (Though several libraries have individual plays from the False Folio, only two institutions have the entire set: the Folger Shakespeare Library and Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.)

Of the False Folio's ten plays, at least two, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Sir John Oldcastle*, are doubtful inclusions; Shakespeare probably did not write them. But the First Folio, too, has contentious inclusions and conspicuous exclusions, including *Pericles* and *Cardenio*. The 1663 Third Folio edition of Shakespeare's works included *Pericles* as well as *Sir John Oldcastle* and five other plays no longer thought to have been written by him.

Aspects of how the First Folio is presented are also misleading or incomplete. It provides almost no basic biographical details. The blurb-like preliminary matter is coy about how and by whom the volume was produced.

In Jonson's *Workes*, the writer took pains to point out that he himself had modified the plays in his collected edition so as to remove the contributions of other writers. The Shakespeare folio, on the other hand, makes no such claim. The significant contributions of other playwrights were not removed, and yet the First Folio acknowledges not one of Shakespeare's collaborators or co-authors.

A few years ago, standing with the Library's head of rare books Maggie Patton, I had the chance to see the Jonson and Shakespeare folios side by side. Though produced by different publishers, the two volumes have a strong family resemblance. In the First Folio, for example, the layout of the prefatory verses is very similar to Jonson's.

But there are important differences, too, especially in the layout of the folios' main body text. Jonson's plays were set in a single column with generous margins, whereas the First Folio was set in two cramped columns. Jonson's volume looks luxurious; the Shakespeare pages look more like an old newspaper or telephone book.

As an example of printing, the Shakespeare folio is far below the best continental European books of that period. Thanks to chaos in Jaggard's printery, the First Folio's letterpress text changed multiple times during production. (The numerous copies at Messei and the Folger are therefore useful for studying differences between variant impressions.)

The textual chaos further undermines claims that the First Folio is the 'authoritative' edition of Shakespeare.

Of course all these gaps and evasions in the First Folio only feed the mysteries and controversies that surround Shakespeare, including the so-called authorship question. The belief in a secret author is misguided, though it is strongly held, something I know from personal experience: having challenged the authorship theories, I now receive more hate mail about Shakespeare than about any other subject I've tackled.

But people are right to interrogate Shakespeare's methods and his achievement. The authorship fraternity would be better off focusing on the textual history of the First Folio, particularly the role of collaborators, editors and others along the textual production chain. Believe me, this is a much more promising frontier than searching for phantoms.

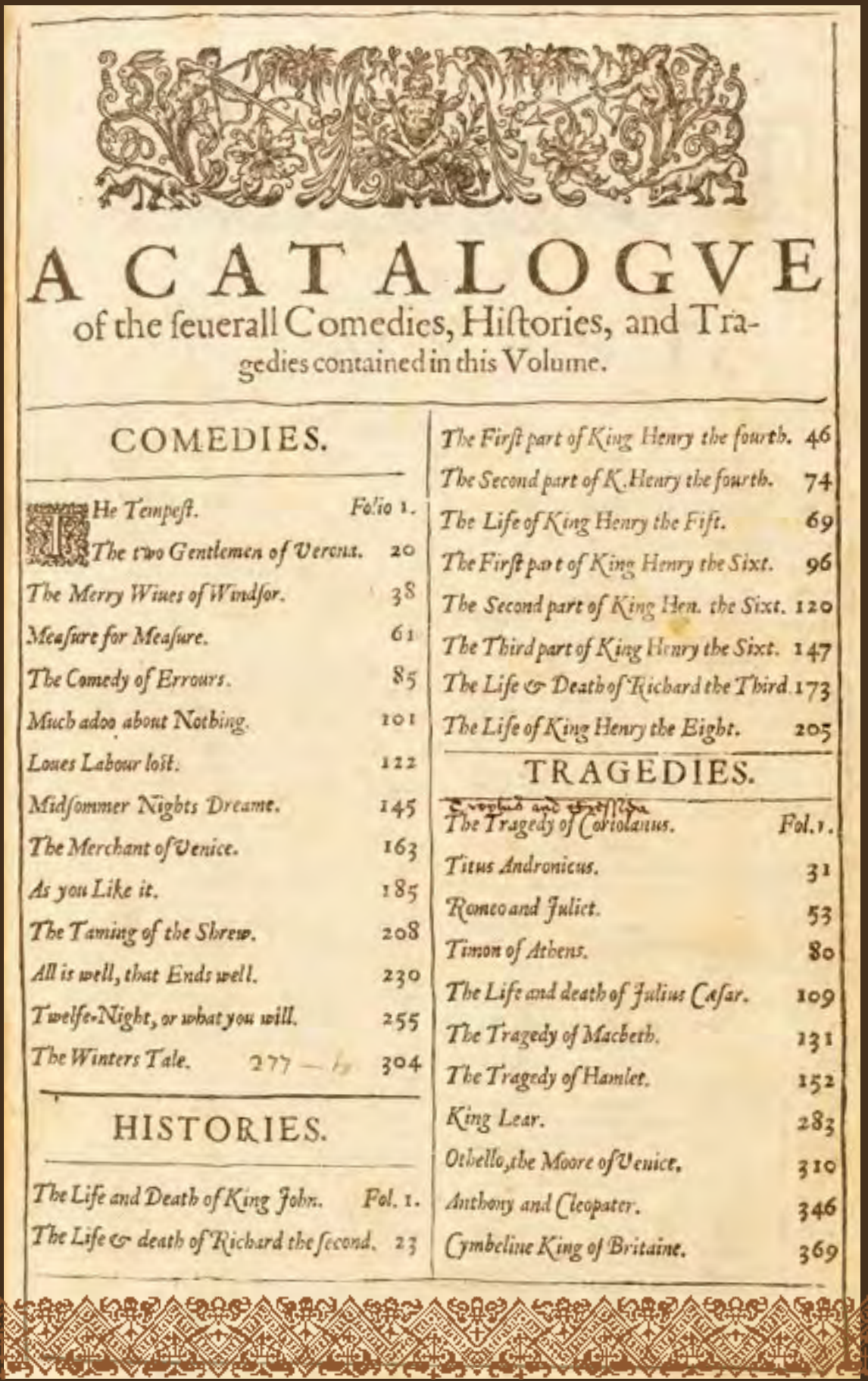
Shakespeare's First Folio is one of the best examples of the ways in which books are more than neutral carriers of texts. Besides the attractions of the plays themselves, there is a lot going on — in the format, the author portrait, the prelims, even the paper and typefaces.

The story of the First Folio is fascinating to me because it includes everything I love about old and rare books: the materiality of the text, the fickleness of book values and literary reputations, the shenanigans of disreputable publishers. We see literary rivalries, fads, hoaxes, scandals and all the other strange things that happen when human beings collide with books.

Sir Kenneth Branagh, John Bell and Dame Judy Dench might call me a philistine, but I think the story of the book is at least as fascinating as the stories in the book.

Stuart Kells is the author of *Shakespeare's Library: Unlocking the greatest mystery in literature*. His most recent book is *MUP: A centenary history*.

The Library's exhibition *For All Time: Shakespeare in print* opens on 8 July.



A CATALOGVE

of the seuerall Comedies, Hiſtories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume.

COMEDIES.

HISTORIES.

TRAGEDIES.

Title page from Shakespeare's First Folio, 1623. Note the late addition of 'Troilus and Cressida'

WHAT PIP DID NEXT

Photo of Pip Williams taken at the Goods Line, Ultimo by Joy Lai

WORDS **Nicole Abadee**

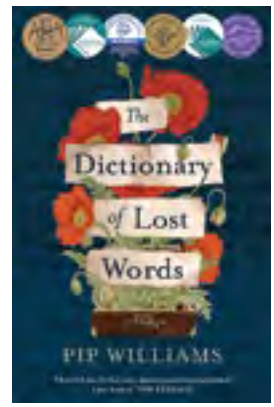
The bestselling writer of *The Dictionary of Lost Words* has a new book.

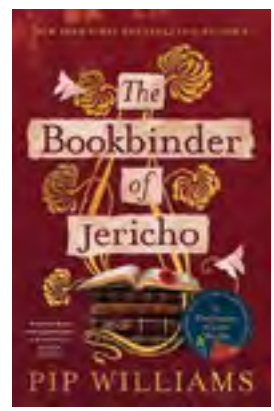
Pip Williams has a PhD in Public Health. At eighteen she wanted to be a fashion designer. She loves to belly dance, calling it 'unbridled joy'. She is dyslexic. As a teenager she dressed up as a rainforest for costume parties, earning herself the nickname 'Pippy the Hippy'. She could never have imagined that her novel, *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, would become one of Australia's most successful debuts.

It has sold over 300,000 copies in Australia, been published overseas in many languages, won several major Australian literary awards, and was shortlisted for the prestigious international Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. It was a *New York Times* bestseller and the first Australian novel to be selected for Reese Witherspoon's popular Book Club. All this is especially remarkable because *The Dictionary of Lost Words* was published in March 2020 just as Covid hit, so Williams had no book launch, writers' festivals or other speaking gigs.

I meet her just as she is about to launch her second novel, *The Bookbinder of Jericho*, described as a companion to *Dictionary*. Both are about books, words and knowledge. Both are historical novels set in Oxford. What gives them their narrative drive is that they are about who gets access to books and knowledge. She is excited about 'experiencing the joy' of live events this time around.

The venue Williams suggests for our interview, not far from where she lives with her family in the Adelaide Hills, could not be more perfect: the mid-nineteenth century, book-lined Circulating Library within the State Library of South Australia. Williams has a great fondness for public libraries — she wrote much of *Dictionary* here because it has a beautiful first edition





The Dictionary of Lost Words and *The Bookbinder of Jericho* are both published by Affirm Press.

set of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. When she was in Sydney, she worked in the Mitchell Reading Room of the State Library. 'These public institutions are so important for storytellers, of fiction as well as non-fiction,' she says. 'I'm so grateful to them.'

Williams relaxes easily into a comfortable red velvet armchair as we speak, answering questions thoughtfully and directly. She was born in London in 1969 to a Brazilian mother who worked part-time as a hairdresser and a Welsh father, a computer analyst. The family moved to Australia in 1972. She has a younger sister who is now a social worker. Her father was a big reader who wrote children's stories and joke books. He was also, she says, a feminist, who had 'no limitations on what he expected of my sister and me'.

Williams grew up on Sydney's Northern Beaches and went to Mackellar Girls High School. She started writing — 'terrible poems' — when she was eight. She started to keep diaries as a teenager and writing became an outlet for her emotions. 'Every time I was emotionally frustrated, I would just write it out.' She also liked to write different ideas down on pieces of paper and still has the old Indian kettle in which she used to keep them.

Her first piece of published work was a poem, 'Fifteen', written at age 15 after a fight with her parents who wouldn't let her go out. She fled to her room in tears, wrote the poem and sent it to her favourite magazine, *Dolly*, which paid her 15 dollars for it. She muses that this may have been a turning point in her writing career.

At 17, Williams learned that she was dyslexic. The diagnosis explained a lot. For years, teachers had been saying that she was bright and verbal in class but these qualities were not reflected in her written work. She was often put on detention for her poor spelling and forced to write out words she had misspelt 10 times, all to no avail because she would spell the same word differently. She was a slow but enthusiastic reader — she loved the then-popular Trixie Belden books and read *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* 25 times. She says she is still a slow reader, but a voracious one.

Williams also had dysgraphia, which makes it physically difficult to hold a pen. Both these conditions have made her reflect on the connection between words and creativity. 'I've come to realise words are just tools which enable you to create. They're not necessarily part of creation.'

She agrees there may be a connection between her dyslexia and the subject matter of her novels — books and words. 'I was like one of those Olympic swimmers who started swimming because he had asthma. My dad knew I had difficulties spelling, so he gave me three dictionaries.' She is at pains to emphasise that her parents never corrected her spelling and says, 'That is the worst thing you can do with a creative child; it's so discouraging.'

After finishing school, Williams took a gap year in Europe. In 1988 she returned to Australia and enrolled in a Bachelor of Science, Psychology and Sociology at what was then Mitchell College of Advanced Education in Bathurst (now part of Charles Sturt University). 'I chose to do something which really interested me, psychology, because I'm very interested in human nature', a fascination that is evident in her novels, which explore relationships as much as they do ideas.

At 17, Williams learned that she was dyslexic.

Williams had always been attracted to social justice and wanted to work to improve equality, particularly for those living with a disability and for women, especially older women. She did her PhD in Public Health at Adelaide University and worked for many years as an academic researcher at the Centre for Work and Life at the University of South Australia. Her boss there was the now Greens Senator Barbara Pocock, with whom she co-authored her first book, *Time Bomb: Work, rest and play in Australia today*.

Williams has been with her partner, Shannon, for over three decades, since they were both 19. In 2003 with their two sons, they moved from Sydney to the Adelaide Hills in pursuit of 'the good life', buying a 5-acre hobby farm. Shannon planted an orchard, and they kept chooks, ducks, an alpaca and a goat. Williams worked in the city while Shannon worked on the farm. Williams says, disarmingly, 'We were useless at it. We had no experience; we were city kids. Suddenly everything was dying and rotting.'

So, in 2011 the family decided to take a timeout. Williams resigned from her research job, and they took the boys, then 12 and 9, out of school and headed to Italy for six months to work as WWOOFers (Willing Workers on Organic Farms).

I had a dream of my own, that had been waiting for me to see it — to be a writer.

They worked in Tuscany, Calabria and Piedmont, gardening and learning how to make everything from bread and pasta to soap.

Hands deep in soil and supposedly living the dream, Williams had an epiphany. 'I realised I didn't have an aptitude for it. Shannon really does, but I don't. I also realised that I had subjugated my own dreams to his, because his were so appealing. I had a dream of my own, that had been waiting for me to see it — to be a writer. No one ever told me not to write, but I was too busy doing 'acceptable' things. But over time, creativity comes knocking. At first, it's quiet, so it's easy to ignore. But it gets louder, until it insists you open the door to it.'

When the family returned home, Williams got a job as a community planner at Adelaide City Council. One of her main tasks was to persuade the Council to create the Adelaide City Library. She was successful, an achievement she is proud of. But she wasn't happy, and admits it was a tricky time. 'Suddenly I had to admit that this joint dream wasn't what I wanted. We'd invested a lot of time and emotions in it — moving states, raising the kids on the farm — and I wasn't sure I cared that much about it. But he did, so it was a real reckoning for us, something we had to negotiate.'

It was Shannon who urged her to write a book about their experience in Italy. He built her a special writing room at the back of the farmhouse, with wall-to-wall bookcases made from recycled timber. Calling it 'a thing of beauty', she says it was everything you could want in a writing space. But somehow it was *too* perfect, and she found it hard to write there, buckling under the pressure of expectations that the room should inspire her. Writing *One Italian Summer* was a struggle. 'If your expectations are unreasonable, you set yourself up to fail. *One Italian Summer* was so excruciating because I was constantly failing by my own standards.' She got there in the end, and the book was published in 2017.

Soon after, inspired by Simon Winchester's novel *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* about the making of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Williams began writing *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, broadly the same topic, but from a female perspective. She says she always starts writing with big questions. Did it matter that the English language was being defined by men, from sources written by men? Might words have disappeared because they were used only by women?

This time, Williams adopted a different writing routine, one that turned out to be a game-changer. She wrote in cafes. 'I applied my psychology brain to it — "I'm going to associate writing with the thing I love — coffee".' She also lowered her expectations. 'My word goal per day was one word. If I wrote twenty words or a paragraph, it was a job well done.'

The novel's story of the motherless Esme, whose father is a lexicographer working on the Dictionary, and how she starts collecting words used only by women for her own 'Dictionary of Lost Words' has captivated thousands of readers all over the world. Later this year, many of them will be able to see it on stage: Verity Laughton's play, based on the book, will be performed in a co-production between the Sydney Theatre Company and the State Theatre Company South Australia. Williams, thrilled, says, 'I love the idea that my piece of art has inspired another piece of art. It's taken on a life of its own.'

Williams knew that exploring whether the *Oxford English Dictionary* was infected by bias was a good idea, but she wanted to make sure she did it justice: 'I didn't want to be the one who fucks that up.' She was not prepared for the book's extraordinary success and is characteristically frank about it. 'Whilst I am absolutely thrilled each time the book is on a shortlist or wins a prize, my overwhelming gut feeling is embarrassment. I wasn't brought up to be successful. We were lower middle class. I went to a school where there were no expectations of us — not a private girls' school where girls are told they can do anything.'

She says she manages this embarrassment by 'being grateful. I'm embarrassed about being embarrassed. I know I'm no more worthy than all these other people who've written amazing books. I'm an introvert — I'm not married, I never have birthday parties and I'm not on social media because I've never liked being the centre of attention.' Williams describes her relationship with *Dictionary* as being like that of a parent with a talented child – 'it's meeting people, influencing things, making its way in the world. My role is to protect it from exploitation — just like a parent.'

For both novels she had writing mentors who are novelists themselves — Toni Jordan for *Dictionary* and Tegan Bennett Daylight for *Bookbinder*. 'You learn so much by engaging with people who've been at it for longer or have a different perspective.' She also likes working

with editors, and pays credit to her editor for both novels, Ruby Ashby-Orr. 'I don't have a qualification in creative writing, so I don't really know what I'm doing. It feels good. It sounds good ... having an editor cast an expert eye over my writing, to polish and sharpen it, is important.'

She started *The Bookbinder of Jericho* in 2020, just before *Dictionary* was published. This latest novel is about Peggy, a young working-class woman, who works with her twin sister Maude in the Oxford University Press bindery in Jericho, a neighbourhood of Oxford, during World War I. Peggy also volunteers at a nearby hospital for wounded soldiers. She is smart and ambitious, and dreams of attending the nearby women-only Oxford college, Somerville, but her gender and class stand in the way.

Bookbinder is also meticulously researched and rich in historical detail, not only about bookbinding, but also about women's wartime experience. Peggy's life is changed by the arrival in Oxford of war refugees from Belgium. Her friend Tilda, who featured in *Dictionary*, works as a nurse at a military hospital in the army base camp at Étaples in France.

During her research Williams was surprised to find so little information about what the women working in the bindery actually did. She did find, however, a few 1920s photos of women and a film about the making of a book, which contained shots of a woman moving gracefully around with printed sections, known as signatures. That got her thinking about whether the women read the books they were binding and what impact that might have had.

She makes the point, well understood by historians, that archives reveal just as much by what they do *not* contain as by what they do. 'Archives hold what the people in power at the time think is worth holding on to. The gatekeepers for archives were men.'

In *Bookbinder* she asks, 'Who gets to make knowledge? Who gets access to it?' As she explains, 'Peggy is bright and ambitious; she desperately wants access to knowledge. But she is a working-class woman, with care responsibilities. She was not born into a class that is given access to knowledge.'

Williams says she could not have written her novels without her 20 years of research experience. 'The biggest skill I brought to my creative writing is knowing how to corral the research, and when to stop.' She starts with general preliminary research, 'to get a birds'-eye view of what to look out for', then does a lot of reading to get the story in her head. 'I feel like it makes sense when the story arc has authenticity, it has a truth.' She writes a draft, then returns to the archives to deep dive into whatever more she needs to know.

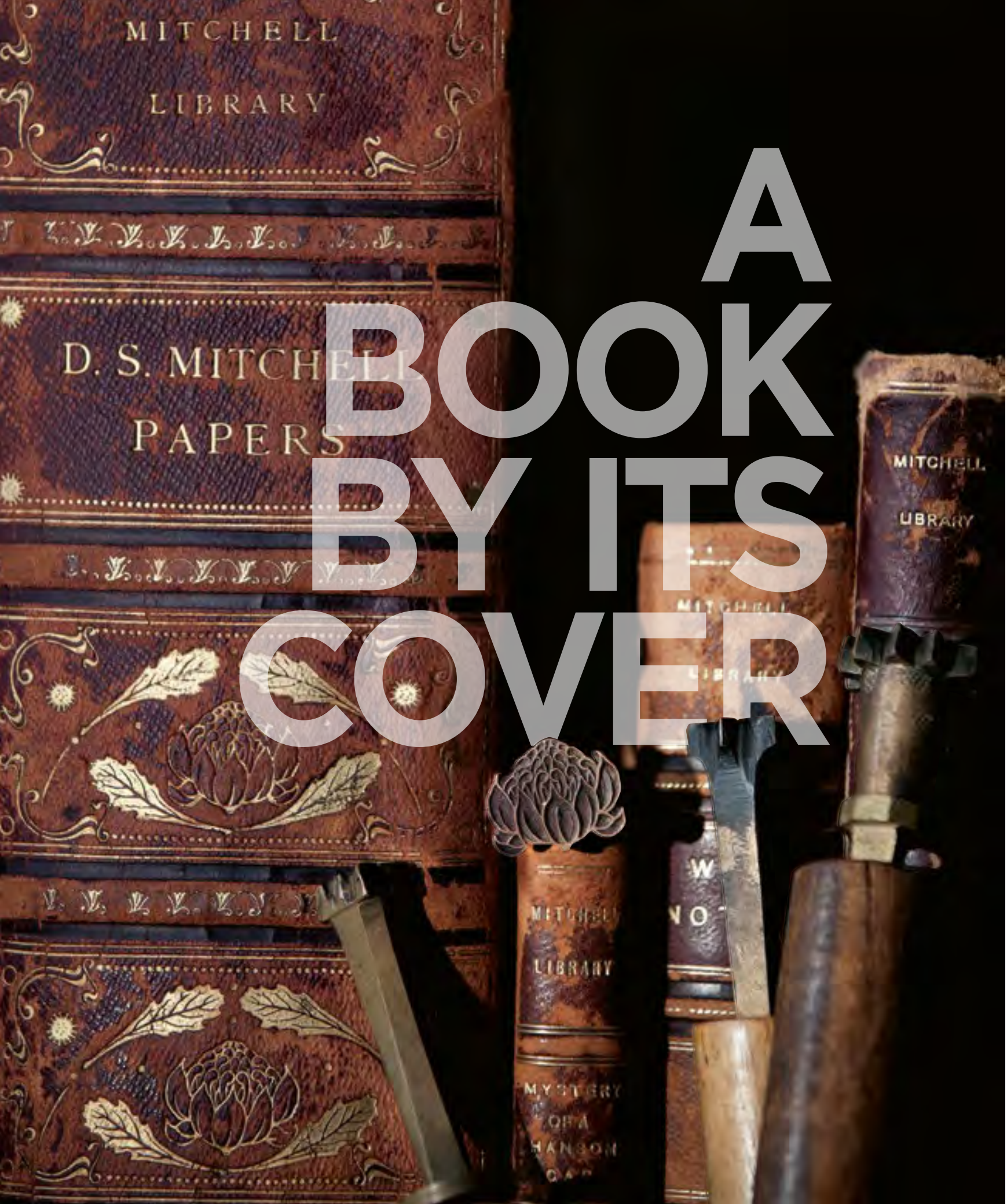
She made three research trips to Oxford, where she immersed herself in the Oxford University Press archives, which added to historical detail about the making of the Dictionary, bookbinding, the movement for women's suffrage and the impact of the Great War. She says, 'I couldn't have written either of those books without these public institutions that hold this archival material, and the people who work there.'

Asked about writing books with feminist themes, Williams says, 'I am a proud feminist, but I didn't write these books with a feminist agenda. I wanted to understand something about history and noticing that history has excluded certain people isn't a feminist act. It's just observant.'

For her 50th birthday in 2019, just before *Dictionary* was published, Shannon gave Williams a first edition of the first volume, letters A and B, of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, published in 1888. Williams was thrilled. When she opened it there was a bookplate on the inside cover saying 'This book belongs to Dr Williams.' She describes it as her most treasured object.

Nicole Abadee writes about books and other things for *The Good Weekend* magazine and appears regularly as a moderator at writers' festivals.

Photo of a bookbinder, or sewer, in the NSW Government Printing Office, taken some time between 1871 and 1910



A BOOK BY ITS COVER

WORDS **Mathilde de Hauteclocque**

A 21st-century fine binder gains a student.

I started my career at the Library at the very bottom, literally, in the underground stacks. My main responsibility was collecting and reshelving items used by readers.

Far from being a tedious or repetitious task, I lived it as a succession of introductions to the Library's vast collection, and then as an ongoing series of quiet rendezvous. I have always loved books for the worlds inside them but the more time I spent among the shelves, the more I became fascinated by the ways those worlds were held and expressed by their exteriors. I needed to know how physical books were made.

My first bookbinding class was a weekend workshop for beginners. Our teacher, Isabelle McGowan, introduced us to bone folders, paper grain, awls and book cloth. Over two days we cut, stitched and glued an armful of little books and a perfect-covered box with lid. It was 18 months later that I returned to class with Isabelle at her bindery in St Peters and became a regular student. Over the years, I have steadily increased my bookbinding vocabulary to include case bindings, endpapers, headbands, kettle stitches, shoulders and hollow backs.

Photo by Joy Lai

Last year, over two days I sewed and covered my first three-quarter leather and marbled-paper book and finished its spine with decorative embossing. It looked exactly like so many of the old volumes I handle day to day. I felt what I imagine it must be like for a surgeon who, having delved inside the human body for the very first time, looks at the exterior with a new secret knowledge of what it contains.

Isabelle McGowan knew from the age of seven that she wanted to be a bookbinder. A relief teacher at her primary school in Sydney, who happened to be a trained bookbinder, eschewed the curriculum and taught the class how to make books instead. 'She taught us Japanese stab binding, little pamphlet books, concertina books — the same books I now teach beginners,' she recalls. 'I got a glimpse into a world where people make books for a living and knew that was what I wanted to do.'

As tertiary study approached, Isabelle knew she would need to go to Europe to immerse herself in bookbinding. She began a fine arts degree at the Edinburgh College of Art, where she explored the freedom of making and honed her aesthetic sense. Halfway through her degree, and with binding still firmly in mind, Isabelle was given the name of a semi-retired, fifth-generation Italian binder who agreed to meet her at his studio, if she could get to Florence. 'I walked in and all I could

Isabelle McGowan at work in her Owl and Lion Bindery, St Peters. The tools in the foreground are finishing tools.
Photo by Joy Lai

see was a sea of finishing tools, beautiful leather, a little marbling set-up in the corner and work benches.' The two said hello and then it was down to business. 'Make a book with me,' he said.

Without any previous formal training, Isabelle began making a book alongside this master, folding and sewing the text block, paring the leather, marbling the paper, applying gold to the spine. He was testing her hand skills but, more importantly, her capacity to listen and follow. After three days of working side by side, he agreed: 'I will teach you as much as you want to learn, as much as I can teach you and as much as we can do together.' Isabelle trained with this bookbinding master for four years.

The story of binding is, like most crafts, a story of continuation. The constructed, hand-bound book as we know it today emerged around the late fifteenth century; the rapid increase in books coming off the printing press required a rebalancing of the weight-to-strength ratio of a book and its binding. From its utilitarian beginnings, the craft has evolved through structural and decorative changes, brought by new technologies, materials and tastes. It is a craft that has been practised through time by humble artisans, retail or trade binders, fine binders and now even highly educated designer bookbinders who integrate experimental structures with expressive designs. It has always remained a meeting place for function and beauty.

Back in Edinburgh, Isabelle opened her own bindery with 10 pieces of paper and a giant flower press. 'From the minute I walked into that little bindery in Florence, I knew I wanted one,' says Isabelle. 'I knew I wanted to work that way.' Life as a fine binder who sews, covers and finishes by hand is a rare profession in today's mechanised book production industry. But Isabelle met experienced European and English bookbinders who helped cement her skills. She worked in collections where she developed specialties based on the tactility and

aesthetics that appealed to her — fourteenth-century Dutch stiff board vellum binding, eighteenth-century French binding and the glossy nineteenth-century English bindings with all their gold.

'One of the biggest influences for me going into historical bindings and repair was the renowned English binder Bernard Middleton. He showed me things about repairing eighteenth-century books, mentored me, added skills.' One day, walking in the British Library stacks with Bernard, he began intermittently pulling books from the shelves, commenting on and criticising the finishing of various bindings. 'I thought, wow, he's a bit tough,' says Isabelle. 'It turns out, they were his books.' Isabelle imagined walking the stacks of the future, picking up her own books.

The most likely place to find a fine binder's signature is on a book's cover. In bookbinding, 'finishing' refers to the process of decorating the outside of a book. It may include lettering, inlays and tooling, which is embossing intricate designs into leather or cloth, with or without gold leaf. Until the second half of the twentieth century, finishing was done almost exclusively by men who received books sewn and covered. Isabelle is well aware that there have been few women gold finishers through history, and has always wanted to reach that level: 'That is really what has inspired me and driven my bookbinding.'

The Library's collection has been touched by several skilled finishers. In 1910, the year the Mitchell Library opened, a bindery was started in a small basement room, staffed by the Government Printing Office. The history of the Mitchell Bindery is a story all of its own, but one of its significant figures was Frank Heyner, appointed as bindery finisher in 1916. Born in London, and son of a well-known binder, he showed early signs of outstanding gifts and, after working and training across Europe, he set sail for Australia.

While the art of hand finishing had long flourished in Australia, Heyner revolutionised a distinctly local type of book or manuscript cover,

using Australian wildflowers such as flannel flowers, Christmas bells and wattle. The bound papers of David Scott Mitchell himself are finished using waratahs and banksia leaves. A kangaroo-shaped tool was even cut for the bindery as a mark for volumes bound in kangaroo leather. The Library's Collection Care branch continues to look after the collection's bindings and the historic finishing tools, including those made by Paul Souze, a famous French tool cutter whose work Heyner saw when he visited the Paris Exhibition of 1900.

Isabelle McGowan leapt at the opportunity to use the Mitchell Library tools. 'As a binder, as a gold finisher, you cannot help but love tools and if you see tools that are unusual, absolutely you want to try them, like an artist wants to try a new set of oils.' She is currently working on a set of bindings using 36 tools selected from the Library's historic collection. McGowan explains that traditional gold finishing includes a degree of imitation, of tooling according to established proportions and formations. It is a way of walking in the footsteps of the masters. But reusing these old tools in a contemporary context is also a way of drawing the craft forwards, into the present and the future.

I am still a novice student, but bookbinding has already given me that same experience of finding myself in the span of time. These days I am drawn to the books I find in stack not because they are mysterious, but because they are familiar. I am discovering that learning an ancient craft, making a book from scratch, is just a series of steps that human hands still know how to do.

Today, Isabelle's work in the bindery is split between repair and restoration, rebinding and gold finishing, box making and teaching. Teaching is a way of paying respect to those masters who saw enough in her to impart their knowledge. She works hard to make the craft accessible: 'As humans we need to have the satisfaction of being able to create something by our own hand, and our own mind. To envision something and be able to make it!' McGowan challenges the aura of nostalgia that often accompanies a specialised craft such as bookbinding when it is described as a 'dying art'. She teaches with the vigorous optimism that others may want to continue the tradition, but also to impart something of the value that lies in the work. She teaches to develop a community that understands and appreciates fine bindings so that the books she makes might also be found in the personal libraries of the future.

Beyond the object of the book itself, Isabelle helps people access something less tangible. Looking at the very book she made with her Florentine master, she remarks that 'binding helps us appreciate the little things that appeal to our souls, the feel, the smell, the little touch of gold, how perfectly the tool has come on, the way the paper and the leather meet so beautifully. It's appreciating life in general, all the little wonders.'

Mathilde de Hauteclocque
Librarian, Collection Acquisition and Curation

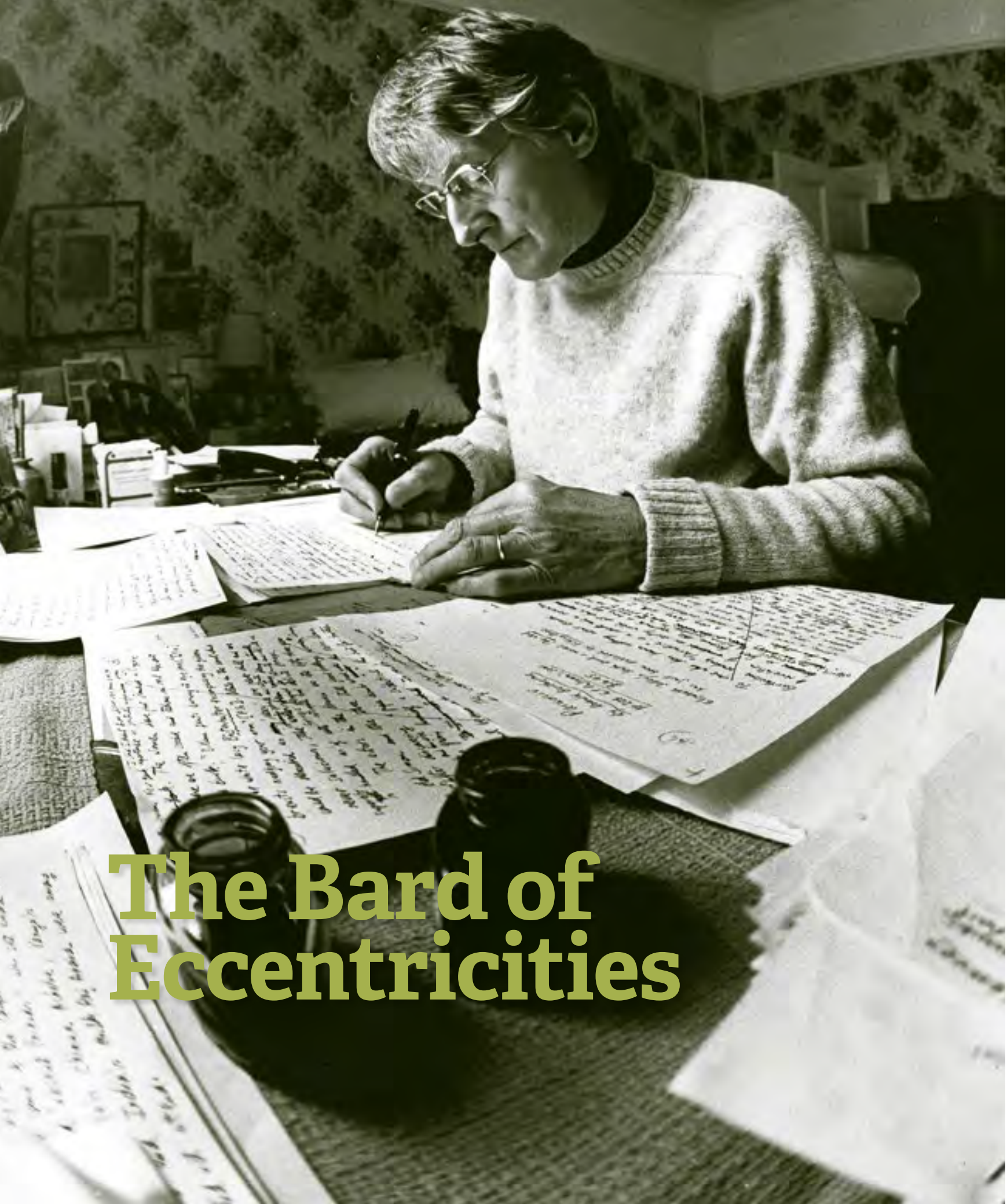
Isabelle McGowan will be teaching introductory bookbinding workshops at the Library on 26 August 2023.

Above right:
A woman binder, or sewer as she would have been known, in the NSW Government Printing Office, Sydney, early 1900s.

Opposite:
Isabelle McGowan at work in her Owl and Lion Bindery, St Peters.
Photo by Joy Lai

Marbled paper, Owl and Lion Bindery.
Photo by Joy Lai

Various tools in their marbled canisters, Owl and Lion Bindery.
Photo by Joy Lai



The Bard of Eccentricities

WORDS **Nathan Hobby**

The centenary of writer Elizabeth Jolley's birth prompts a literary biographer to revisit her complicated life and work.

'Birthdays are for childhood,' Elizabeth Jolley wrote for a newspaper on the occasion of the Bicentenary of Australia in 1988. She granted that an exception could be made for a major birthday, a 21st, a 40th, or, presumably, a 100th.

If she were with us still for her own centenary on 4 June 2023 we could expect mischief in some form — an article or an interview that would leave us perplexed, amused or inspired, perhaps all three. For the Bicentenary she was commissioned to write a novel and so, to celebrate 200 years of British colonisation of Australia, she turned in *The Sugar Mother* (1988), a bawdy and dream-like story of an academic's midlife crisis.

Jolley was a superstar of Australian literature in the 1980s and 1990s. Her comic, macabre world is populated with eccentrics and outcasts. Sex and desire in many forms are always bubbling under the surface, as are complex psychologies of need and control. A cleaning lady is driven to desperate measures by her neighbour in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* (1981). Two women living on a farm run over a creature at night and throw the body into a well in the 1986 Miles Franklin Award-winning, *The Well*, adapted for film in 1997. Jolley's semi-autobiographical Vera Wright trilogy, *My Father's Moon* (1989), *Cabin Fever* (1990) and *The Georges' Wife* (1993), is regarded by some as the pinnacle of her work. Writer Philip Salom sums up her writing so well as 'mirth and malice'.

Part of the Jolley legend was her unlikely success after decades of struggle, during which she took on cleaning and sales work to pay her typing bill. 'Thirty-nine rejections in one year and a failing door-to-door salesman,' she recalled. Her first book, *Five Acre Virgin and other stories*, was published in 1976 when she was 53. She became a central figure in a blooming Western Australian literary scene, visiting book clubs and teaching creative writing at the WA Institute of Technology, now Curtin University. Her fame grew and she became a crowd favourite at literary festivals, adopting a dotty bag-lady persona for public appearances.

Writer and broadcaster Ramona Koval remembered her as a 'tricky customer ... skittish and impossible to corral. And very entertaining.' Tim Winton, a student of hers, wrote, 'For someone with such an unbusinesslike mien, she was rather good at taking care of business — and then covering her tracks.' But Jolley's literary executor Caroline Lurie saw her old friend's persona in a different light, not as performance but as undisguised anxiety for herself and others.

Opposite: Elizabeth Jolley, 21 April 1989. Photo by Julian Cowan, *Newspix*

Jolley's 15th and final novel, *An Innocent Gentleman*, appeared in 2001. In the lead-up to her 80th birthday in 2003, a newspaper article revealed that she had been admitted to a nursing home with dementia. Helen Garner, her correspondent for 20 years, visited her but found it was too late to truly say goodbye. When Jolley died in 2007, newspapers around the world ran obituaries, including *The Times*, *Le Monde* and the *New York Times*.

Jolley inspired great devotion in her Curtin University colleagues Brian Dibble and Barbara Milech. Their Elizabeth Jolley Research Collection, now held at Curtin University Library, was a Borges-like project commenced pre-internet to capture not just every book, story, letter to the editor and recipe published by Jolley but even every newspaper article that mentioned her. Simultaneously, Dibble devoted decades to researching and writing a biography of Jolley. He had access to Jolley herself and to all her papers for many years, but his biography, finally published in 2008, holds back in what it reveals. 'Everyone wants the life of a writer to be public, [but] there were things she wanted treated with discretion,' he said.

Dibble's extensively researched authorised biography does lay out some of the complexities of Jolley's early life previously glimpsed in her fiction and non-fiction. She was born Monica Elizabeth Knight in Birmingham on 4 June 1923 to a pacifist English father and an Austrian mother. As a young nurse, Monica Knight became entangled with a couple named Leonard and Joyce Jolley. Monica and Joyce gave birth to babies five weeks apart in 1946; Leonard was the father of both. Eventually, Leonard left Joyce for Monica and persuaded her to use the name Elizabeth. Elizabeth, Leonard and their children moved to Perth in 1959 so that Leonard could take up a position as University Librarian at the University of Western Australia.

Four years after Dibble's biography was published, its muted account of Jolley's marriage was unsettled by the revelations in Susan Swingler's memoir *House of Fiction* (2012). Swingler is the baby born to Leonard and Joyce. When Leonard left Joyce, who remained in the UK, he made her promise to have no contact with his siblings and parents, a promise she held to. From Australia, Leonard had pretended to his family that he was still married to Joyce and that his daughter with Elizabeth Jolley was actually Swingler. As part of the ruse, faked letters written in Swingler's name were sent to her paternal grandparents, Leonard's parents; Swingler is certain Elizabeth Jolley wrote them. Swingler re-established contact with her father but Jolley usually wrote to her on Leonard's behalf. Swingler came to see Jolley as subtly but firmly in control of Swingler's interactions with her estranged father and half-siblings in Perth. When literary critic Susan Wyndham asked Swingler what the effect of her book would be, she said that while Jolley's reputation 'as a person' might be affected, she hoped her reputation as a writer 'won't be tarnished. I hope it takes people back to her books.'

If Swingler's memoir sent people back to Jolley's books, it didn't last for long. Jolley's popularity had been fading in the new century since her flood of publications stopped. Dibble quoted a blogger named 'Andrew E' who observed in 2006, 'Now you hardly hear of her.' There was a period of renewed interest after her death and many of her books were republished between 2008 and 2010 and are available today as ebooks. However, only a few are still in print and have a physical presence in bookshops and public libraries.

Jolley's bestselling phase is in the past, but she still has some devoted lovers of her work. Lisa Hill, author of the ANZ LitLovers blog, hosted an Elizabeth Jolley week for Jolley's 95th birthday in 2018, inspiring several bloggers to contribute

reviews of Jolley's books. Jolley also has a Twitter account (@elizabethjolley); the novelist Laura McPhee-Browne tweets wise and beautiful lines from her work.

Memorials to Jolley were established in her lifetime, and afterwards, but they don't always last — two different lecture series in her honour have fallen by the wayside. Still going strong, however, is the *Australian Book Review*'s Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize, one of Australia's richest and most prestigious short story competitions, founded in 2010. At Curtin University stands the Elizabeth Jolley Lecture Theatre, named in her honour in 1994. One memorial that should endure is Elizabeth Jolley Crescent in the Canberra suburb of Franklin.

Another aspect of Jolley's afterlife is her collection of papers, held by the State Library of NSW. Consistent with Winton's assessment of Jolley's acumen, she organised her papers before her death, selling them to the Library in seven batches between 1987 and 1999. In total, there are 91 full archive boxes; stacked up, they would make a 14-metre tower of paper. Jolley's diaries from 1940 to 1985 are embargoed until the death of all her children or 30 years after her own death, whichever is sooner, with the Library able to exercise discretion after that date.

But beyond the embargoed diaries, Jolley's papers are full of riches. Her literary correspondents range across generations and genres — Thea Astley, Bryce Courtenay, Mem Fox, Kate Grenville, Gillian Mears, Christina Stead and Kylie Tennant. Like the relic of a saint, a lock of Jolley's hair has been saved from a Valentine's Day poem she sent to Leonard in 1951. And there's the suitcase she brought with her in 1959 when she began her new life in Australia. It looks far older, carrying the initials of a stranger named 'RDB', a sticker for the Southern Railway to Tunbridge Wells Central, and another sticker for P&O Orient labelled 'JOLLEY'. It speaks of possibilities, migration and a patina of stories.

If the fading of Elizabeth Jolley's reputation is startling, it is not particularly unusual; Australia is not good at remembering its literary past. Just as we celebrated Jolley at her peak, we focus now on new work, the books that speak most directly to the present moment. But posthumous literary fortunes can change, and Jolley's darkly humorous fiction has a timeless quality. One film adaptation can make all the difference, as it did for Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*. Or in Jolley's case, when her diaries open by 2037 and another biographer has a chance to tell her story more fully, biographical revelations might return readers to her work for a new spring.

It's not easy being a dead writer, your profile relying on biographers, journalists, publishers and changing mores rather than your own new books. Happy 100th birthday, Elizabeth Jolley — may your work find the readers it deserves in your second century.

Dr Nathan Hobby is a special collections librarian and archivist at Curtin University Library in Perth. His book *The Red Witch: A biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard* (2022) is published by Miegunyah Press.

Elizabeth Jolley's suitcase, part of the Library's collection


LA NATION FRANÇAISE D'AU
25
JAN
1788

Eclair Noir
(Flash Blak)

I could'a been a little bit French
had La Perouse landed earlier that week
January 26th, 1788.

Following faux maps
drawn by sly sailors,
men often sail adrift searching
for treasure Islands.

So, I won't speculate too much
about this other terra Australis
balancing hemispheres that
everyone wants a piece of.

But I like to think
I'd be a real flash French Blak.
I'd have a knack for carving croissants
all dreamlike into impossible shapes
like Andre Breton. He enjoyed
an abstract…

Who knows?
Maybe we'd all be doin shoeys
out'a Louboutin stilettos
on our national day.

I know it's not right to reduce things down
To black & white like a savage,
signifiers floating nomadically.
But I'm a gap-trapped fulla caught
reading Claude Levi-Strauss
in the lingua franca: English.

Listen, there's a Law written on this Gadigal peninsula.
You'll have to suffer the misinterpretations:
I'm interested not in what's lost,
but what's gained in translation.

How I enjoy feeling the word 'sovereign'
boom from my feet and out through my throat
because we all know it's about land and language
and that there are two kinds of people in this world:
those who speak their own and those who don't.

Luke Patterson

Luke Patterson is a Gamilaroi poet, educator and musician living on Gadigal lands. His research and creative pursuits are grounded in extensive work with First Nations and other community-based organisations across Australia.

Illustration by Rosie Handley

Sydney Gay & Lesbian Choir. Courtesy Robert Knapman Photography

WELLNESS AND CREATIVITY

A writer with first-hand experience of art as therapy is compelled to investigate further.

WORDS **Ashley Kalagian Blunt**

The verdict came at the end of 2017 after a year of increasingly debilitating symptoms. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. No one in my family had a history of similar illness. Mostly bed bound, I ended up in personal lockdown three years before the rest of the world joined me.

At my sickest, I lost the ability to construct meaning from language. I could read individual words but couldn't hold enough of them in my head to figure out a sentence. I often couldn't follow the thread of narrative through an audiobook or podcast. Background noise became auditory chaos; even when I felt well enough to leave the apartment, it was a struggle to interact with others.

After the diagnosis, I learned the protocols for fatigue. These are largely based around pacing. I categorised tasks as physical (brushing my teeth, showering) or cognitive (answering a text message, heating leftovers) and monitored my symptoms as they related to each. Gradually, I developed a sense of how much I could do before needing pre-emptive rest.

Amid the blow of the illness, I had one stroke of luck: my quiet, reduced life allowed me to continue building the writing practice into which I'd invested nearly a decade. I was able to cling to this essential part of myself.

I became ill while writing my fifth manuscript. Writing was an activity I could do alone, in the silence of my empty apartment. More than that, returning to the manuscript, in pockets of 20 or 30 minutes, was an escape from the reality of the illness. Sinking myself into material I'd drafted when I was well helped to keep my mental health intact.

This shouldn't have surprised me. James McKenzie Watson, author of the award-winning *Denizen*, has been telling me for years that he writes for therapy.

Watson was 20 when he decided to try writing a novel. 'It was this very dark, bleak story about violence and abuse in the bush,' he says. Though the story wasn't based on his own experiences, he found the act of writing therapeutic.

> I was writing and processing and narrativising — not things that had happened to me, but thoughts and feelings I'd had. Having control of it on the page gave me a sense of understanding over my own thoughts and feelings. You're examining emotion and feeling in a very deep, nuanced way.

I would describe the benefits of my creative practice differently. When I'm deep into my writing, I feel like I've escaped myself for a while. I also feel a sense of accomplishment at seeing a story or essay come together and improve, draft by draft.

It's clear that creative endeavour can support wellbeing. But the relationship between both is more multifaceted, and less understood by scholars than I imagined.

'There's a common understanding out there that the arts are good for you, so if you engage in them, that's good — you know, it'll help you feel good,' says Dr Stephanie Rocke, the academic convenor of the Creativity and Wellbeing Hallmark Research Initiative (CAWRI) at the University of Melbourne. There is mounting evidence that engaging in the arts is beneficial. The question is how.

> What current scholars are looking at is what's good, when, and how, and pinning down the fact that what's good for you, Ashley, will be quite different than for me, Stephanie, because of who we are, our economic context, our social context.

Take singing. 'If singing's good for you because it's good for your respiratory health, that's good for anyone,' Rocke says. 'But it'd be particularly useful for people with asthma.'

As part of his work with CAWRI, Dr Frederic Kiernan studied how various creative activities helped people to regulate their emotions during Covid lockdowns. While people mainly chose to watch films and TV, and did more cooking and baking, it turned out these activities weren't as useful for regulating emotion as listening to music was. Singing and dancing were also more effective, but engaging in those in public during the pandemic was almost impossible.

Passive activities were generally less effective than active ones; the exception was listening to music. Through his research, Kiernan determined that listening to music was a creative activity that helped people cope with social isolation.

'A lot of people felt that their lives during the pandemic were chaotic and out of control, in a way,' he says. 'Music was able to help people regain a sense of control over their lives.' One research participant described how listening to music helped 'dissolve' the physical structures around him. Music stood in as a companion when human companionship was lacking.

Kiernan's research focuses on music, but I asked him if he felt that writing or reading could provide similar benefits. He seemed doubtful, but in my experience, I can feel an immense sense of control when I'm writing, as Watson also describes. Reading, likewise, gives me the potential to mentally shape the environment I'm in, based on the books I choose.

Watson finds reading therapeutic as well. 'Particularly when I recognise emotion that I don't know how to name or wouldn't be able to name even if I tried,' he says. 'That's why the novel is such an important art form. It's that ability to be inside someone else's head and experiences that is so helpful in untangling your own experiences.'

Author and editor Sophie Cunningham*, who has long been part of Australia's literary scene, notes that both reading and writing offer the potential for flow, which is best understood as the state of being fully absorbed in a task.

'When I do have time to really get into a book and read it cover to cover, I find it extraordinarily calming and engaging. There's a sense of being in the present, which not many other areas of your life give you. You need to slow down to read,' she says. 'You stop thinking about time. You become less restless. It does some of the things that I would say that meditation does, when you really start to engage in a book. It transports you to another world.'

Cunningham feels similarly about writing. 'There's something about any activity that gets you into your body, into the moment, that I think improves wellness. And that can be creativity, if you get totally engaged, if you get flow going — flow is a pretty extraordinary feeling, and it's pretty rare.'

There will surely be further studies of the therapeutic aspects of reading and writing, but I discovered another CAWRI researcher with an entirely different approach to exploring connections between creativity and wellness. Curator, artist and postdoctoral fellow Vanessa Bartlett specialises in 'thinking about how experiencing visual art or making visual art can support better understanding of human health'.

Her current project, 'Stomach Ache', combines this research with her personal experience of living with undiagnosed gut issues for the past 15 years. 'There's something really isolating about having a condition that doesn't have a proper name,' she says. Bartlett's symptoms force her to restrict her diet. 'I don't eat most things.' This makes everyday activities like going to restaurants or to friends' homes for a meal practically impossible.

I came to love writing for its own sake.

'I used to be very shy about those kinds of conversations. I didn't really have a way of talking about it,' she says. But through her research and artistic practice, she's learned to give herself permission to discuss her health challenges. This, in turn, has emphasised 'why we actually need to have these conversations about the social implications of gut issues and how it makes certain things about social life kind of awkward'.

She's now in the process of preparing an international exhibition focused on creative collaborations that combine artistic and health practices. 'Seeing an artwork address some of these issues is a great way for people to start talking and acknowledging some of these issues,' Bartlett says. 'I hope it'll make it easier for other people to talk to their family and friends about what goes on for them with their gut.'

Often academia 'tends to think about people with health issues as participants in creative programs that might help to make them better or to control their symptoms,' she adds. 'We don't tend to think about these people as creatives in their own right, in relation to their own health.'

Writing was an activity I could do alone, in the silence of my empty apartment.

For all the ways creativity can support wellbeing, it can be detrimental as well. In the years before becoming ill, my writing caused me significant stress and anxiety, and I often contemplated giving up. I started writing 'seriously' in my late twenties, as opposed to the many years I spent as a teen and young adult writing poetry, short stories and two novels, in addition to studying for a degree in journalism. The pursuit grew more serious because of the opportunity cost, to use the business term. When I was younger, I was writing for coursework, or in my free time. Later, I worked part-time in order to pursue writing as a career. Perhaps naïvely, I believed all I had to do to launch that career was sit down and write a 'serious' book.

Creative anxiety is a common experience. Psychologist and emerging writer Sanchana Venkatesh is familiar with the ways anxious thoughts can sometimes result in creative endeavour feeling more stressful than supportive. 'There are so many positives with creativity,' Venkatesh says. 'When we create, we feel fulfilled, we feel useful, we feel like we're using our potential or we're engaging in something we really love. But anxiety is also part of it. Because it's trying to come up with something new. It can be about the fear of failing. It can be about disappointing ourselves, disappointing others, being judged, being rejected. Sometimes your identity's tied in with what you write, or you're sharing a part of yourself through that process.'

On reflection, it wasn't the act of engaging with my creativity that caused me anxiety. It was my creative ambition, the emphasis I put on outcomes that could only come from external sources. Like many aspiring writers, I felt that my writing was only valuable if it was published, earned income or won prizes.

Venkatesh isn't surprised that I've had such opposing experiences with creativity. 'It's two sides of the same coin. When you're engaging in something creative, you will find you have moments of anxiety,' she says. 'But you'll also find it cathartic.'

When the illness shut down my life, I came to love writing for its own sake, and understood the privilege of having the time, space and cognitive clarity to engage with my ideas and develop my skills. Now, even though I still experience anxiety about my creative work, I try to set my ambitions for external validation aside. As Venkatesh is fond of saying, 'The thoughts and emotions are not the problem. It's how we're responding to them.' Instead of trying to banish unhelpful thoughts or label them as 'bad', we can acknowledge some discomfort as a normal part of the experience.

It is important to note that if a person feels their thoughts are too intense for them to refocus their attention, Venkatesh advises consulting a health professional. In contrast to the 'tortured artist' narrative, studies have shown that clinical levels of mental illness can negatively impact creativity.

Through her work as an art therapist at the Hospital Research Foundation Group in Adelaide, Karin Foxwell offers another perspective on creativity's capacity to influence wellness. She's quick to distinguish between engaging in creative activities professionally or for pleasure, and the 'art' aspect of art therapy. Prospective clients often tell her, 'I can only draw stick people.' But there's no artistic skill required for art therapy.

'It doesn't matter what's on the page,' Foxwell says. 'It's the narrative that comes from it.' In her work with military personnel and first responders suffering post-traumatic stress, for example, Foxwell takes the approach that everyone already has what they need to heal, even before starting the process. They just need to discover what it is.

A client might only draw a single stroke, spend weeks working on a painting or create a map of a place where a traumatic event occurred. Foxwell's role is to guide them to find the meaning in their work. 'I'm not telling them anything,' she says. 'And they're often really amazed at what they know about themselves. This is one of the healing aspects of art therapy — that they discover for themselves how they express meaning in their lives.'

While art therapy is more intentional about its outcome, this process resonates with my experience of writing after I became unwell, and with what Watson describes. 'So often I come out of writing feeling clearer and more emotionally centred and grounded,' he says.

If I'm grateful about any aspect of my illness, it's this renewed perspective on my writing practice: not as something I was 'failing' at, or that could only be justified through publication, but as an act of respite, offering me a way back to myself.

Ashley Kalagian Blunt's latest book is *Dark Mode*, published by Ultimo Press. She co-hosts *James and Ashley Stay at Home* with James McKenzie Watson, a podcast about writing, creativity and health.

*Sophie Cunningham was profiled in *Openbook* Autumn 2023.

WORLD PRESS PHOTO 2023

Australian Floods in Infrared
© Chad Ajamian

This series offers a unique perspective on the recent floods that have devastated areas in New South Wales. Aerial infrared imaging renders vegetation in pinks and reds, contrasting sharply against blues and cyans, which represent water. These images make newly flooded areas easily discernible to post-disaster emergency responders, assisting with response and recovery. The photos in this series were taken during the rounds of devastating floods, which forced the evacuation of 18,000 people in March 2021 alone. The increased intensity and frequency of flooding in the region is likely an outcome of the global climate crisis.

The project contains adaptations from raw data in NSW Flood Imagery Viewer by DCS Spatial Services, SED licenced under CC BY 4.

Flooding along the Hawkesbury River, 31 March 2022. The flood level reached an average of more than 13 metres and was the catchment's wettest 9-day period since records began.

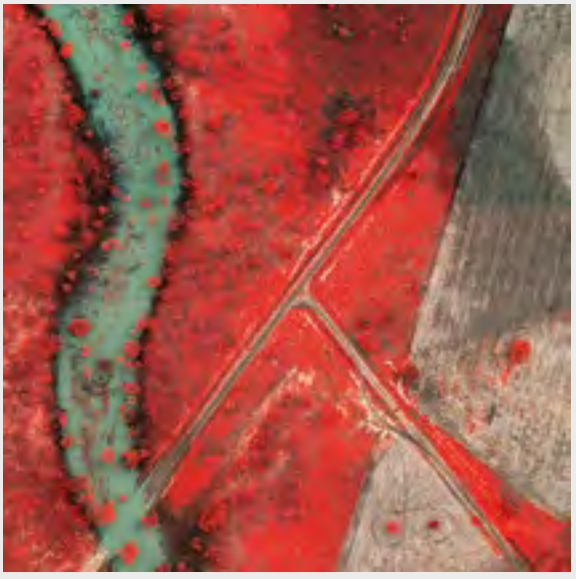
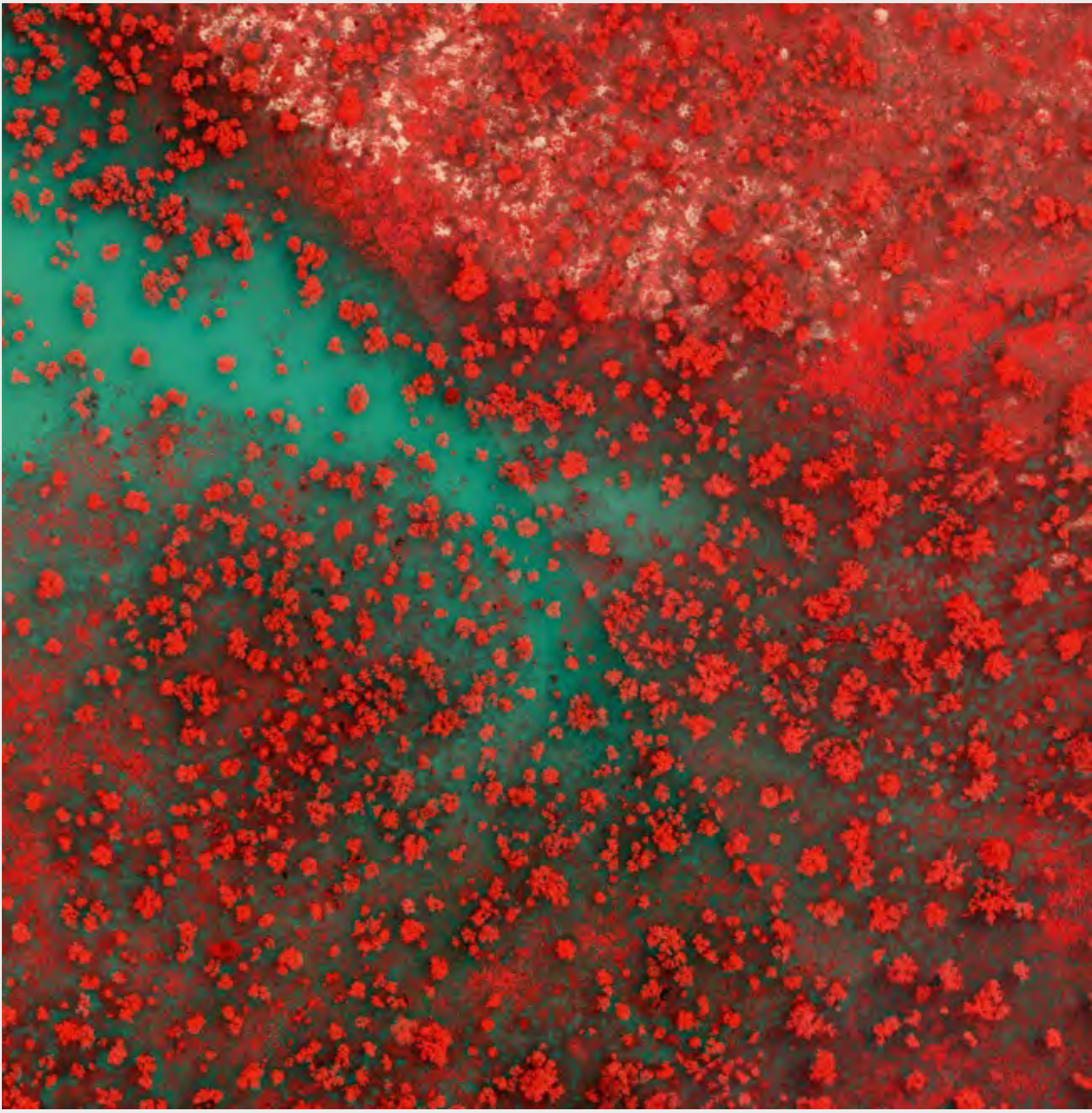


Image of a junction in Mogil Mogil, north-west NSW, 19 April 2021. Emergency response agencies use infrared aerial imagery to determine the extent of damage and can also determine safe ingress routes for response teams.

A view of the Lachlan River near the town of Forbes, 21 November 2021, after a flood inundated the town, blocking roads and access routes and damaging crop yields of local farms.



A flooded forest in Mungindi, on the border between NSW and Queensland, 19 April 2021. This area forms a natural basin, which can further isolate remote communities for weeks at a time, requiring emergency air supplies of food and medicine.

The Big Forget
© Lee-Ann Olwage,
Bob & Diane Fund,
for *Der Spiegel*

Sugri Zenabu, a mangazia (female community leader) of the Gambaga 'witch camp', sits encircled by residents in Gambaga, Ghana, on 27 October 2022. Zenabu shows some signs of confusion and memory loss associated with dementia.

World Champions
© Tomás Francisco Cuesta, Agence France-Presse

A scene of jubilation as Argentinians revel in their country's return to football world dominance after winning the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Buenos Aires, 18 December 2022.

Net-Zero Transition
© Simone Tramonte

Workers monitor seedling growth at a vertical farm, near Milan, Italy, on 10 November 2022. Crops grown in vertical stacks increase efficiency of land use, and reduce water consumption.

The Dying River
© Jonas Kakó, Panos Pictures

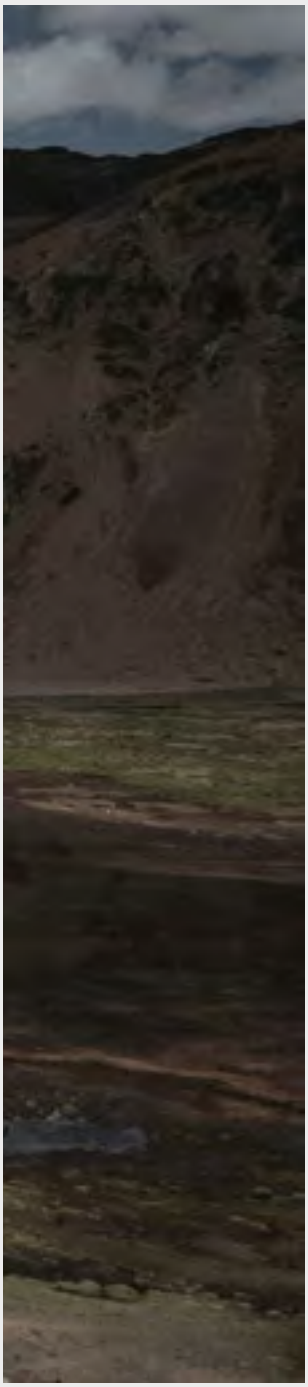
Alfredo, Ubaldo and José tend beehives near Wenden in the Arizona desert, United States, on 11 March 2022.

Maria's Journey
© Carlos Barria, Reuters

Upon arriving in the United States from Honduras in 2017 in search of asylum, Maria Hernandez and her two daughters, aged eight and three, were apprehended. Border authorities deported Maria, but her children remained behind. At first, they stayed in a children's shelter; later, they went to live with Maria's adult son, who was already in the US. In 2022, Maria returned under an asylum program, and was reunited with her family in Los Angeles, California. Maria Hernandez arrives to work on a banana plantation, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, on 25 June 2021.

Alpaqueros
© Alessandro Cinque, Pulitzer Center/*National Geographic*

Alina Surquislla Gomez, a third-generation *alpaquera* (alpaca farmer), cradles a baby alpaca on the way to her family's summer pastures, in Oropesa, Peru, on 3 May 2021.



Home for the Golden Gays
© Hannah Reyes Morales, for the *New York Times*

The Golden Gays are a community of older LGBTQI+ people from the Philippines who have lived together for decades and support each other. In a country where they face discrimination, prejudice and challenges amplified by their age and socioeconomic class, the group came together and made a home, sharing care responsibilities and staging shows and pageants to make ends meet. When their founder died in 2012, the community were evicted and some experienced homelessness until 2018, when they began renting a house in Manila.

World Press Photo opens in the Galleries on 12 August.

BREAKING THE LINE

WORDS **Adele Dumont**

A writer enrols in a drawing class and starts to see the world differently.

I enrolled in a drawing class to escape from the writing I was supposed to be doing, namely, the finicky and taxing work of editing a collection of personal essays. I thought it might be a tonic for my screen fatigue. Craving the tactile, I wondered if I could trade the business of paragraphs and punctuation for charcoal-smudged fingers and real-life rolls of Rubenesque flesh?

I opted for the National Art School's open-to-the-public short courses: first, Life Drawing and later, Expressive and Tonal Drawing. The school's imposing physicality appealed to me — its tall sandstone walls and buildings standing since colonial days when it was Darlinghurst Gaol. It has the secluded, quiet atmosphere that is so absent from those Brush and Sip places that have cropped up across Sydney's inner suburbs. They offer a fun, harmless night out, but are, to my mind, not so creatively inspiring.

We are accustomed to conceiving of the visual and the written as distinct artistic languages. Maybe even in opposition to one another. So over the course of two months' worth of weekly drawing lessons, it took me aback to discover so many parallels between the two. I began to see how the lessons of the drawing studio illuminated my writing practice in unexpected ways.

Our studio was located up a spiral staircase, on the upper floor of the school's central turret-like building. This was the heart of the gaol's original panopticon layout, with seven cell blocks radiating out from it, spoke-like. But in our short breaks, rather than gaze outward over the school grounds, I would lap around the arc of easels and survey the efforts of my classmates. Almost all of them were full-time students with considerably more experience than me. If you're a beginner drawer, it's tempting to look at your own disappointing sketching and think, well, of course I can't make a good drawing of that misshapen old vase, that cellulite-pocked thigh, chipped plaster cast or whatever subject is presented

One of Adele Dumont's charcoal life drawings done at the National Art School

Casting his own eye over our attempts, he says, ‘I can see you're seeing really well.’

before you. Circling the room, though, I was startled and humbled by how much the other students had *seen*. Such an unexpected composition! Such precise and delicate line! Such shadowy softness here, such drama there! I was profoundly struck that the *how* was more important than the *what*.

I remember having a similar epiphany about writing. When I started out I thought my subject matter needed to be dramatic and out of the ordinary to warrant my — or anyone’s — attention. So I sought out spectacular landscapes and pursued adventure, for ‘material’. But now I see that it’s okay to work with what’s in front of you: to write the life you’re in the midst of living and, especially for an introvert like me, to examine your own inner world more closely.

Gerald Murnane, whose prose is endlessly compelling, trusts his own mind will have sufficient content to give him all the material he needs. He has never been in a plane, and rarely ventures out of his hometown of Goroke; he has never owned a TV and has only ever seen a handful of films. He writes, ‘My work as a writer is to search for the sentences that will most accurately describe the mental imagery that is my only available subject-matter.’

Similarly, in her book *The Luminous Solution* Charlotte Wood has said that the writer’s essential task is the ‘weighing and balancing of sentences’ so as to give them energy, musicality, authority, clarity and flair. She asserts that in the same way a painting is often about ‘the paint itself’, what animates a piece of writing is less the theme, or the storyline, and more ‘the application of language itself’.

Before a visual artist can develop their particular style, or technique, or begin to experiment with composition or tone, they first need to develop their capacity to see.

It’s tempting when you’re starting out, to think *of course* you know what an elbow, or a door handle, or a tree trunk looks like. But so much of learning how to draw is learning how to see. Artist Luke Thurgate, who is one of my drawing tutors and has years of practice and experience, tells me he’s constantly reminding himself to double — and triple — check his subject, so that his mind doesn’t revert to seeing what it *thinks* is there. He shows us how to angle the easel so that you don’t have to swivel around — you want your eyes to be able to dart back and forth between the subject and the paper. Casting his own eye over our attempts, he says, ‘I can see you’re seeing really well.’ According to Luke, developing our capacities of attention and observation will lead us to gradually replace our presumptions with the ‘actuality of perceived experience’.

For instance, I didn’t think of drapery as geometrical but as soft and flowy; this is, apparently, a common mistake. Fabric actually hangs in straight lines and drapery is made up of interlocking triangles. Another common trap for beginner drawers is to focus on the outline of an object, rather than seeing a figure’s overall gesture or its variations in tone. ‘Lines don’t really exist,’ says Luke, ‘they’re conceptual, they’re like words. They’re signifiers: they tell us that two tones are meeting in space.’ Our job, he says, is to ‘find the relationship between the lightness of one thing, and the darkness of another’. Examine anything closely enough, I learn over the course of the coming weeks, and even the humblest of objects or the plainest of surfaces will reveal previously unseen complexities and richness.

Likewise, Mary Gaitskill believes good writing is grounded in an individual’s ‘intensely intimate perception’. For her, such attention is about care, respect, and even reverence: ‘It is like saying … this particular human is worth the most precise attention I can give them’. She laments that such devoted attention is currently undervalued. Tegan Bennett Daylight, who says she is the daughter of a ‘serious noticer’ with a ‘magpie attention’, believes that sensory details are what we respond to in good writing and for that matter, in life. She recalls teaching Les Murray’s ‘The Cows on Killing Day’. The poem would elicit her students’ outrage, or fury, or distaste until, one day, one of her students who happened to have worked on a dairy farm cried out: ‘But this is exactly what it’s like!’ Daylight commented that her student ‘read the poem as it is meant to be read. Murray doesn’t ask for sympathy for the cow: his job is simply to use his art to show *what it’s like*.’

Written descriptions that rely on default, conventional images or abstract, generalised ideas — what the writer *thinks* is there — are likely to be dull or clichéd. When reading back

through my own journals, I'm often struck by how up-close observation — whether I'm recording snatches of overheard dialogue in a cafe, or describing a physical landscape while I'm standing in it, or interrogating an emotion when I'm in the thick of it —brings an aliveness to my writing that eludes me when I try to describe that same thing from a distance.

Drawing is sometimes viewed as painting's inferior cousin — preparatory, unsophisticated. But Luke argues for it being beautiful and powerful in its own right: it has a rawness, and an immediacy. For Luke, the 'roughness' of a drawing — the evidence of numerous attempts, for example, to figure out the shape of something — can make its accuracy feel more accurate, and more alive. 'Give me evidence of the thing being made!' he exhorts us. 'The presence of a human struggling to do something!'

I think about the equivalent in writing, and wonder whether it might be the essay form, which has room for the tangential, the digressive and the associative. The best versions of the form, to my mind, show the writer thinking on the page; with lesser versions, the reader will sense the writer has already arrived at their position from the outset, and is simply fixing this down on paper. What draws me back to my favourite writers is not their grammatical accuracy, or the flawless logic of their arguments; it's that immeasurable

Right: One of Adele Dumont's still life drawings in charcoal and, above, its source

and ineffable quality that we often call 'voice'. I want to sense something of the presence and personality of the person behind the pen — their history, or their hang-ups, or their humour.

One day, Luke interrupts us 20 minutes into our willow-charcoal drawings. He instructs us to take a strip of cotton rag and to erase our work. (A panic rises in me, the same kind as when I realise a Word document hasn't saved properly.) We all groan and eventually set ourselves back to work. Twenty minutes later he gets us to erase everything again. The goal, he explains, is not to get too attached to or anxious about what's on the page but to develop what he calls a 'fuck-it' attitude. In a more dramatic illustration of this principle, Luke's recent work involves large-scale figurative charcoal drawings done directly on gallery walls, which he builds up painstakingly over the course of several weeks, and then paints over. The emphasis is on process, rather than the end result.

Another day, Luke tells us we have three hours to draw the still life on display: a plaster torso with some loosely scrunched-up paper tacked on in place of a head, an enamel carafe and a simple vase. Within minutes of beginning, I can see my proportions are off and I want to start over, but Luke insists that I just keep on adjusting and readjusting. That I check what the furthest point to the right is, this angle, that ratio. An hour in, the proportions are certainly more accurate but, a novice with charcoal, I've made a great blurry mess. Luke asks my permission to touch my artwork and shows me how I can work back into the blackness with a rubber to reveal the white of the paper, pressing softer or harder to get the tone I want. He says that with time, we'll learn the discipline to stay with the process.

I notice, with a fascination that makes me feel outdated, that the first impulse of some of the youngest members of the class when presented with a subject to draw is to use their iPhones to take a photographic image, and proceed to draw from that. Luke doesn't condemn this strategy, but he does point out that the number one trap when people work from found images, is to try to record *everything*, thinking everything is of equal importance, rather than prioritising, and exercising curiosity. With today's fast-advancing AI-generated imagery and text, and the fears it provokes, our capacity to slant the

'Drawing Week in the Library is one of the programs offered to students who have completed their first year of study at the National Art School. It is part of the Drawing Week Program funded by the Margaret Olley Trust — 18 participated at the library this year. This is a small selection of their work.'
— **Kim Spooner**, tutor, National Art School.

From left: Drawings by Zoe Friedman, Francisca Carrasco-Reyes and Isabella Bendeich

subject according to our whims, feels especially poignant. We are humans, not cameras, after all.

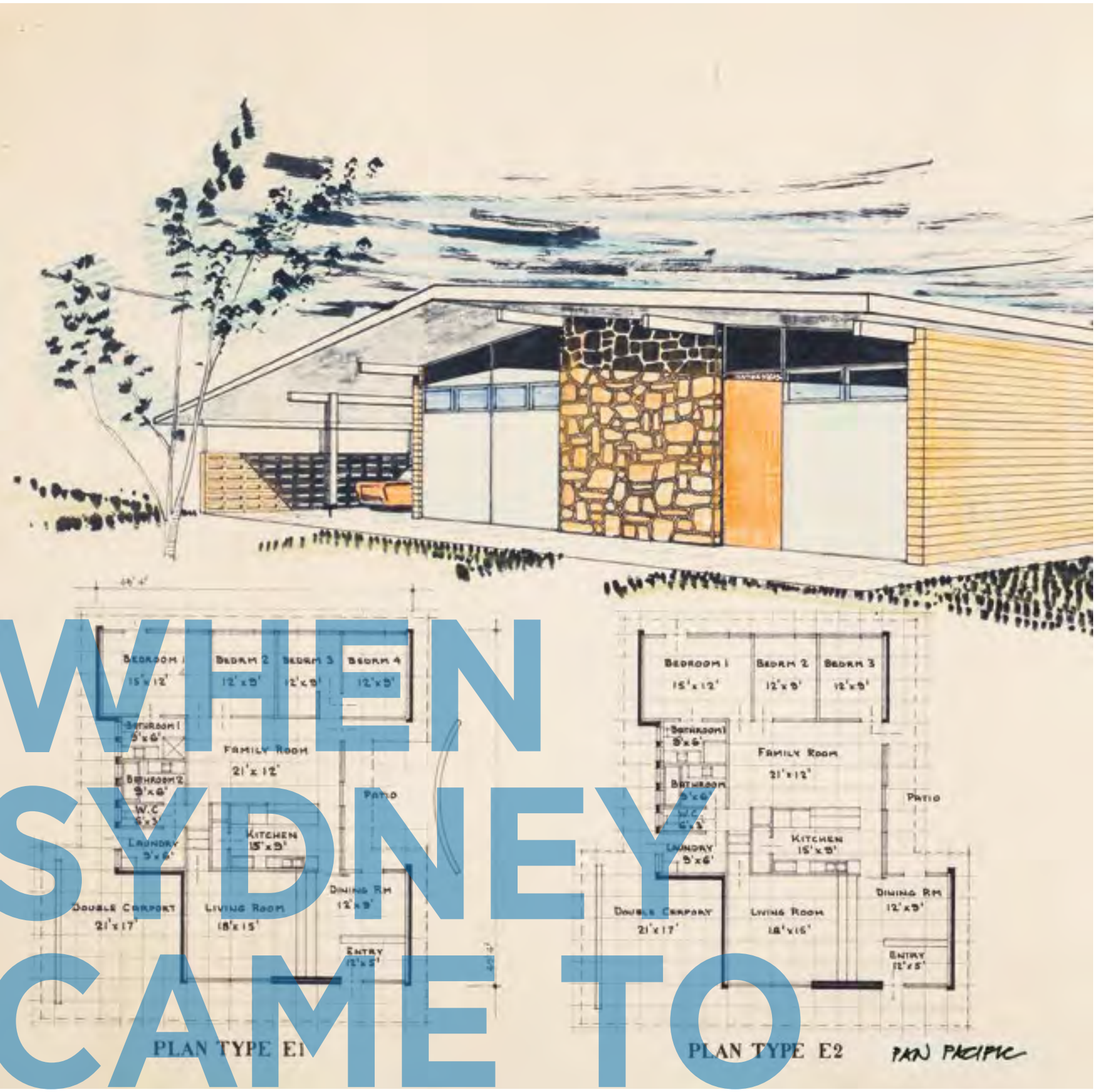
As well as turning out drawings, we learn about ourselves. For me, there's my propensity to compare myself to others in the room, most particularly, a teenage girl with emo makeup and enormous headphones who hunches over her tiny sketchpad. Her work is exquisite. I see my perfectionist tendencies, which mean I'm never really satisfied with my efforts. Again and again, the impulse rises in me to escape, to abandon what I'm doing. We need to be rigorous with the expectations we have of ourselves but also kind to ourselves. Luke comments that there should be moments where you're a bit uncertain or frustrated: 'Being on the edge of not-knowing is a powerful space to occupy.'

Drawing by Adele Dumont

It's not all about 'doing' either. He says we have this fantasy when it comes to making art that things just pour out, but that's not how it works. Luke says he'll often go to his studio and spend ages staring at his water bottle or making a cup of tea. For him, 80 per cent of the creative process is second-guessing, doing backflips. For a long time, I thought I wasn't a 'real' writer because I found the process so circuitous and so laborious. Now I know repetition, backtracking and uncertainty are integral to the creative process. Yet I'm still prone to conceive of this inefficiency as a means to an end, namely, a fluent, vivid piece of writing. Why am I more ready to recognise the value of practice and process in visual art, or music, or dance, or sport, anything but writing? I vow to place less focus on the 'result' of my writing, instead to appreciate the inherent value of thinking, meandering and zigzagging. And seeking.

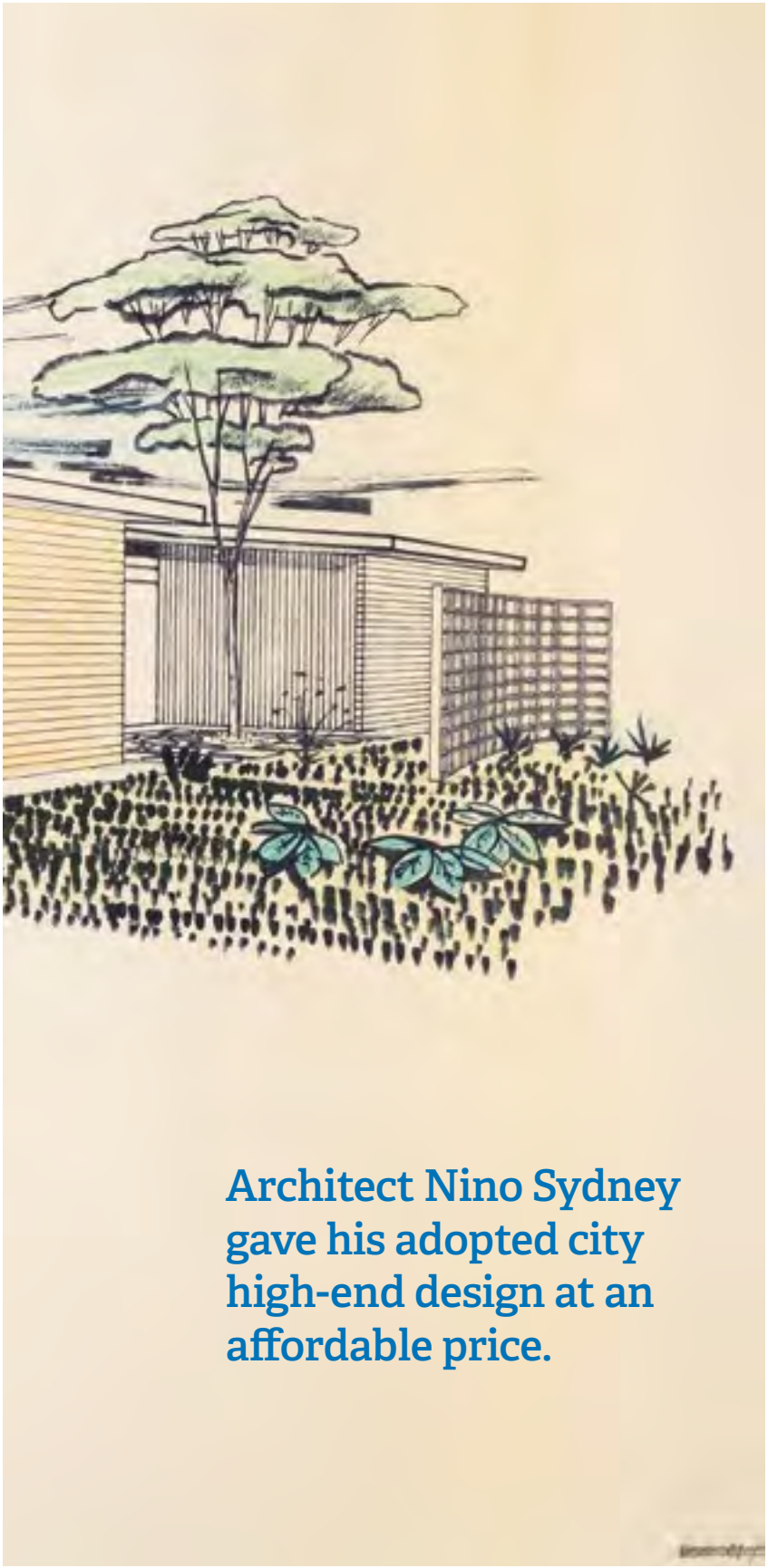
Each time I transition back from scribbling at my easel to scrawling in my journal, I have a feeling of homecoming: of ease, and familiarity, and comfort. But there's something else, too: a shift away from the segmented way we habitually view different art forms, and, in its place, a renewed awe at the human mind, in all its mystery, and all its bottomless creative potential.

Adele Dumont is a Sydney writer. Her second book, *The Pulling*, will be published by Scribe in early 2024.



WHEN SYDNEY CAME TO TOWN

WORDS **Anna Dearnley**

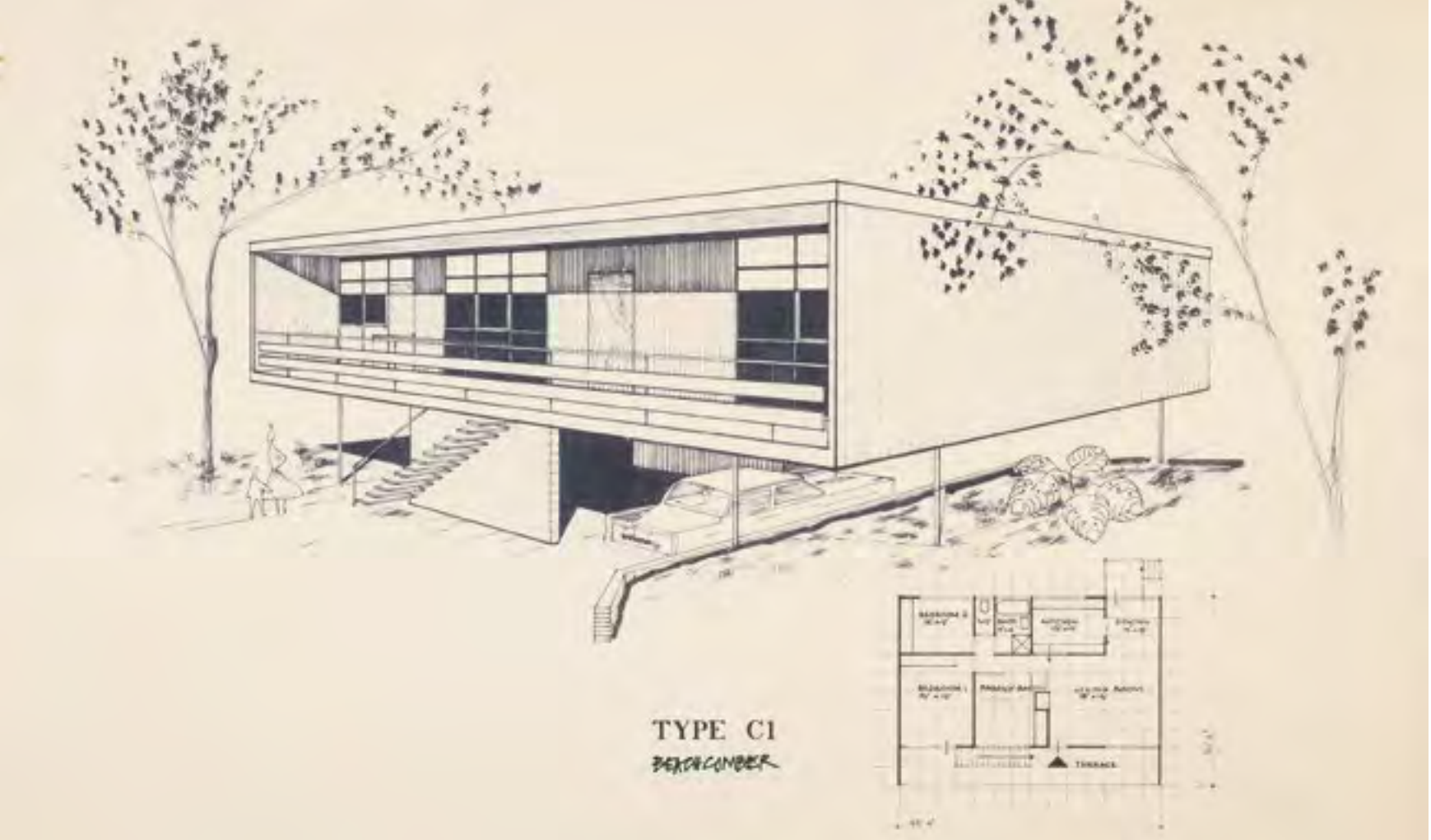


Architect Nino Sydney gave his adopted city high-end design at an affordable price.

Design for the 'Pan Pacific' project home, Nino Sydney for Lend Lease Homes, c 1961

How would you like a home built for you for the same cost as two family-size cars? That's what architect Nino Sydney set out to achieve with his project home designs for Lend Lease Homes, displayed amid great excitement at the Carlingford Homes Fair held in Sydney's northwest in 1961.

Hrvoj Oskar Ninoslav Pleminiti Somogji (anglicised as Harvey Oscar Nino Von Somogy) was born in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1932 and studied architecture at the University of Zagreb between 1950 and 1954. Arriving in Sydney a year later, he discovered his Croatian architectural qualifications weren't recognised. So he enrolled in architecture at the University of Sydney — successfully so, winning the Stephenson & Turner medal for his fourth-year studies. After graduating in 1959 he spent some time working in Germany, before returning to Australia and starting his architectural career in earnest, in 1960. Such was Nino's enthusiasm for his new home that not long after returning he changed his surname from Somogy to Sydney; he wanted something easy to pronounce. Sydney, like Somogy, had six letters, started with an 'S' and ended with a 'Y'. And Sydney had taken to his new town in a big way.



Above from left: Design for the 'Beachcomber' project home, Nino Sydney for Lend Lease Homes, c 1961

Interior of Nino Sydney's Somogy House

Nino and Vera Sydney

Sydney was a great place to play water polo, his chosen sport. He had learned the sport from a young age and played for both the Yugoslavian National University and national teams. So as soon as he arrived in Australia in 1955, then-Somogy joined the Bondi Club, the NSW state champions. He made the NSW state team, played at the national level nearly every year between 1957 and 1964, and was the NSW captain for the 1961 championships in Adelaide. Despite his evident talent, Nino Sydney was not eligible to join the Australian Olympic team due to the length of his Australian residency. He was, however, selected to coach the Australian team for its non-Olympic tour of Europe in 1965.

But architecture was the main game. Ever ambitious, Nino became Chief Architect for real estate and investment group Lendlease, a position he held from 1961 to 1973. During this time, he designed many houses for Lend Lease Homes, the company's newly formed project home branch, including the famous 'Beachcomber' — a modernist-style house for the masses.

Nino had produced designs for the initial 1961 'Lend Lease Project Homes Village' in Carlingford. The next year, the Carlingford Homes Fair launched, a joint venture between Lend Lease Homes and the *Australian Women's Weekly*, which had its own Home Plan Service houses to promote. The fair was an incredible success, featuring display home designs not only by Nino Sydney but also by notable architects Harry Seidler, Don Gazzard, Neville Gruzman, Ken Woolley and Michael Dysart. (Dysart and Woolley would go on to become the architects of the much-loved Pettit+Sevitt project homes.) The fair attracted approximately 200,000 visitors, around 9 per cent of Sydney's population at the time!

Nino Sydney contributed five designs to the fair, including the 'Beachcomber', the 'Golden Key' and the 'Pan Pacific', each of which show the influence of international modernism and the exuberance of Californian design associated with architect Richard Neutra and Palm Springs at the time. It was perhaps Nino's 'Beachcomber' that left the biggest impression on the Sydney landscape.

Around 200 Beachcombers were built throughout NSW, the ACT and Victoria — for the cost of £4495, around $134,992 in today's money. The locations and adaptations have been documented through

Helen Thurloe's Beachcomber House website (www.beachcomberhouse.com.au), which won a National Trust heritage award in 2017. Through sites such as this one and associated fan events, the Beachcomber design has reached iconic status.

Nino Sydney had been inspired by the German Bauhaus movement and the work of architect Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye. The opportunity to take the spirit of these renowned architects and adapt it to something within the reach of the average Sydney family was a dream come true. The raised design, which used a steel structure below and timber framing on top, was a clever solution for the type of sites found around Sydney, which are often sloped or rocky. The floor plan included a large balcony and open plan living spaces — perfect for making the most of a view. The architect was involved in every aspect, even designing the light fittings and door handles himself.

Sydney was prolific outside his work for Lend Lease. He designed numerous family homes across Sydney, as well as other project home designs for Hooker Homes.

The Nino Sydney architectural archive, recently donated to the Library by Sydney's wife Vera Sydney, contains many of his original Lend Lease project home designs, including the various iterations of the 'Beachcomber'. By the time he finished at Lend Lease in 1973, Sydney had designed more than 50 styles of Lend Lease project homes, as well as a house in Tahiti for Dick Dusseldorp, Lend Lease's founder. Lend Lease's largest housing estate was in Campbelltown, where around 2500 Lend Lease houses were built. In 1967, Sydney won the NSW Royal Australian Institute of Architects Project House design award for his 'Casa Blanca' project house model.

Among the pages of the impressive Nino Sydney archive I discovered drawings for several projects — houses, apartment blocks and factories — by Polish architect Theodore (Tim) Fry, (originally Teodore Frewilling). Sydney worked for Fry in the years immediately following his return to Australia in the late 1950s, apparently overlapping with his time at Lendlease. It appears, in fact, that Sydney had at least two simultaneous jobs for most of his

career, working for Fry, then taking on Fry's active jobs after Fry died in 1959. He also maintained a private practice throughout his time as Chief Architect for Lend Lease, designing numerous modernist houses for family and friends over decades. These included, in 1961, the dramatically sited 'Somogy' house in Castle Cove: a concrete tilt-slab house on raised V-shaped piers, with feature-wall stonework and triangular windows.

The newly acquired archive documents Sydney's entire career, which was sometimes fraught with difficulty. Like many architects, he was involved in numerous court cases over disputes with clients and builders. Nevertheless, he was prolific. The archive includes examples of his domestic work, key Lend Lease and Hooker project home designs, designs for one-off factories and other commercial premises, as well as the full set of drawings for his exuberant 1970s Surf Rider Motel, a triangular building on the waterfront at Dee Why, which featured a curvy rooftop pool with glass sides.

Nino Sydney loved his chosen industry and was always advocating for ways it could improve. The archive also contains documentation relating to Sydney's contributions to the Australian Modular Building society, for which he was a federal councillor. This construction industry group advocated for the establishment of standardised sizes for building materials, with the aim of improving efficiency and reducing building costs.

Nino Sydney's designs helped to shape the look of the city's suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s. More than any architect of one-off, individual houses, his designs have become part of the public's consciousness about the architecture of this period. Nino and Vera and their children lived in several houses he designed himself, eventually settling in Northbridge, near the Northbridge Baths, where he trained the Collaroy Red Devils water polo team.

Nino passed away in January 2022. Vera and children Mark (also an architect), Danny and Maya speak warmly of him as a husband, father, architect and sportsman, a kind, enthusiastic and passionate person who always had multiple projects on the go. The Nino Sydney archive, which contains over 600 architectural drawings, as well as correspondence, sketches, reports and photographs, is a wonderful resource for understanding this influential architect's life and career, and the city he helped build.

Anna Dearnley, Librarian, specialises in architectural collections.

HARVEY NINO ~~SOMOGY~~ SYDNEY B. ARCH. ARCHITECT A. R. A. I. A.

AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATIVE OF "INTERCONSULT" (INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF CONSULTING ENGINEERS)
36 KINGS CROSS RD., KINGS CROSS, N.S.W. - BUSINESS: 61-8124, 61-8125 - PRIVATE: 31-6034

27-7631

Top: Nino's letterhead: Somogy out, Sydney in

Bottom: Proposed residence for Mr and Mrs M Somogy, Deepwater Road, Castle Cove, designed by Nino Sydney, 1961

WORDS **Suzie Miller**

The library that made me

I am 12 and newly at high school. Libraries have not been part of my growing up. Books were not something my family shared or gifted each other. Yet, at first, my childhood was furnished with classics and beautiful hardback editions of books. They arrived courtesy of a retired schoolteacher, Miss Anne Brown, who lived across the street in our tiny cul-de-sac in Ripponlea in Melbourne, and who took a real interest in my reading life. We moved to a house closer to the hustle and bustle of St Kilda when I was 7 and the constant supply ended.

Instead, I reread the dozens of English classic novels that 'Aunty Anne' had given me, all with beautiful inscriptions in her flowery hand, together with a massive supply of hardbacks: Enid Blyton, the *Anne of Green Gables* series, the *Heidi* series. All were arranged and rearranged on my shelves.

Then, in the 1970s the St Kilda library was built. I had heard there was a new library, but I personally discovered it one day when I was in search of information for a Year 7 assignment. I rode my old red Malvern Star bike up Carlisle Street in St Kilda and was astonished at what was before me — a living, breathing building of books, books and even more books. From that day on, I spent every weekend in that library.

St Kilda Public Library, unbeknownst to me at the time, had been fought for and won by the community. Designed in the 1970s brutalist architecture era by Enrico Taglietti, its concrete and wood, strange angles, indented areas, soaring ceilings and slanted outdoor staircase were the opposite of libraries I had read about in books. To me, it felt like a 'pretend library', there for a bit of fun, not intimidating or old and musty. The architecture was in fact a nod to St Kilda's position by the bay and was intended to appear as a ship arrived into port. What a port of salvation it was for me.

Inside it felt odd, like a 70s spaceship. Everything was orange and brown, with large lights and plastic furniture. There were bright orange and white vinyl swivel chairs dotted about the place. It was welcoming and disarming all at once. The books lined the shelves, waiting there for us to wander around, take a look, pull one out, flick through, read or borrow it. I was allowed to look through any book! That I could then borrow them for free and take them home with me was like being offered a magic key.

I rode my bike to that library through rain, hail and bleaching heat. I would ride from home or from the bakery I worked at on weekends or drop by after my paper round during the week if the library was still open. It sat in the middle of my life, both physically and mentally. It was as if its bright, weird boxy design and its flamboyant orange carpet were always calling me in.

I spent weekends doing my homework there, seated at a white, plastic desk alongside other people at their white, plastic desks. I took long breaks and lost myself in the aisles, discovering poetry, novels, encyclopedias and art books. Hours of homework time would be lost and I would chastise myself as I dragged my feet back to the desk area. Often with a book or two in hand, one of which would be read at the desk in that frenzied manner of youth where the only thing in the world is the story before you. My homework barely attended to.

Later in life I was astonished and then envious of my friends at university who had parents who carefully guided their reading, offered them books from family shelves and discussed which books were important. But now I look back at the incredible joy I had in discovery. For under those massive square lights, within the confines of orange and the laughing of children down in the 'kiddies section', I was free to roam and to select anything I chose.

At times those choices were unschooled, while others were evidence of my secret burgeoning sexual awakening. So too, there were books that changed my life, my ideas on writing, my sense of who I was. Sunk deeply into one of those swivel chairs, I read the entirety of *Great Expectations*, my first taste of Dickens. It's where I read and reread *Jane Eyre*, *Anna Karenina*, *Wake in Fright*, books by Chaim Potok, Virginia Woolf. Reading *Wuthering Heights* I was completely transported to the moors of England without leaving the burning heat of an Australian summer. It was in that library that I first read poetry — consumed it, inhaled it. And Shakespeare. Despite not understanding it all I was agog at the iambic pentameter of his work (without the label), the characters and the sonnets.

In that library, fought for by community, built with the vision of a new style of architecture, and nurtured by passionate librarians, I discovered who I was. Outside, the trams of Melbourne hurtled along Carlisle Street; inside was a land that not only welcomed me and taught me that books were there for everyone, but a land that encouraged me. Through the sheer enjoyment of reading voraciously it taught me of the joy in playing with words, of describing and transporting oneself through story.

I would almost weep when a story ended, having to farewell a character I had bonded with so closely; I wanted to take the book home with me for all time so I could be close to it. But a library is about leaving books behind for others to discover. Often I would pop by the shelf to visit a favourite, take it out and caress it, remind myself of the characters or check certain special passages. It was my way of reminding myself that the book still existed, was still there to touch and leaf through. And when a certain book was missing, I knew that it would be back.

Suzie Miller is an award-winning playwright, screenwriter and librettist. Her play *Prima Facie* premiered at Sydney's Griffin Theatre and toured Australia before opening to sell-out seasons in London. It won the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play in April 2023 and recently opened on Broadway. In 2022 her plays *Anna K* and *RBG: Of many, one* toured nationally and will also transfer to London and NYC. She lives between London and Sydney.

Photo of Suzie Miller in London's West End, by John Davis

COOKING THE BOOKS

WORDS **Sally Hone**

Mrs Osborne's tomato chutney

Photo by Joy Lai


Tomato Chutney.

12 lbs tomatos
1 lb dark sugar.
1 oz whole pepper.
½ oz mace.
½ oz ground ginger.
½ oz allspice.
½ oz ground cloves.
3 pints vinegar.
2 oz chillies (deseeded first)
½ lb dried apples.
½ lb currants & sultanas
Scald & peel tomatos.
Tie spice in muslin.
Boil slowly for 4 hours.

Tomato Sauce.

40 lbs ripe tomatos

From Mrs Dorothy Osborne's handwritten recipe book, 1896

Some colonial recipes don't exactly have you leaping into the kitchen bursting with enthusiasm to experiment. Boiled sheeps head, jugged wallaby or stewed mutton anyone? Our sophisticated palates are a far cry from those of 120 years ago, when meat dishes such as these, prepared with a minimum of flavouring, were standard fare. So, searching for a hearty winter savoury recipe, I decided to make this chutney. It is no wonder, I realised, that chutneys like this one produced in the kitchen of Mrs Dorothy Osborne of Foxlow Station, Bungendore, NSW, would have been essential to add zest to an otherwise bland spread.

An attractive element of this recipe was the spice mix — mace, ground ginger, allspice, ground cloves and chillies — an aromatic blend to rival many contemporary chutney recipes.

To start, I converted the pounds to kilos and grams, and shrank the quantities by about 25 per cent. 12 pounds of tomatoes converts to 5.4 kilograms and I really had no idea how much chutney that would make, so settled on 4 kilograms.

The vinegar ratio of 3 pints to 12 pounds of tomatoes seemed excessive too — that would be 1.4 litres to 5.4 kilograms of fruit. I also questioned the ratio of fruit to sugar to vinegar. I used 4 kilograms of tomatoes and 1.15 litres vinegar — a bit less than Mrs Osborne's ratio, or Dr Wadham's, whose name appears at the bottom of the recipe. Presumably, Dr Frederick Wadham, a medical practitioner in Bungendore, and perhaps the recipe's source.

In the early colony, vinegar (mainly malt vinegar) was imported from England, but as food production became more established, it was also manufactured locally. It must have been produced by winemakers and perhaps households brewed their own too, for example apple cider vinegar from crop windfalls. Our commercial vinegars have about 5 per cent acidity; it's possible that in 1900 vinegar was less acidic.

Having decided to reduce the whole recipe by a quarter, I tossed up between malt vinegar and apple cider vinegar and settled on the latter. Whichever you use, make sure it is good quality, preferably organic, and made from food-based sources. This will be closer to what Mrs Osborne would have used at the turn of the century. My own research suggested that some cheap vinegars are made from wood shavings and that those made from grains and spirits are poorer quality than those made from apples or grapes.

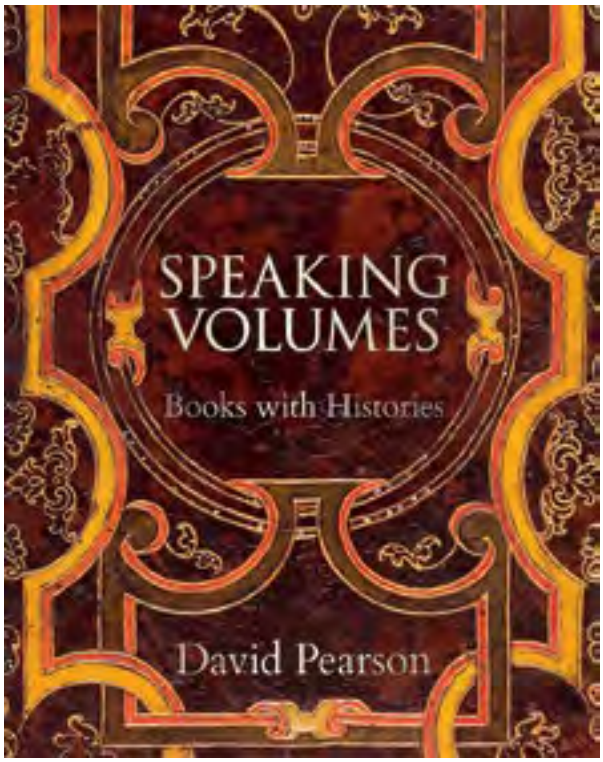
Half an ounce of each spice converts to 14 grams, or for me with my recipe's reduced quantities, 10.5 grams. That seemed a bit heavy-handed, especially for the cloves and mace, so I cut them back to about 8 grams each and used them whole. I slightly bruised them in a mortar and pestle, and tied them up in muslin, along with whole allspice and black peppercorns, 11 grams of each.

As for the other ingredients, I used 3 red chillies (seeds and veins removed), 450 grams of brown sugar, 2 Granny Smith apples roughly peeled and chopped small. (I suspect the recipe calls for dried apples because apples were probably only available for a short season and not at the same time as tomatoes.) I used about 110 grams of sultanas and currants, but more currants than sultanas. And I couldn't help using a bit of fresh ginger, a 20-gram piece sliced, as well as 2 teaspoons of ground ginger.

I scalded and peeled the tomatoes and blitzed them for a few seconds in a food processor, but if you have time, chop them by hand! I added all the other ingredients and simmered everything in a 10-litre pot for 4 hours as instructed. (In fact, this was the only instruction.) Gradually, this heady brew reduced to about half and my apartment smelt like a chutney factory.

I ended up with six large jars of dark, richly flavoured chutney. At first, I found the vinegar a bit strong, and I wondered if it should be reduced to a maximum of 1 litre next time. But I had put my faith in a recipe written more than 100 years ago, and it paid off because now it seems to have settled and I like it — the flavours are all well balanced. I'm putting tomato chutney on everything, and at this rate there won't be much to give away as I first intended! So all up, a pretty successful recipe that I recommend.

There's one final thing I could easily have missed: handwritten in pencil at the bottom of the recipe it says 'ps don't forget salt'. I didn't, adding 2 dessertspoons. Onions might make a good addition too.



Speaking Volumes
Books with Histories

by David Pearson

Bodleian Library Publishing and University of Chicago Press

Easy as it is to access the content of more and more books digitally, physical books remain important for their archaeological evidence. This was David Pearson's argument in his 2008 work *Books as History*, and it is his message in his latest work as well: 'This is a book about why books matter.'

Speaking Volumes builds upon, but may be read independently of, *Books as History*. Whereas the earlier work covered books in their library contexts and matters pertaining to entire editions or issues, as well as the features of specific copies, *Speaking Volumes* focuses entirely on provenance and, to a lesser extent, bindings. It is thoroughly up to date, for example noting Jason Scott-Warren's discovery in 2019 of John Milton's annotations on a copy of Shakespeare's First Folio and discussing Covid-19's effect on books.

Annotations in books used to be considered significant only if they were done by somebody famous. Bindings aroused interest only if they were fine, which means expensive and highly decorated. Pearson argues that all annotations are important and that the notes of ordinary people shed light on their thoughts and lives. He also proposes that the starting

Between You & Me

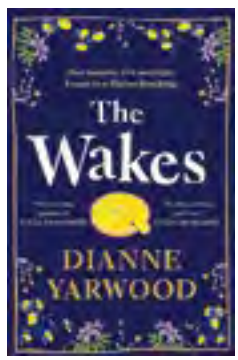
by Joanna Horton

Ultimo Press

Between You & Me is a stunning debut, set beneath the simmering Brisbane heat. Elisabeth and Mari are close friends who drift into an unlikely ménage à trois with an older academic. While some readers have made comparisons with Sally Rooney, this work speaks for itself; it reconciles the communication issues that plague friendships of people in their mid-20s and the unavoidable demands that life puts on us.

With a plot that weaves towards its conclusion, this a must-read for those looking for a slow-paced novel this winter. The characters within are so frighteningly realistic that were they to be transposed onto Paris Street in Brisbane's West End, they would live out their lives alarmingly well. Horton has created a stunning fusion of literary fiction and reality, demonstrating herself to be a writer of serious talent with an even more serious future ahead of her.

Lewis Fisher



The Wakes

by Dianne Yarwood

Hachette

It's the prospect of death that makes us ponder life, loss that makes us grateful for what we have, and funerals that have us craving a bit of cake. These striking human realities are key ingredients in Dianne Yarwood's debut novel. *The Wakes*, set in Sydney, explores the interwoven lives of three people, Chris, Clare and Louisa, who are brought together by twists of fate, and by funerals.

Recently divorced Clare meets her new neighbour, Louisa. Together, they form a funeral catering business aiming to provide a morsel of comfort to the grieving. Chris, an emergency department doctor, struggles with his own losses: lovers, friends and patients alike.

The Wakes is both sorrowful and uplifting in its exploration of these three lives, ultimately inspiring purpose in the aimless and hunger in the despairing. It's an easy read that tackles big ideas on friendship, loss, love and lemon tarts.

Siena Byrne

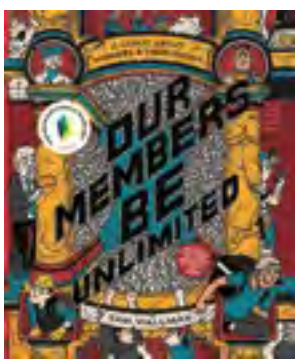
point of bookbinding history should be not the binders, but the users who chose to bind their books either grandly or, more often, plainly. This, he argues, emphasises the social status of both books and people. His approach accords with the 'bottom-up' approach of history more broadly. It also ties in with interest in family history and genealogy.

Pearson's erudition, familiar to readers of his textbooks *Provenance Research in Book History* and *A History of English Bookbindings, 1450–1800*, shines through. But librarians and book historians are already converted. Elegantly and simply written, *Speaking Volumes* is a fascinating read for a broader audience. Case studies taken from books held in personal and public libraries across the world support the author's general comments. Unsurprisingly, given its publisher, samples from the Bodleian Library in Oxford dominate. But of specific Australian relevance are examples from Moore Theological College in Sydney, including the concordance Australia's first chaplain brought out on the First Fleet, the binding of which was repaired in crude DIY fashion because no trained bookbinders were available at the time. The State Library of NSW abounds with books that exemplify points Pearson makes. A German Bible from 1832 recording births and deaths in the Leichhardt family, including the birth of explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, is a salient case.

When print is censored, manuscript and other annotations can be the only concrete proof of dissent, and one Catholic showed his disapproval of John Foxe's rabidly *Protestant Actes and Monuments*, or Book of Martyrs, with the binder's spine title: 'Lying Foxes Acts'. Another enthralling anecdote tells how copies of the First World War manual *War Instructions for British Merchant Ships* were weighted with lead to make them sink if ships fell into enemy hands. The poignancy of some annotations is undeniable.

The book is generously illustrated and well presented. My only caveat is the way case studies often interrupt the narrative thread, but it is hard to see a viable alternative. One might not agree with everything Pearson says: I have reservations about the feasibility of his extremely light-touch approach to rebinding, and place more value than he does, in this monograph at least, on artefactual elements of the book beyond the copy-specific or on pristine copies of books in libraries. But provocation makes one think, and that alone is a point gained. Buy, read, mark and inwardly digest this excellent book.

Karen Attar



Our Members Be Unlimited

A comic about workers and their unions

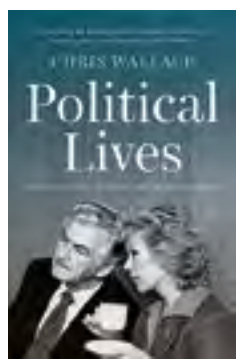
by Sam Wallman

Scribe

With a visual style reminiscent of *The Simpsons* and *Futurama*, across the 254 pages of his graphic novel, Melbourne-based author and illustrator Sam Wallman gives us an historical overview of the trade union movement, with personal — and harrowing — details of working in an Amazon warehouse in Melbourne. It is an entertaining and amusing, yet serious and informative global history of unionism.

He uses cinematic techniques throughout, beginning with a cosmic overview and ending with an extreme close-up of a small plant growing from a crack in a pavement. In some ways, the book reminded me of the illustrated 'For Beginners' series but printed at a much larger size, in full colour and with better page layouts that take their time to tell a visual story. I'm already a union member but if you're not, this just might tip you into joining.

Gabriel McCann



Political Lives

Australian prime ministers and their biographers

by Chris Wallace

UNSW Press

Would you recognise a photo of Australia's first prime minister if it were placed alongside photos of Alfred Deakin (#2), Chris Watson (#3) or George Reid (#4)? Probably not. Political historian (and former Press Gallery journalist) Chris Wallace asks whether the existence of a biography — there was no contemporaneous account of Edmund Barton and the other 'founding fathers' — might have created a more permanent place in the national historical consciousness. Her ambitious book, which works as collective biography of twentieth-century prime ministerial biographers *and* their subjects (from Barton to Howard), is authoritative and compelling.

The story of Bob Hawke and his biographer Blanche d'Alpuget is worth the price of admission alone. Wallace writes that d'Alpuget 'is unique in Australian biography and possibly unique in the history of modern political biography in the degree and sheer longevity of her engagement with her subject and the impact of her work on his career and life, and vice versa'.

Phillipa McGuinness

Illustration by Rosie Handley

WORDS John Zubrzycki

Shakespeare Wallah

The Bard on tour in Bengal and beyond

In September 1867, the grandly named Royal Lyceum Theatre opened on Calcutta's maidan, a vast expanse of greenery that lay between the so-called White Town and the Hooghly River. Made from bamboo and corrugated iron and able to seat 800 spectators, the theatre was erected by GBW Lewis, an impresario. The *Bengal Hurkaru* newspaper applauded the theatre's 'ample and imposing stage', gilt plaster ornamentation and red velvet seats. Presenting a mix of Shakespearean dramas and the latest theatrical productions from Drury Lane, Lewis's company played to full houses — until disaster struck. A month after it opened, the structure was flattened by a cyclone.

The London-born Lewis was among the earliest theatrical entrepreneurs to tap into Asia's insatiable appetite for entertainment. After arriving in Australia in 1853, he started an equestrian circus that performed across the goldfields in NSW and Victoria. In 1859, he decided to tour his troupe of five adults and four children to Hong Kong and China, lured by the prospect of larger audiences — and greater profits. A year later his Great Australian Hippodrome and Mammoth Amphitheatre arrived in Calcutta. Its cast of players included 'Lilliputian Tom'; JM Wolfe, 'the celebrated Shakespearean Jester'; the brothers Leopold and Austin Shangahae and a 'host of other celebrities'.

Actor–managers such as Lewis trawled the entertainment circuits that spanned the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Many sprang up in the 1850s alongside the gold rushes in California and the Australian colonies, presenting everything from circus to Shakespeare, minstrelsy to magic, vaudeville to ventriloquism. Theatres, tents, town halls, army barracks, mess rooms and clubhouses became focal points for a whole gamut of performances that catered to both expatriates and locals.

Australia, located at the intersection of these two circuits, was strategically placed to export its talent to the world. As another impresario, Robert 'Sparrow' Smythe, remarked in 1871, it was from Australia, not Europe, 'that the East receives its supplies of musical, dramatic, and other travelling troupes'.

Smythe, who like Lewis was born in England and had made Australia his home, was struck by the adventurous spirit of these 'wanderers'. 'Wherever I have been east of the Cape of Good Hope, I have met some kind of professionals either sojourning, or enroute, voyaging at sea in large ships or small, or travelling on land by railroad and dak gharree, on horseback, in sampans, dandy dhoolie, palankeen, and sedan-chair; in buggy, tent-cart, stage-coach, and omnibus; by bullock-train and mule-waggon, and even on the back of commissariat elephants.'

Lewis would have sampled most of these modes of transport during his travels in India and China. He epitomised the spirit of Smythe's professionals,

Above: Panorama of Calcutta from the Ochterlony Monument on the Meydan, 1832 (detail). Drawn by Jacob Janssen

Left: Rose Lewis, nee Edouin. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

but such tours took a heavy toll. After their initial Calcutta seasons, Lewis went with his heavily pregnant young wife Rose Edouin and the rest of the company on a gruelling tour through northern India. In April 1868, their 10-month-old daughter Lucy May died of convulsions. While recuperating from their travels in the Himalayan hill station of Simla, the couple's third child William was born but sadly died a year later from bronchitis. Shortly afterwards, Rose's brother Charles succumbed to heat exhaustion.

In 1871, Lewis opened his first brick and mortar venue, the Theatre Royal on Calcutta's main thoroughfare Chowringhee. The Lewis Dramatic and Burlesque Company premiered with a performance of Leicester Buckingham's play *The Silver Lining* followed by a season of *Othello* in which Rose played Emilia. A month later Lewis staged 'a Grand Production of *Macbeth*' with the multitalented Rose as Lady Macbeth and a choir of 100 voices.

India's appetite for Shakespeare dates back to the early eighteenth century with the publication of local English-language editions of the Bard's works. Popular Shakespearean dramas became the mainstay for amateur theatre groups from the 1770s onwards, initially for the benefit of English residents in Bombay and Calcutta.

In 1831, a company of Bengali actors staged *Julius Caesar* in their own Hindu Theatre and in 1848 a Bengali actor, Bhaishnav Charan Adhya, played Othello in a production with an otherwise all-English cast. With the passing of the 1835 India Education Bill, which made English the language of

instruction in government-funded schools and colleges, Shakespeare became a part of the 'civilising' mission of the Raj, designed to produce 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect'.

Students flocked to theatres to improve their elocution. As one commentator noted in *The Times of India* in 1868, 'Shakespeare has been studied by our Baboos in their educational course at universities or college and they regard anything below Shakespeare as something scarcely worth notice.'

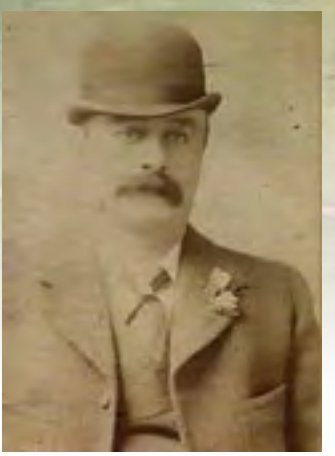
Indian playwrights soon began adapting the Bard's works, translating plays into local languages, rearranging plots, changing names and adding song and dance routines. Audiences were naturally drawn to the figure of Hamlet, who shares remarkable similarities with Arjuna, the mythical king of the Pandavas in the Sanskrit epic the *Mahabharata*. Both are princes who find themselves trapped in a world of war, intrigue and deceit. Both must grapple with the fact that the only resolution to their plight is the shedding of family blood.

GBW Lewis and Rose Edouin's association with Calcutta left a lasting legacy. A frequent visitor at Theatre Royal was Girish Chandra Ghosh, who is now regarded as the founder of the modern Indian stage. Ghosh developed his acting talents by watching their plays and even copied the theatre's layout when designing his own venue. Edouin became Ghosh's mentor and the pair discussed European dramas and performances.

Another Australian actor–manager who exported Shakespeare to Asia was Hobart-born Harry P Lyons. After briefly performing in an equestrian circus with Rose's brother Willie Eduoin in the 1850s, Lyons decided that his real talents lay in theatre management. Over a career that spanned six decades, he managed dozens of companies and performers, including the Australian tour of Blondin, the first man to cross the Niagara Falls on a high wire. Other companies Lyons managed on their tours through Asia included Louise Pomeroy's Shakespearean Dramatic Company and George C Miln's Shakepearean Revivals.

Fresh from a successful season in Australia, Miln spent two years in India from 1890 presenting an all-Shakespearean repetoire, organising readings of the playwright's work and rehearsing with local companies. Calcutta newspaper *The Englishman* praised him as 'the first manager who has attempted an adequate staging of these great plays in India'. In 1892 Miln played Shylock in a production of *The Merchant of Venice* by the Bombay Amateur Dramatic Company, whose members came from the city's Parsi community.

Lyons himself spent enough time presenting Shakespeare in India to know how careful one



Harry P Lyons. Photo by Marion & Co, courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

Robert 'Sparrow' Smythe, who was described as a traveller, concert manager and orator, around 1875. Photographer William Davies & Co

William John Holloway, *carte de visite*, from Ward Family collection, c 1862–1891

Essie Jenyns as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, 1886. Photographer unknown

had to be when playing before an audience of Bengalis. He told one interviewer: 'The Baboo takes his copy of Shakespeare with him to the play and does not mind correcting you and arguing the point if he thinks you are wrong.'

Sharp-eyed critics were not the only hazards Shakespearean actors faced in India. The Bard's plays often called for heavy costumes that were unsuited to the tropics. Canadian-born Matheson Lang, the lead actor with the Holloway Touring Theatre Company, complained that his makeup was constantly running down his face. Perspiration caused actors' beards to fall off. When the company landed in Calcutta in 1912, they found the publicity posters for their forthcoming season had been printed with the wrong dates. On arriving in Bombay, they discovered that 200 tonnes of scenery was stuck at Nagpur in central India, forcing the cancellation of the opening night's performance. But the show did go on.

The Holloway Touring Theatre Company was among the most successful Australian ensembles to take Shakespeare to Asia. The company was founded by William John Holloway, a former boilermaker turned actor–manager, who began his career with the Redfern Amateur Dramatic Club in Sydney. Holloway's wife, Emily Jennings's daughter, Essie Jenyns, was considered the finest Shakespearean actress of her day in Australia.

Holloway also toured South Africa between 1895 and 1905 and, in 1911, undertook a two-year Asian circuit, playing to audiences from Bombay to Shanghai. The pace was hectic. During a nine-day season in January 1912 at Singapore's Victoria Theatre, the company staged six plays: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Othello*.

Perspiration caused actors' beards to fall off.

While performing in Calcutta in 1911, Lang and Holloway found themselves competing with Allan Wilkie's Shakespearean company, which was beginning a three-year Asian tour to Ceylon, Singapore, British Malaya, Hong Kong, China, Japan and the Philippines. Whereas Holloway's company played to predominantly European audiences, Wilkie drew crowds of Bengalis when he performed at the Kohinoor Theatre on Beadon Street in the heart of Calcutta's so-called 'native' quarter. 'During the more pathetic and moving scenes of *Othello* they would weep openly and unashamed,' Wilkie wrote in his memoir *All the World My Stage*. 'The realistic combat between Macbeth and Macduff aroused them to such a frenzy of excitement and panic that many of them dived under their seats and others made a mad rush for the doors.'

Wilkie's memoir also captures the sometimes-comical side of touring in Asia. At the Grand Opera House in Calcutta, his actors struggled to be heard above the noise of monkeys in the theatre's roof, who threw pieces of wood and spanners onto the stage below. Bouts of sickness often left productions short of actors. In one performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, Wilkie played the roles of Friar Lawrence, Mercutio and Prince Escalus.

Despite these hardships Wilkie never lost sight of the rewards of presenting Shakespeare in the distant corners of the empire. When news spread that his company was presenting *Hamlet* in Bangalore, half a dozen students from a remote village walked for 60 miles through the jungle before taking a 300-mile train ride for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the play. The return journey took more than a week and, as Wilkie noted, probably consumed a year's savings for each of them. 'One cannot but lament that such extreme devotion to our national poet is rarely, if ever, to be found amongst his fellow countrymen,' he wrote.

In 1916, Wilkie settled in Australia and four years later established Australia's first permanent touring Shakespeare company in 1920. His ambition was to present all 37 of the Bard's plays in towns and cities around the country. He managed only 27 before the Great Depression made touring unviable.

Shakespeare's presence in Asia has been described as part of the 'baggage of empire', but as the experience of Lewis, Edouin, Smythe, Lyons, Holloway and others testifies, his works had universal appeal. Wilkie reminisced: 'I had transported my company some 30,000 miles or more by land and sea and produced over 30 plays, staging Shakespeare in many places for the first time and frequently to alien races whose enthusiastic appreciation testified once more that not only is Shakespeare for all time but for all peoples.'

John Zubrzycki was the 2021 Merewether Fellow at the State Library of NSW, researching Australian popular culture in Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

WORDS **Rowena Lennox**

The Captain

The devastation of a shipwreck echoes across time.

In 1884 my great-great-grandfather died in a shipwreck off the coast of New Zealand/Aotearoa. His name was William Currie and he was first officer on the barque *Clyde*, which had unloaded part of its cargo of sugar from Mauritius at Port Chalmers, the port for Dunedin, and was heading to Lyttelton, the port for Christchurch, with the remainder. But instead of reaching Lyttelton, the *Clyde* struck a reef, called Snuffy Nose by whalers, on the southern side of the Banks Peninsula/Horomaka. The barque broke up quickly and everyone on board drowned except for a 17-year-old ship's apprentice called George Gibson. Only two bodies were recovered — that of another apprentice, Herbert Bohle, only 13 or 14 years old and on his first voyage to see how he liked the sea, and that of the captain, Edward 'Ted' Culmer.

Gibson's account, published in the New Zealand newspapers, describes how Captain Culmer ordered the crew to launch a lifeboat, which they did. The captain's three children — Mary Margaret (aged five or six), Edward Thomas (aged three or four) and Edith May (about one) — were passed safely to the boatswain in the boat. As the captain's wife Margaret got in, the lifeboat got caught under the rail of the *Clyde* and was swamped. When Gibson saw the mainmast falling, he dived underwater. The lee rail of the Clyde was underwater. Water covered the poop deck and the captain, alive but stunned and covered in blood, was floating in it. The two older children were alive, too, floating near their father. Gibson assumed their mother 'went down below' when the lifeboat was swamped. He got the children into another lifeboat with mate William Currie,

Bretagne, an example of a barque, from the Nichols collection of sailing ships, by Roy Douglas Nichols

He grabbed Mary's arm, but a big wave forced him to let go.

apprentice Herbert Bohle, and two other crew members but soon it too was swamped in the wreckage. While he was holding on to the spanker boom Gibson saw the captain and his elder daughter Mary, who was still alive, float past. He grabbed Mary's arm, but a big wave forced him to let go. He got on the deckhouse, was washed off, got back on again and was washed in to shore. Gibson walked to a colonial settler's hut and they rode off to raise the alarm. It was about 8 am on Thursday 6 November 1884.

By 1 pm a steamer had arrived from Akaroa, about 24 kilometres away by sea. It took Gibson and the body of apprentice Bohle, who Gibson and locals had found, back to Akaroa. The settlers continued their search from land for survivors, and for more bodies. That evening they found the body of a big, stout, middle-aged man who had red whiskers, a tattooed arm and was missing the little finger of his left hand. He was too heavy to carry far so they moved him beyond the reach of the waves. When police returned to Akaroa and described the missing finger, Gibson identified the body as that of Captain Culmer. Among the debris floating near Culmer's body was an enlarged painted photograph of the captain and his wife, 'wonderful likenesses' according to a newspaper report.

The portraits of Captain Culmer and his wife Margaret held by the State Library of NSW are, like the portrait found floating at the wreck, painted photographs. They were donated to the Library in the 1970s by Mrs Culmer's grandnieces, and were in such poor condition that the Mitchell Librarian assured the donors that the Library would undertake restoration work. In her portrait, Margaret Culmer is austerely dressed in black with white, with an almost Tudor-style collar and cuffs, but her earring is crimson and the rings on her left hand are gold. The dark painted surface is cracked and a pale crack circles the pupil of her left eye, giving her a strange, glassy expression: *Remember us*. I cannot help wondering whether these portraits were retrieved from the wreck and somehow made their way back to Australia.

Captain Culmer's portrait shows him in 7/8 profile. He has a good head of hair, magnificent brown-with-a-touch-of auburn whiskers and a beard, which is unruly at the ends. His faintly rose-tinted cheek is shaved, which must have been the facial-hair fashion of the time. His skin is pale, smooth and young looking. He's probably about 29. I don't imagine he is a man who wears a suit often (his body was found without jacket

Portraits of Captain 'Ted' Culmer, master of the barque *Clyde*, around 1880, and Margaret Culmer, nee Moy

or boots); his thick neck fills up his collar. The photograph-painting shows signs of wear: nicks in the captain's forehead and cheek, tears at the top and right-hand lower corner that reveal the layers of paint. There is an ochre-auburn drop on the centre of his white shirt, a stain on the surface of the portrait, that looks like blood. His eyes are blue, a touch of sunset in the colouring around them. The more I look at the original, the more uncertain his expression seems to be.

Culmer's good nature and genial disposition were well known in Port Chalmers and Lyttelton from his days as master of the barquentine *May*, of Wellington. Though he was only about 34 when he died, he had a colourful past. According to the *Otago Witness*, Culmer was first officer on the barque *PCE* (*Peace, Comfort and Ease*) under Captain David Cochrane Law. In 1874, Captain Law enabled Henri Rochefort, who was an owner of newspapers and a vaudeville writer, and five other prominent French Communards, to escape the French penal colony in New Caledonia by taking them from Noumea to Newcastle/Mulubinba on the *PCE*. About 4000 Communards were transported to New Caledonia after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. In his book *At the Back of the World: Wanderings over many lands and seas*, mariner George Pugh describes the first officer of the *PCE* on the voyage that brought the Communards to Newcastle, though he does not name Culmer: 'The mate was a most illiterate man, coarse in speech and manner, and proud of his manners, or lack of them, but a good seaman, and utterly fearless. It was generally believed on board that he would have gone to sea on a plank if the pay had been good enough.'

For Rochefort and the five other Communards, the escape was successful. They disembarked in Newcastle without being apprehended. In his memoir *Retour de la Nouve Calédonie de Nouméa en Europe*, Rochefort writes with great verve about Newcastle and relays how after the escape, the *PCE*'s owners, Sydney-based firm Montefiore, sacked captain and crew. On its next voyage the *PCE* was wrecked just south of Lake Macquarie, with the loss of one life. (You can read more from Pugh and Rochefort on the Hunter Living Histories website.)

There are more French connections in the *Clyde*'s last voyage. Barque and crew left Newcastle on Boxing Day 1883 for the port of Haiphong in Tonkin, now northern Vietnam, where the French were fighting the Vietnamese and Chinese to establish a protectorate. Newspaper reports do not divulge what the *Clyde* traded but, according to the *Otago Witness*, a French admiral chartered the *Clyde* to sail to Formosa, now Taiwan, where the French were imposing a blockade. For six weeks the *Clyde* was paid 500 francs per day to be a storeship. After the blockade broke up, the *Clyde* sailed via Singapore to Mauritius, loaded sugar and made what was considered a slow 40-day crossing to Port Chalmers in New Zealand. After unloading part of the sugar cargo there, the *Clyde* was towed to sea on the morning of 5 November, bound for Lyttelton with the remaining sugar. After Lyttelton, barque and crew were scheduled to return to Newcastle under ballast. But they never made it.

The colonial settlers of Horomaka found Captain Culmer's body in a place accessible only with the aid of ropes. But they could not get back there because of torrential rain until the Monday, four days after the *Clyde* struck the reef, when they were finally able to retrieve his body. They collected wood from the wreck (bluegum and ironbark from the Williams River in NSW, where the *Clyde* was built), carried it up the cliff and, on the spur, made a sled. Sixteen men carried the captain's body up to the sled, where it was met by horses and taken along Peraki spur to Wainui. From Wainui he was taken by whaleboat, in a raging south-westerly, across Akaroa Harbour to Akaroa where he was put in a coffin.

In Akaroa George Gibson testified at the inquests of Captain Culmer and Herbert Bohle. Bohle was buried in Akaroa. Gibson then travelled with shipping agent Joseph Kinsey to Christchurch. With them was Captain Culmer's body. Culmer's mother lived in Christchurch and wanted her son to be buried there. In the Lyttelton Anglican Cemetery there is a memorial to Edward Smith Culmer (1851–1884), Margaret Moy Culmer (1857–1884), Mary Margaret Culmer (1878–1884), Edward Thomas Culmer (1880–1884) and Edith May Culmer (1883–1884). In the picture online, the square column stands on a hill with a view of the sea.

My great-great-grandfather William Currie left four children in Stockton/Burrabihngarn, just north of Newcastle. There was usually not any financial support for the families of lost mariners. My great-grandmother Jessie Currie was 17 years old when her father drowned. Her mother had died of tuberculosis the year before. One of her brothers, a ship's carpenter, sailed to Lyttelton and back after the *Clyde* was wrecked. Was he looking for traces of his father?

I don't know how long it took for Jessie Currie and her siblings to accept that their father wasn't coming home. On the first anniversary of his death they put a notice in the *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*: 'In affectionate remembrance of our dear father, William Currie, who perished in the barque Clyde at Horseshoe Bay, New Zealand, Nov. 8th, 1884. Dead but not forgotten.'

None of Jessie Currie's sons went to sea.

Rowena Lennox is the author of numerous essays, stories and poems and two books: *Dingo Bold* and *Fighting Spirit of East Timor*. 'The Captain' is part of a longer essay about the wreck of the *Clyde*.

WORDS AND PHOTO **Rey Angelo Samson**

The Bagpiper of Hospital Road

One lunchtime a few weeks ago, I was supposed to join the Library's Thursday walkers social club. I didn't see anyone so I thought it must have been cancelled, or people had started walking already. So I set off by myself. I'd decided to bring my camera that day, in case I saw something interesting.

I walked through the Botanical Gardens and on my way back, walking through the Domain, I could hear the bagpiper. It was unique — I don't usually see bagpipers and I'm amazed by the lungpower. I thought why not, I'll ask the guy if I can take a photo. He said yes — it turned out his name was Lachlan. When he'd finished I talked to him for a while. He was practising for the Anzac Day march. It turned out another colleague here at the Library knew him — she played bagpipes too. I never knew.

I use a first-generation Sony A7 paired with an adapted 35 mm manual lens, down to F2. I always use the manual setting, it slows you down, calms the mind and makes you think. It's more challenging — sometimes I miss the shot, but that's the fun of it. It means I don't take a thousand photos. I've been trying to do more in black and white — I like the feel of it. It shifts your perspective. You see subjects differently than when you're shooting in colour because you think more about light and shadow.

I've been taking photos since uni. I learned with a film camera. Initially as a hobby, but I did photography professionally for a year or two back in the Philippines. Now I like street photography and a bit of portraiture.

This particular one was really striking — when I was selecting from the images I took that day, I immediately chose it. I couldn't explain it, but there's emotion and passion in that photo.

20 questions

1. What would you expect to find in containers of varying volumes, called Methuselah (6 L), Balthazar (12 L) and Nebuchadnezzar (15 L)?
2. Which country has a spice as its national symbol, which appears on its flag?
3. Which physical item once owned by the writer Elizabeth Jolley does the Library hold in its collection?
4. What has recently been dropped from the packaging design for iconic chocolate bar Toblerone?
5. What does the Mohs scale measure?
6. What does the word 'apricity' mean?
7. What is the name of Isabelle McGowan's bindery in St Peters?
8. What is the more common name for 'supercilia'?
9. What is the word for a shade of red that is derived from the Latin for 'little worms'?
10. What popular Netflix series about a ranching dynasty, set in the US, has an 'origin' story set 100 years ago?
11. Which Shakespearean play has a name well suited to this time of year?
12. What is the significance of the title of Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451*?
13. Which famous artist of the Dutch and Flemish Renaissance painted several winter landscapes, including *Hunters in the Snow*, and is known for depicting large numbers of people engaged in diverse activities?
14. Which major prize did playwright Suzie Miller recently win, and for what play?
15. Which sea, sometimes depicted in literature and popular culture as mysterious or dangerous, has no land borders, and contains the North Atlantic garbage patch, a concentration of plastic waste?
16. Fifty years ago, in 1973, which two players competed in the exhibition tennis match billed as the 'Battle of the Sexes'?
17. How many Australian libraries have a copy of Shakespeare's First Folio?
18. Who became President of the Republic of Turkey on 13 August 1923?
19. Pickle ball is a game played with a racquet/paddle that resembles tennis, although on a court the size of a badminton court. When was it first played?
    a) 1960s b) 1980s c) 2000s
20. Numismatics is the collection and study of what?

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

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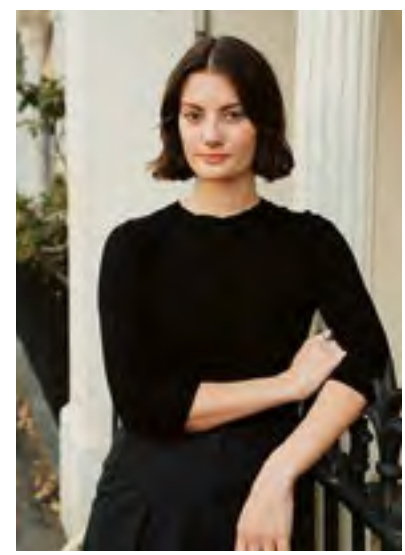

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
A view of the Lachlan River near the town of Forbes, 21 November 2021 (detail), after a flood inundated the town, blocking roads and access routes and damaging crop yields of local farms. *Australian Floods in Infrared* © Chad Ajamian

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Shadow portrait, c 1950 by Rob Hillier

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