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The Kircher Collection

MAJOR WORKS FROM THE CLASS OF 2025



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MAJOR WORKS FROM THE HSC CLASS OF 2025

The Kircher Collection
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Saint Ignatius' College Riverview acknowledges the Cammeraigal people who are the Traditional Custodians of this land upon which we are privileged to live and educate. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people who dwell on this land.

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MR MARK TANNOCK, PRINCIPAL

Foreword

The Kircher Collection was introduced at Saint Ignatius' College Riverview over a decade ago to recognise and celebrate excellence in each graduating cohort. The Collection showcases those students who have demonstrated a deep and abiding commitment to maximising their intellectual and aesthetic gifts in a range of HSC subjects that have a major project as a component of their assessment schedule. These subjects include Aboriginal Studies, Drama, English Extension, History Extension, Music, Science Extension, Technological & Applied Studies, and Visual Arts.

The Kircher Collection is named after 17th Century Jesuit polymath, Fr Athanasius Kircher SJ. Kircher was a German Jesuit scholar known for his broad contributions to various fields of knowledge. These included Mathematics, Linguistics, Egyptology and Science. He demonstrated exceptional intelligence from a young age and was taught by the Jesuits as a child before joining the Society of Jesus and pursuing formal training in philosophy and theology. Kircher became a prolific writer and researcher, publishing over thirty books on diverse subjects, including Egyptian hieroglyphics, Geology and the study of microorganisms. In this field, he was one of the early proposers of their status as the cause of diseases. He was a pioneering figure in early modern scientific inquiry.

Kircher is an exemplar of the commitment that the Society of Jesus has had over the centuries to academic excellence in the pursuit of knowledge. This pursuit is not an end in itself, but a means to *finding God in all things*. In this, the Jesuits have been essential actors in proposing the complementarity of faith and reason in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

I hope you enjoy the breadth of works that the Class of 2025 at Riverview have produced and the depth to which they have sought the *Magis*. I commend the 2025 *Kircher Collection* to you.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

MN Tannock
Principal

FR TOM RENSHAW SJ, RECTOR

Introduction

In the middle of 2021, the second global colloquium on Jesuit education was held virtually. In responding to Father General’s question of “**How do we accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future in our education apostolic ministry?**”, the response was the following,

**We ought to educate for a hope-filled future
by educating for depth and global citizenship
in faith and in reconciliation
in the context of our Education integrated (Holistic) Perspective.**

Jesuit education seeks to do this through four interrelated strands:

1. Educating for faith;
2. Educating for depth;
3. Educating for reconciliation; and
4. Educating for global citizenship.

The goal of Jesuit education today “is to educate for human excellence that leads to a hope-filled future: persons who are compassionate, competent, conscious of God in themselves and in the world around them, and committed to seeing all things new in Christ”¹.

This collection is named after a 17th century Jesuit, Fr Athanasius Kircher SJ, who is the embodiment of depth and the *magis*. I congratulate the students whose works appear in this collection and for the differing ways in which they have used their God-given talents to respond creatively in producing outstanding works of scholarship as part of their Higher School Certificate. Each work is an inspiring expression of human excellence. In the next section, one of my predecessors, Fr Ross Jones SJ (College Rector 2011-2017), outlines most eloquently the life of Fr Athanasius and his extraordinary contribution, as a polymath, to many different fields of learning.

¹ Vision Statement, Second Colloquium JESEDU-Global 2021, <https://www.educatemagis.org/jesedu-global2021/colloquium-hub/>, accessed 27 November 2021.

FR ROSS JONES SJ

Athanasius Kircher SJ

“The last man who knew everything”

“

It was because of Kircher’s work that scientists knew what to look for when interpreting the Rosetta Stone.

”

Athanasius Kircher, born in 1601, was the complete Renaissance man, the *uomo universale*, a polymath—widely regarded as the physical embodiment of all the learning of his age. Deservedly known as “the Master of One Hundred Arts”, he taught in the Colleges of Würzburg and Avignon, before being posted to Rome (where he died in 1680). In bridging the sciences and the humanities, Kircher has been compared to da Vinci. Stanford professor, Paula Findlen, entitled her recent biography of Kircher *The Last Man Who Knew Everything*. But as a young man, Kircher was, according to his own account, an accident-prone dimwit.

Kircher wrote over thirty separate works dealing with the widest range of subjects. He invented a universal language scheme, attacked the possibility of alchemical transmutation and devised a host of remarkable pneumatic, hydraulic, optic, and

Athanasius Kircher;
The Kircher Museum in Rome



magnetic machines, which he displayed to visitors to his famous public museum (the first such institution), housed in the Jesuit Collegio Romano. His books, lavishly illustrated volumes, were destined for Baroque princes with a love of the curious and exotic explorations of their time.

Kircher invented the lantern slide (the forerunner of projectors). He accurately estimated the speed of a swallow at 100 feet per second (without a stopwatch). He was a volcanologist (even climbed into the volcano Vesuvius) and wrote the first book on volcanology. Kircher and others like him taught in the Colleges and encouraged the appropriation of the sciences into the school curriculum.

Kircher invented calculators, wrote on symbolic logic, and devised mathematical tables. He understood the evolutionary process and hinted at the germ theory of disease—he attributed the plague to tiny animals which he had observed under a microscope.

His first publication concerned magnetism. Then he wrote of sundials, next on the Egyptian language, then on calendars. He proposed a map of the city of Atlantis. He knew twenty ancient and modern languages. He studied hieroglyphics and it was because of Kircher's work that scientists knew what to look for when interpreting the Rosetta stone. He has been called the real founder of Egyptology.

Kircher always wanted to be a missionary in China, but the importance of his teaching saw this dream never realised. However, that did not prevent him writing a huge treatise on China, *China Illustrata*, which included mythology, accurate cartography and Chinese characters.

While traveling through Italy writing his book on magnetism, he came to the town of Taranto, which gives its name to the poisonous tarantula spider. The region of Taranto was known for the prevalence of a disease called 'tarantism', which induced an hysterical condition in the sufferer, with one characteristic feature being the sudden desire to dance, in a wild and rapid whirling motion. It was commonly supposed that the illness was a result of the bite of a tarantula. Accordingly, it was believed that the cure for the bite of the tarantula was to perform the dance, to work out the toxin. In his book on magnetism, Kircher helpfully depicts the region populated by the spider, and gives drawings of the animal and of its victims being bitten. Finally, should one be unfortunate enough to get bitten, Kircher, composed a piece of music—*Antidotum Tarantulæ*—for the victim to dance to, to cure the bite!

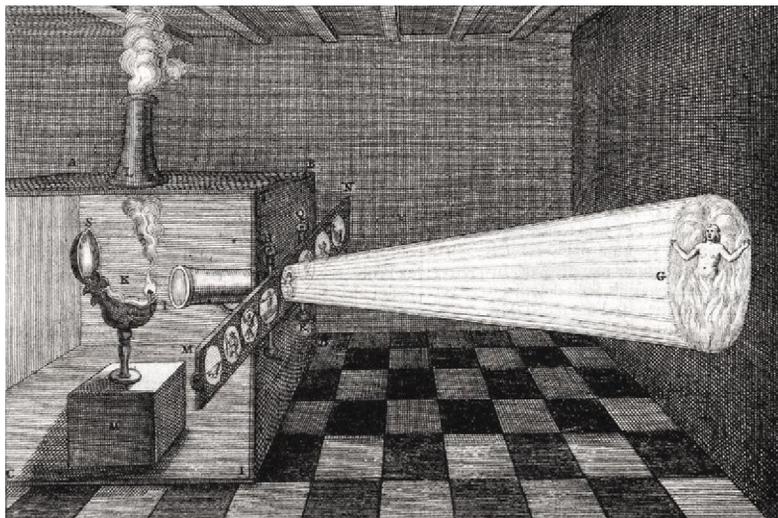
Kircher practised a unique brand of science before the lines had been drawn between it and art and religion. He covered herbs, astrology, mining, dragons, demons, weather, eclipses, fossils, gravity, bioluminescence, the sun and moon, and other topics. For example, spanning scriptures and science, he calculated that the height required for the Tower of Babel merely to reach the moon would catapult the earth out of its orbit.

“

He understood the evolutionary process and hinted at the germ theory of disease.

”

The precursor of the slide, overhead and digital projector



Visitors to Kircher's impressive museum heard his disembodied voice, fed to them through a hidden metal tube he spoke through from his bedroom. He engineered megaphones with which one of his friends used to bray at wolves and set them to howling. He launched dragon-shaped hot-air balloons with "Flee the wrath of God" painted on their underbellies.

In the Jesuit Archives in Rome there are more than 2,000 items of his correspondence with the most eminent scientists of his time, including Leibniz, Torricelli and Gassendi. In addition, Kircher harnessed the network of Jesuit missionaries in far-flung places to carry out natural observations and experiments on a global scale.

Towards the end of his life, Kircher's stocks fell as the rationalist era emerged. Descartes (himself a Jesuit alumnus) described Kircher as "more quacksalver than savant". Because of his stature and high regard he was also the victim of a number of hoaxes where his enemies attempted to set him up, and occasionally did so.

However, in this postmodern era, many are being drawn again to his eclecticism, transcendence of academic boundaries, taste for trivia and technomania. In recent years his life and works have interested many biographers and authors revealing his myriad areas of interest. There is an Athanasius Kircher Society in Manhattan. Stanford University hosts an Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project.

Perhaps Athanasius Kircher was not really "the last man who knew everything". But he might have come closer than most.

FR ROSS JONES SJ
COLLEGE RECTOR 2011-2017

Harry Sultana

To what extent does Lenin's legacy and Leninfall in post-Soviet Ukraine serve as a site of contestability for historical narratives, national memory and geographical identity?

REFLECTION STATEMENT

I was inspired to research this project by my passion for European history, with this topic allowing me to explore one of my great passions and allowing me to go deeper into the Russia-Ukraine conflict. With the increasing geopolitical tensions in our world, I was drawn to this topic to understand the factors behind this. By centering my question around Lenin, I was able to introduce a strong historiographical dimension that explored how political regimes may collapse, yet their ideological legacies continue to live within national memory. In Ukraine, this is most evident in the remembrance of the Holodomor and other tragedies experienced under Soviet rule.

The process of completing this project took me far beyond the classroom from conversations with university professors specialising in Ukrainian history to extensive research across academic journals, archival material, and digital media. These diverse sources taught me that history is not merely recorded in textbooks; it is constructed by people, and shaped through the lived experiences of those who inherit it. Engaging with this topic allowed me to better understand the complex geography, identities, and ethnicities that define Ukraine today. Ultimately, this project gave me a newfound appreciation for the ongoing struggle for civil liberties in Eastern Europe. My research revealed how societies across the former Eastern Bloc continue to fight to disentangle themselves from the authoritarian narratives that dominated the twentieth century, and how they work to construct new forms of national memory independent of Russian influence.

“

...history is not merely recorded in textbooks; it is constructed by people, and shaped through the lived experiences of those who inherit it.

”

ESSAY

To what extent does Lenin's legacy and Leninfall in post-Soviet Ukraine serve as a site of contestability for historical narratives, national memory, and geographical identity?

To a significant extent, post-Soviet interpretations of Lenin and Leninfall in post-Soviet Ukraine have diverged, with Lenin and Leninfall serving as a site of contestability for historical narratives and national memory; however, to a lesser degree, geographical identity also plays a role. Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, remains one of the most polarising figures of the 20th century, due to his use of terror while simultaneously claiming to liberate the proletariat. As a result, the Leninfall movement serves as a site of contestability, with the movement being the mass removal of Lenin statues across Ukraine, particularly in the aftermath of the Euromaidan protests. Historical narratives are constructed accounts of the past mediated through ideology and political agendas. National memory refers to the collective recollection of history shaped by the lens of those who wield power. Geographical identity, on the other hand, refers to how communities perceive their history in relation to their location and space. Together, these factors emphasise that history is not a static record but is constantly under construction. With Lenin's legacy and statues holding critical importance within post-Soviet Ukraine, they encapsulate the nation's struggle to form a national identity.

Ukraine's post-Soviet reassessment, to a significant extent, highlights the contested nature of historical narratives, as the removal of statues becomes a means through which a nation discusses its past. With the Leninfall movement epitomising this debate, Dr Anastasiya Pshenychnykh, a cultural-nationalist specialist in memory and heritage studies at the Kyiv- Mohyla Academy, expresses within 'Leninfall: The Spectacle of Forgetting' (2019) that the movement was a "symbolic victory over the previous political trajectory". Her framing asserts the movement as a divergence from Soviet ideological legacy and an assertion of national identity through the reclamation of an anti-Soviet historical narrative. With her emphasising that "Leninfall, being an instance of iconoclasm, is part of a bigger process which took place in other countries with socialist pasts." Pshenychnykh's framing raises a critical question is the removal of statues an act of liberation, or a selective forgetfulness that risks instrumentalising the past to serve a present agenda.

Furthermore, the Leninfall movement prominently highlights how post-Soviet Ukraine's re-examination of public space transforms monuments from static commemorations into sites shaped by historical narratives. Monuments serve not merely as physical structures; they act as curated expressions of state ideology, embodying the historical narratives surrounding them. Ukrainian historian Oleksandra Gadai, grounded in a postmodern memory studies historiographical framework in 'Leninfall in Ukraine: How Did the Lenin Statues Disappear?' (2021), contended that Lenin's ubiquity in Ukrainian public space is the "cult of Lenin penetrating every aspect of citizens' lives". With 5,500 Lenin statues existing throughout Ukraine in 1991, Gadai emphasises that these function as a mechanism of ideological control rather than a neutral commemoration of the revolutionary legacy. Revisionist historian Alex von Tunzelmann echoes Gadai's interpretation in *Fallen Idols* (2021), where her post-structural and cultural revisionist lens views monuments as dynamic instruments of political meaning rather than static artifacts. By framing statues as "not a record of history but of historical memory". She posits that statues are not inert but dynamic instruments that reflect the ideological assumptions of their time, subconsciously curating what society's chosen history narratives are. Von Tunzelmann further raises the question, "Whose stories do we tell? Who or what defines us? Who gets to make those decisions? What if we don't all agree? How is history made, why and by whom?" These questions illustrate the contested authorship of historical narratives within Ukraine, wherein Lenin is repurposed, reflecting deeper political struggles of Ukraine's identity and political alignment. The Leninfall movement, thus, becomes more than an act of removal; it is a symbolic renegotiation of identity. Within this paradigm, Leninfall is not a historical erasure but a reclamation of the historical narrative, one that seeks to liberate the imperial residue of the Soviet Union and assert a post-Soviet historical narrative.

Moreover, the removal of Lenin's statues undoubtedly raises concerns about distorting historical narratives and risks transforming history into a tool of moral judgment. In contrast to von Tunzelmann, Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan, rooted in a Von Rankean tradition through a liberal empiricist lens, cautions that toppling historical iconography can risk presentism, the projection of contemporary moral values onto the past. In *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), she argues that history must serve as a tool for understanding, not a weapon for judgment, cautioning that "we can also deceive ourselves when we selectively take evidence from the past to justify what we have already made up our minds." MacMillan's lens argues that reducing Lenin's legacy to a symbol of anti-Soviet rejection risks collapsing historical nuance into political convenience, ceasing to be a discipline of inquiry and becoming one of propaganda. MacMillan's caution about presentism is particularly relevant in the case of Lenin, whose legacy in Ukraine has been reframed through both nationalist and ideological

vilification. MacMillan would argue that such oversimplification of complex historical figures risks making history an absolute. Though von Tunzelmann's juxtaposing lens is echoed through historian Oleksandra Gadai, who notes within *'Leninfall in Ukraine: How Did the Lenin Statues Disappear?'* (2021), "To many Ukrainians, the Lenin Monuments symbolised the so-called unbreakable ties between Russia", highlighting Lenin as a lingering reminder of Soviet totalitarian realities. However, to view Lenin solely as a symbol of oppression risks obscuring his liberating role. These elements remain crucial for some within Ukraine in their post-Soviet narrative and class-based lens. With Leninfall representing not the erasure of historical narratives but their renegotiation, wherein the removal of monuments becomes a site of contestability between post-Soviet reclamation and empiricist critique, revealing how historical narratives are not merely inherited, but their purpose is constantly under reconstruction. Thus, the Leninfall movement significantly reveals how historical narratives within post-Soviet Ukraine are not passively but actively reconstructed, wherein monuments become sites on which historical narratives are contested and redefined.

Lenin's legacy, to a significant extent, underscores how historical narratives are utilised by those in power to construct national memory, with Lenin's legacy becoming a site on which historians' competing lenses contest. Lenin in post-Soviet Ukraine epitomises Hayden White's postmodernist foundational claim that history is not a transparent record of the past, but rather a rhetorical construction shaped by ideological and epistemological frameworks.

Lenin, simultaneously venerated, vilified, and effaced, is a symbolic figure through which competing versions of Ukrainian sovereignty are articulated. White, in *The Burden of History* (1966), asserts that "Many historians continue to treat their 'facts' as though they were given", arguing that many historians view facts as things that can speak for themselves. White emphasises that it is their purpose and the ideologies of historians that construct history.

White's lens emphasises history as rhetoric; however, his lens arguably collapses into relativism when applied to the Leninist movement, wherein history has tangible consequences due to its association with national memory. Thus, Lenin's legacy within Ukraine demonstrates how rhetorical narratives can serve to shape national memory.

Furthermore, the construction of national memory in post-Soviet Ukraine reveals how historians, to a significant extent, are shaped by ideologies of those in power, which are actively embedded in the presentation of history. The divergent interpretations of Leninfall reflect the tension between historical lenses, revealing that history is not shaped by consensus but by ideological framing. This divergence within the

construction of national memory is epitomised by the two heads of the Ukrainian National Remembrance Institute, Volodymyr Viatrovykh and Valerii Soldatenko. Volodymyr Viatrovykh, operating within a contemporary romantic nationalist and teleological framework, presents a revisionist history that frames Ukraine's history as a linear struggle for liberation. As the head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (2014-2019), Viatrovykh held significant influence due to the institute's role as a central executive body tasked with implementing state-based national memory. His role facilitated the promotion of state-sponsored anti-Soviet national memory, aligning with the political imperatives of the Ukrainian (UDAR) and pro-European Alliance governments of the time. Although controversial due to its instrumentation, his position can be understood within Ukraine's struggle to formulate a post-Soviet national memory.

Viatrovykh, expressed in *'Ukrinform'* (2016), "Ukraine has done more on overcoming the legacy of the totalitarian past than during the whole time of independence." Thus, Viatrovykh argues the importance of state-sponsored national memory in reforming a post-Soviet national identity. Furthermore, within the academic journal of *'Krytyka'* (2015), Viatrovykh asserts that "the lack of a communication of policy in Ukraine after its declaration of independence was one of the reasons that led to the revanchist neo-Soviet regime of Yanukovych" and contends that "The persistent totalitarian past still stands in the way of the development of Ukraine as a European, democratic state." Thus, Viatrovykh highlights how post-Soviet reassessment underscores the multifaceted purpose of history, showcasing its role in shaping national identities. These statements substantially reflect a broader instrumentalist approach to history in post-Soviet Ukraine, where the construction of national memory serves not merely an academic function but a political one.

Moreover, in contrast to Viatrovykh, Valerii Soldatenko, operating within a modernist Marxist-Leninist historiographical framework, head of the Ukraine Institute of National Remembrance from (2010-2014), provides a juxtaposing view revealing the ability of institutionalised power to shape national memory. In *'Україна: революційна доба й наступні десятиліття'* (2021), Soldatenko situates the Bolshevik-led revolution within a class-based, ideological trajectory, presenting Soviet rule as historically inevitable and socially progressive. Soldatenko argues that there was an inherent "problem of state-building in Ukraine during the revolutionary era" and emphasises that the Soviet period was not an anomaly, but a logical stage in the development of Ukrainian society (Soldatenko 2021). This deterministic and Marxist interpretation of Ukraine's history foregrounds class structure and ideological progression while marginalising Ukrainian national trauma in favour of a redemptive revolutionary teleology. Soldatenko attempts to recast Lenin into Ukrainian national memory, not as an oppressor but as a harbinger of societal transformation and liberation, emphasising

how Lenin is shaped less by historical consensus than by ideological terrain. These radically opposed interpretations and frameworks of Viatrovych and Soldatenko exemplify Hayden White's postmodernist integration, wherein no historical narrative can escape its authors' rhetorical and ideological assumptions. Ultimately, to a significant extent, these radically divergent interpretations by historians of Ukraine reveal the extent to which historians can shape and mould national memory through embedded power structures.

Ukraine's East-West geographical divide, to a moderate extent, shapes Ukraine's history through its influence on how regions interpret events based on their spatial relationships. Within the geographical area of Eastern Ukraine, there still exists a historical ambivalence toward Lenin, while in Western Ukraine, he is viewed as an oppressor and perpetrator of totalitarianism. Historian Yuliya Yurchuk's writing through a postmodern and memory studies lens in *Memory of the Past and Memory for the Future* (2011), stresses that "national history tends to select only certain memories of a certain group which are purposed to form a truthful and legitimate picture of the past for the whole nation", emphasising the tendency of national history to ignore geographical identity. Though she emphasises the role of geography specifically in forming Ukraine's historical perspectives, "The process of deconstruction is intensified by local and regional identity politics (both on administrative and grassroots levels)". The geographic dimension of history, as Yurchuk suggests, fuels conflict within Ukraine's history, with Lenin's legacy diverging between East and West, where spatial identity determines how Lenin is remembered. This spatial-bound interpretation is reinforced by the *Ukrainian Harvard Institute* (2017), wherein support for the demolition of Lenin statues within the Western Ukrainian is emphasised by 92% of the Lviv oblast and 98% of the Ivano-Frankivsk oblast being demolished, while in the Eastern oblasts demolition these figures are supported by 11% of Kharkiv and 15% of Zaporizhia, significantly emphasising the geographical divide within Ukraine.

However, this spatially bound viewpoint is not universally accepted by all of Ukraine's historians. While Yurchuk emphasises the role of geographical identity in shaping history, Ukrainian historian Andriy Portnov, operating through a meta-historical deconstructive lens, cautions against overstating the post-Soviet Ukraine East-West geographic divide, instead emphasising the fluidity of regional identities with ideology shaping history, not geography. Andriy Portnov emphasises that Lenin's legacy is determined not through a unified lens but is often framed through a nationalist or communist lens. With Portnov writing in the academic journal *Krytyka* (2015) through a meta-historiographical lens, "Above all, a conception of the historian as a doctor, who has to prescribe society medicine against communism or nationalism." Both communism and nationalism have a "need for each other so that they can put their opponent into a clearly defined ideological box". Portnov thus issues a significant

warning: reducing Lenin's legacy to that of either a tyrant or a liberator erases the nuance and contested nature of historical meaning, particularly in post-Soviet Ukraine, where identity is still actively negotiated. Portnov's lens is reinforced within *'The Ukraine Divide'* (2020) by Penkaa, Derluyn, and Lietaert from Ghent University, who adopt a socio-historical lens to explore the cultural and regional disparities within Ukraine. *'The Ukraine Divide'* emphasises that the entrenched ideological divide within Ukraine, rooted in the East-West divide, cannot be sufficiently explained through ethnographies. Instead, it emerges from "symbolic geographies, historical myths, and political imaginations". Emphasising that ideological and emotional imperatives are the determinants of history, not just physical geography, and have all served to fracture a nation's historical lens. Together, these tensions surround, reflecting Portnov's meta-historical lens, cautioning that such geographical divisions are artificial constructions. However, Yurchuk's view emphasises the role of geography in mediating memory through competing narratives. Though at the same time, the juxtaposition between Lenin as a symbol of Soviet domination and revolutionary liberation becomes a vessel through which these geographical differences are projected. Thus, Lenin's legacy and Leninfall, to a moderate extent, reveal the role of geographical identity in constructing history, albeit alongside the role of ideological imperatives.

Ultimately, to a significant extent, post-Soviet interpretations of Lenin and Leninfall in post-Soviet Ukraine have evolved, with Lenin and Leninfall serving as a site of contestability for historical narratives, national memory and, albeit to a lesser measure, geographic identity.

Rather than Leninfall marking the erasure of history, the removal of Lenin's statues reflects an active dialogue with the past, emphasising that history is always under constant construction. In post-Soviet Ukraine, Lenin has become more than a historical figure, serving as a site of contestability on which Ukraine debates its national identity. The significance of this debate is epitomised by the theoretical frameworks through which Lenin and Leninfall are interpreted. When viewed through the lens of national memory, Leninfall exemplifies how societies curate the past to construct national narratives. Although Ukraine has a distinct geographical divide, it struggles to fully demonstrate the ability of history to be specific to a particular geographic region. With Ukraine's historical narrative significantly emphasising the role of anti-Soviet resistance and national liberation, the removal of Lenin's statues represents a shift towards a new national identity. Thus, the Leninfall movement serves as an expression of identity renegotiation, with Lenin serving as the vessel through which Ukraine redefines itself.

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Samuel Hutchinson

Multifunctional Furniture

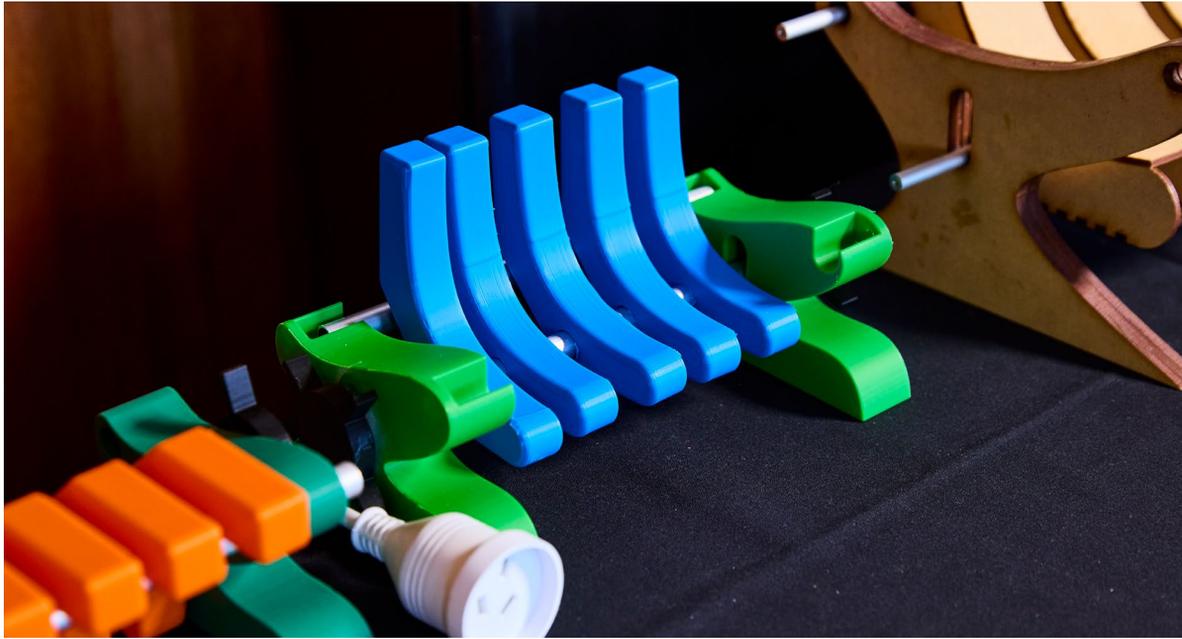
(Nominated for SHAPE)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

My Major Design Project presents an innovative multifunctional furniture piece crafted from both structural and elegantly curved plywood, leveraging rotational mechanics to seamlessly transition between a bed, desk, and seat. This design responds thoughtfully to the pressing demands of compact urban living, offering a sophisticated solution tailored to Sydney's escalating rental pressures and cost of living challenges. By maximising spatial efficiency without compromising aesthetic grace, the project blends form, function, and sustainability - an emblem of adaptive design for contemporary lifestyles.







DRAMA: GROUP DEVISED PERFORMANCE

Julian Criola, Archie Delany, Angus Devlin, Harrison Hooper & Raymond Teng

“

Harvested

(Nominated for OnSTAGE)

Working together
has been a
truly rewarding
experience... Our
shared love of
drama has driven
us to bring
Harvested to life
with energy,
creativity, and heart.

”

REFLECTION STATEMENT

Our piece, *Harvested*, is centred around a small rural town in the Central West of New South Wales. It explores the lives of the town's farmers, Tim, Rob, Davo, Baz, and Dom, and their deep connection to the land and community. Their peaceful existence is disrupted by the arrival of Rio Tinto executives, whose corporate interests threaten to transform the town into a mining site. Through dynamic physicality, stylised movement, and versatile use of props such as oil drums, the piece shifts seamlessly between the intimacy of the town and the cold, mechanical world of corporate power.

We chose Hobbys Yards because it reflects our concerns about the ruthless expansion of companies like Rio Tinto and their impact on communities. Within our school, we understand the importance of land, environment, and community connection. With society increasingly reliant on mining as an economic resource, we wanted to shine a spotlight on its negative effects on small towns, local ecosystems, and the people who call these places home. The piece allows us to explore these issues through storytelling while celebrating resilience, solidarity, and the value of place.

Working together has been a truly rewarding experience. Every member contributed with enthusiasm and dedication, and together we discovered the power of storytelling to explore important issues. Our shared love of drama has driven us to bring Hobbys Yards to life with energy, creativity, and heart. We are especially grateful to Ms Louise Arnott for her guidance and mentorship throughout the process.

CAST

Farmers of Hobbys Yard

Julian Criola	BAZ	Local pub owner, 50, the heart of the community
Archie Delany	ROB	Sunflower farmer, optimistic and sentimental
Angus Devlin	TIM	Farmer, married to the local MP, father of four
Harrison Hooper	DAVO	Wheat farmer, optimistic and sentimental
Raymond Teng	DOM	Grocer, newer to town but devoted to the community

Rio Tinto Executives

Julian Criola	CFO	Finance executive at Rio Tinto
Archie Delany	CPO	Procurement executive at Rio Tinto
Angus Devlin	CEO	Corporate leader of Rio Tinto
Harrison Hooper	Sustainability Co-ordinator	Rio Tinto environmental representative
Raymond Teng	COO	Operations executive at Rio Tinto

Reporters

Julian Criola	Reporter 2	Italian Reporter
Archie Delany	Reporter 1	Australian Reporter
Angus Devlin	Reporter 4	British Reporter
Raymond Teng	Reporter 3	Chinese Reporter



Watch the *Harvested*
performance here

SETTING

A small rural village tucked into the rolling hills of the Central West region of New South Wales, within Blayney Shire. It sits quietly between Bathurst, Barry, Blayney, Neville, and Trunkey Creek, close enough to feel connected, but far enough to remain its own world. Life here moves at a steady, familiar pace; farms stretch across the landscape, the pub is the unofficial town hall, and generations have grown up knowing every bend of the creek.

Onstage, this world is brought to life through a simple but striking design: oil drums and barrels. These rough, industrial shapes form the backbone of every setting. With each scene, the cast shifts them in full view of the audience, rolling them, stacking them, sitting on them, so they become whatever Hobbys Yards needs in the moment: the pub's bar tables, the banks of the creek, fence lines on the farms, or, in stark contrast, the cold, uncomfortable boardroom of Rio Tinto.

SCRIPT

Scene 1: Morning Glory

(Lights fade up. A rhythmic soundscape begins in darkness. Farmers are hidden behind oil drums.)

Tim taps the lid of his oil drum twice. After two taps, Baz taps the side of his drum with nails. After four taps, Dom shakes his drum. After six taps, Davo hits the rim. After eight taps, Rob makes a kookaburra call.

Three distinct "Ah! Ah! Ah!" calls are heard, then all farmers pop up and lean over their drums.

Scene 2: Hobbys Yards

All: Hobbys Yards.

Tim: A small town.

Dom: Eight hundred people.

Baz: With a tight-knit community and all you'd ever need right here.

Rob: Just off the Hunter.

Davo: And right on the beautiful creek. *(All drop behind barrels.)*

Baz: Hey, I'm Baz, and I've been running the local pub for over 15 years now. It's a tight-knit group. My favourite nights at the pub are Bingo Thursdays! Just last night we had a cracker game. Eighty-eight, two fat ladies!

Davo / Tim / Dom / Rob: *(Jump, hit pose.)* BINGO!

Rob: G'day, my name's Rob and I grow sunflowers - *(everyone pops up smiling)* the brightest, yellowest crops in town.

Tim: My name's Tim. My wife's the local MP. Four kids, and hopefully still counting. Hey, kids, dinner!

Davo: Hi, my name's Davo, and I own the wheat farm. But I can't do it by myself, though. Got four kelpies who help me work the land: Kevin, Rosie, Heela, and Mutton.

(Everyone comes out from behind the drums and imitates dogs.)

Dom: Name's Dom, and I run the local grocer. *(Baz, Davo, Tim, and Rob imitate scanning groceries three times.)* Only arrived a few years ago, but it didn't take long to get settled.

Davo / Rob / Baz / Dom: *(Popping up.)* Me first!

Tim: Look, we do have our fair share of struggles within this town.

Rob: Yeah, the drought really crippled the sunflower farm. *(Brings barrel down.)*

Davo: *(Brings barrel down.)* And the floods that came the following year knocked me out cold.

Dom: Adjusting to a new community last year was a struggle, but this bunch made it so much easier.

Baz: I'd say we're a fairly resilient bunch - don't give up too easily.

Rob: Yeah, we're always looking to celebrate the little things, right by the creek, just like when we were kids.

Tim: You know, I remember when Davo and I first found this spot going bush-bashing one arvo.

Baz: Ah, excuse me, but I think you'll find my dad found this spot. I remember him taking me to go yabbing.

Rob: Ya know, I had my first kiss under that tree. Now what was her name again?

Baz: Soph, wasn't it?

Davo: Look, who found it doesn't matter now. What does matter is that it's Baz's 50th.

Baz: Let's get in for a photo, boys.

(Davo and Rob pick up blocks as they leave. Farmers gather for a birthday photo.)

All: Cheese!

(Hold moment.)

Scene 3: The News

Dom: Hate to ruin the moment, but - *(all turn to him)* did you guys pick up the paper today? The Hobbys Herald came this morning. Somethin' you might want to see.

(Dom pulls a folded paper from his pocket. Everyone gathers around.)

Baz: Local MP pregnancy announcement.

Tim: Surprise. Number five is on the way.

Davo: What're you gonna call him?

Baz: My vote's on Baz.

Rob: And what if it's a girl?

Baz: Call her Baz anyway. *(All laugh. Dom cuts them off.)*

Dom: No, below that.

Baz: "Mining company Rio Tinto plans the expansion of the current coal mine into the nearby town of..."

All: Hobbys Yards.

Pause. They look around. A kerfuffle of overlapping reactions. The farmers return to their barrels and reposition them into stools for the boardroom scene.

Scene 4: HQ Rio Tinto

(Executives turn one by one as they announce themselves.)

CEO: Headquarters of Rio Tinto.

CEO: CEO *(Turns)*

CFO: CFO. *(Turns.)*

COO: COO. *(Turns.)*

CPO: CPO. *(Turns.)*

Sustainability Co-ordinator: Sustainability Co-ordinator. *(Turns.)*

CEO: And all graduates of THE School. *Caecilius est in horto.* When money is the goal...

All: The sky is the limit.

CEO: Very well, gentlemen. *(They rise sharply.)* Compose yourselves.

(Executives jump onto barrels, swivelling like office chairs, crossing right leg over left.)

CFO: Gentlemen, I've just run the numbers, and we are in crisis. *(All panic.)* We are running out of money, and investors await the forthcoming location of our next mine. Gentlemen, contemplate.

(All hum thoughtfully.)

CPO: Palm Beach?

(Rotate legs.)

CEO: Highly implausible. Channel Seven would almost certainly initiate litigation.

COO: Perth?

(Rotate legs.)

CFO: Regrettably, Ms Rinehart has already usurped that opportunity.

CEO: Orange?

(Rotate legs.)

Sustainability Co-ordinator: We've already poisoned that one.

(Laughter that turns to panic.)

CFO: Gentlemen, *(all jump off barrels)* we've found ourselves in a predicament.

(Hit pose.)

CEO: Put your heads together.

(Snap up into candlestick pose. Executives shuffle poshly back to barrels.)

CFO: I've got it! Let's expand our current mine into the nearby town of Hobbys Yards.

All: Where's that?

CFO: Exactly. And it will become the largest and most profitable mine in the country. I already have an investor from the Chinese markets lined up.

CPO: Well, gentlemen, we'll no doubt be in need of a special team to set it up.

Sustainability Co-ordinator: What if we nominate ourselves?

CPO: Ooh, good thinking, and if we do, we can even double our bonuses.

COO: Well, gentlemen, what are we waiting for? To Hobbys Yards!

(CEO counts them in .Tapping his foot to the ground)

Scene 5: Money, Money, Money

(Soundscape begins. As investors roll their barrels into formation. Chorus ensemble moment)

All: Money, money, money / Must be funny / In the rich man's world.

All (whispering): Money, money, money / Must be funny / In a rich man's world.

Scene 6: What's That?

(On the final lyric, all spin and hit a bevel. They rise as farmers again.)

Tim: Thanks for the help with my old man's cookout today. You know how much it means to him.

Baz: Wouldn't miss it for the world.

(Farmers rotate around their barrels; the pub bingo night.)

Baz: Eleven, legs eleven, ohh, my back.

Tim: Oi, you need to get on the Voltaren. Works wonders.

Rob: Mate, 50s hit you like a bullet train.

Tim: Oh, we'll see how you're tracking at my age.

(Rotate 90 degrees: next day.)

Tim: Oi, boys, where are those trucks heading?

(All drop and follow silently across the stage - eight counts.)

Dom: I think they're heading to Berry Avenue.

Rob: That's near my place.

(All freeze in a dynamic tableau.)

Scene 7: To Sign or Not to Sign

Baz: We know this land, its seasons, scars, and breath. Each dawn we rise to tend its silent need. For generations, we braved its death; its droughts and floods shaped our humble creed. But Rio Tinto circles us. Their millions whisper a promise of peace.

Tim: Look, mate, that's a lot of money, but there's too much pride in here.

Davo: If you think my family's legacy has a price, you're joking.

Baz: They say, "It's dying. Sell, be free instead." We ask: "Without this soil, do we cease?" Our fathers' ghosts still walk these furrowed miles, their calloused hands built all that we defend.

Dom: I've only just started up the shop.

Rob: What would Grandpa think?

Baz: For leaving wouldn't bring us life, it'd be breaking what we are, and dying twice.

(Rob and Dom slam the door.)

CEO: All righty, gentlemen, compose yourselves.

CFO: Well, can't say I expected that. These farmers sure have a bit of kick to them.

(Laughter that spirals into panic.)

CEO: Yes, one said something about pride.

CPO: Yes, another about his grandfather.

All: *(Laugh then gasp in panic.)* HAHAHA, ahhhhh!

Sustainability Co-ordinator: I've got a solution. We could dig up that vacant field. All I can see is a few weeds, a tree, ignore the koala, and no bees. Yep, doesn't look endangered to me!

CEO: I like your thinking! Alrighty, gentlemen, shall we get digging?

(Executives shuffle in a line.)

CFO: Headgear on!

(All mime a helmet "shoink" sound and lean out.)

Scene 8: Drill Baby Drill

(Build Drill)

CEO: Without further ado.

(Start the drill)

Sustainability Co-ordinator: Photo op! *(All pose. Then break the huddle and move in front of the Drill.)*

CFO: Gentlemen, fantastic news, we are no longer in a...

All: (*Hit pose*) Predicament.

CPO: This calls for Prosecco.

(*All look at each other, confused.*)

Sustainability Co-ordinator and CFO: You mean Champagne.

CPO: I'll pop the bottle. (*All walk in a line, order: Davo, Baz, Tim, Dom, Rob, move behind the drill head and duck down to transition into farmers.*)

Scene 9: To Sell or Not to Sell?

(*The main drill remains. Two side barrels become seats. Farmers sit/kick around at a campfire, throwing a footy. Dom throws to Baz; Baz throws to Davo.*)

Rob: Yeah, can I get your opinion on something? (*Pause.*) You know how those guys came over to my house the other day, and Dom and I told 'em to rack off? Well... I've been thinking, and it is a lot of money. And you all know I haven't been keeping up with the bills recently, so... I mean, I haven't done anything yet, but you know.

Baz: Oh mate, they've offered me big money too.

Tim: Yeah, I got a similar offer.

Davo: So what, you're all just gonna bugger off?

Tim: Unfortunately, mate, I don't really see another option.

Dom: I think we all got a similar offer... but we aren't gonna sell, are we?

Rob: Dom, I appreciate the emotional sentiment, mate, but...

Davo: *Emotional sentiment?* That's all you've got to say?

Baz: What do you want us to do? They've already started up the mine. They're digging up the bloody floor. It's not like our houses are gonna be worth anything in a few months.

Davo: Our *land* has never been worth pig's poo, it's what it's worth *in here*...

Tim: Don't think we don't have pride for this land, but we've got bills to pay.

Baz: Yeah, the drill, the noise... no one's gonna visit the pub. And are we supposed to raise our kids next to a drill?

(Baz, Rob, Tim, and Davo begin arguing, overlapping.)

Dom: INTERSECT! I've only been here a few years...

Dave: Hang on, I think I've got it. The only thing they've actually got right now is that old field. Anything else they want to dig up, they have to buy off us. This is the turning point. If we want to save this town, we have to act now. So what do you say, boys? You wanna take those bastards to court?

Baz: It's a bloody Hail Mary.

(Transition to the news reporter scene. Slow, remaining in character; a palpable sense of uncertainty.)

Scene 10: Good Evening

Reporter 1: *(Seven News channel sting. Australian newsreader accent.)* Good evening. Tonight, we bring you breaking news from the rural community of Hobbys Yards. This small town faces the High Court of Australia. We cross now to...

Reporter 2: *(Cutting in.)* Buonasera. Questa sera abbiamo notizie internazionali: in un processo storico contro Rio Tinto, una piccola città australiana si ribella per salvare la propria comunità.

Reporter 3: 早上好。今晚我们的国际新闻聚焦一起具有里程碑意义的审判：一个澳大利亚小镇挺身而出，对抗力拓集团，誓言守护他们的社区。

Reporter 4: *(Australian accent.)* Tune into the High Court now.

(Davo pushes the middle barrel out and steps forward.)

Scene 11: Tell the Truth

Rob: *(Raises right hand.)* Do you swear to tell the truth

Baz: *(Raises right hand.)* The whole truth

Dom: *(Raises right hand.)* And nothing but the truth

Tim: *(Raises right hand.)* So help you God.

Davo: I do. Hobbys Yards is not just a place on a map waiting to be dug up; it's a home. A home Australians have called home for generations. But all Rio Tinto can see are profit margins. Well, I tell you: put aside the profit, just once, and put real Australians first. Save Hobbys Yards. Put Australia first.

Tim: One day soon, he'll tell her it's time to start packing.
She won't even ask why they're leaving this time, or where they're headed.
She'll only remember how, when they came here,
She held out her hands...

(Circle in, but not too tight.)

Dom: Bright with berries,

Baz: The first of the season,

Rob: And said

Davo: Make a wish, boys.

All: *(Beat.)* Make a wish.

(All look out to the audience. LQ2 GO: Lights fade down.)





MUSIC 1

Ahran Grimes

Performance (Bass Guitar)

“

...getting to play melodies and take solos over these songs as a bass player, who is otherwise relegated to just quiet walking basslines, was intimidating but also highly educational.

”

MUSIC 1

Core Performance: ‘Dean Town’ by Vulfpeck

Elective 1: ‘How High the Moon/Ornithology’ by Les Paul, Mary Ford and Charlie Parker

Elective 2: ‘Spain’ by Chic Corea

Elective 3: ‘Sir Duke’ by Stevie Wonder

REFLECTION STATEMENT

I was in Year 9 when my bass teacher, Justin Dileo, first played me a recording of ‘Dean Town’ and I was immediately floored. The sheer speed of this contemporary funk classic’s intro, the immaculate warm tone, and even how far the bass player’s fingers had to stretch all led me to believe that the piece was, at full speed, nearly impossible to play. Justin then told me I was going to learn it for my HSC. After endlessly practising, studying, and getting each of this song’s many hand-stretching riffs up to full speed, I learnt a lot about the technical side of funk bass playing (know your pentatonics), but I also came to realise that the most important part of this song was its tight groove which, upon Justin’s advice, led me to playing the song slightly slower to emphasise its face-scrunching rhythm.

Learning jazz standards ‘Spain’ and ‘How High the Moon/Ornithology’ and getting to play melodies and take solos over these songs as a bass player, who is otherwise relegated to just quiet walking basslines, was intimidating but also highly educational. Switching between melodies and basslines throughout the pieces strengthened my understanding of the interplay between soloists and accompanists.

Stevie Wonder's pop classic, 'Sir Duke', is my repertoire's happy in-between of chromatic jazz harmony, swung rhythms and funk-adjacent riffs. This song is the audiated embodiment of joy, it is infectiously happy because of how fun it is to play; its energetic swung feel allowed me to bounce improvised ideas off the band, syncopating the rhythms in my own unique way, ornamenting the famous melodies with embellishments, making each performance expressive and unique.

These pieces really came together because of the support and considered feedback of my teachers and accompanists; Justin Dileo, Micheal Bellemore, James Hauptman, and Peter Watters.



Watch Ahran's
performances
here







Leo Schmid

Neurodiverse Narratives (Podcast)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

As a student of English Literature who identifies as neurodivergent, this critical podcast is inspired by the discussion and debate surrounding the representation of neurodivergent identities in literature and popular culture. Specifically, the novel form.

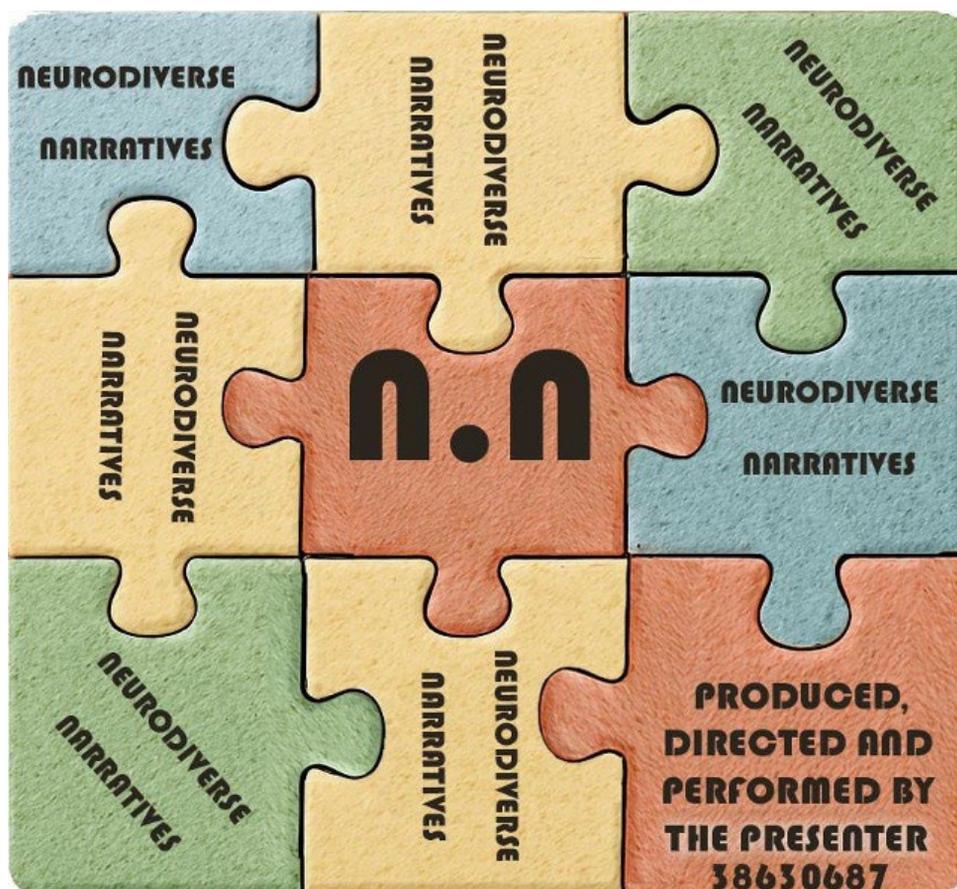
The academic discourse that exists around the modern novel infers that the contemporary reader considers that the fundamental purpose of this literary form, is to align narrative with the lived experience: to shine a light on the human condition and the nuances of complex psychological and social experiences, in a variety of given contexts. However, from my critical perspective, the novel form, despite its influence in the genesis of popular culture, at times, has enormous difficulty reflecting the identities and experiences of marginalised individuals. Thus, a more discerning reader might want to untangle the underlying assumptions and politics and to interrogate recurring tropes, especially when it comes to the depiction of underrepresented minorities. In this instance, I am primarily concerned with the nature of dominant representations of neurodivergent characters, arising in three contemporary narratives.

In this critical podcast, I endeavour to interrogate both the shortcomings and possibilities of the novel as a literary form, through a process of direct engagement with three contemporary, successful novelists: Graeme Simsion, Australian-New Zealand author of the global best-seller *The Rosie Project*; acclaimed American author Richard Powers, author of *Bewilderment*, and winner of the *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction* in 2018 and British writer Viktoria Lloyd-Barlow, whose imaginative prose in *All the Little Bird-Hearts* is informed by her background as an autistic woman.

I attempt to achieve my investigation of three texts through academic research in the form of voiced interviews, all of which have been conceived, developed, recorded, transcribed and edited by me, for the purpose of this podcast. My hope is that through the process of direct engagement with living authors of notable modern fiction, that I have succeeded in eliciting and analysing key themes, patterns and insights, which

together with extensive scholarly research about neurodiversity, influenced my critical analysis of the representation of neurodivergent characters.

I have also utilised sonic elements including music, readings and sound effects judiciously, to deliver a podcast for a targeted audience of ABC Radio National listeners, in a manner that is compelling and captivating.



PODCAST GUESTS

GRAEME SIMSION is a New Zealand-born Australian author who is best known for his international bestseller *The Rosie Project*, which is discussed in this podcast. The novel won the 2012 *Victorian Premier's Unpublished Manuscript Award* and went on to sell over six million copies in 42 languages. Simsion's other novels include sequels to *The Rosie Project: The Rosie Effect* and *The Rosie Result*. The presenter of *Neurodiverse Narratives* interviewed Graeme Simsion on 7 January, 2025.

RICHARD POWERS won the *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction* in 2018, for his novel *The Overstory*. He is an acclaimed American novelist who is known for blending science, philosophy and human emotion in his work. A polymath of sorts, Powers studied physics before turning to literature and his deep understanding of science deeply informs his writing. His 2021 novel *Bewilderment* follows astrobiologist Theo Byrne and his neurodivergent son Robin, as they navigate grief, environmental collapse and experimental neurotherapy. Powers' thirteenth novel, *Bewilderment*, was shortlisted for the *Booker Prize* and praised for its lyrical prose and emotional depth. The presenter of *Neurodiverse Narratives* interviewed Richard Powers on and subsequently recorded him reading an extract from *Bewilderment* on 17 April, 2025.

DR VIKTORIA LLOYD-BARLOW is a British author whose debut novel *All the Little Bird-Hearts* was longlisted for the *Booker Prize* in 2023. Autistic herself, Lloyd-Barlow brings a unique perspective to her writing, exploring neurodivergence, motherhood and vulnerability, with lyrical sensitivity. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Kent, where her novel originated as a core element of her doctoral thesis. The novel is centred on the character Sunday Forrester, an autistic woman who finds herself navigating complex relationships and social codes. The presenter of *Neurodiverse Narratives* interviewed Viktoria Lloyd-Barlow on 14 January 2025 and subsequently recorded her reading an extract from *All the Little Bird-Hearts* on 9 August, 2025.

OPENING MONTAGE [SFX: The podcast opens with a short, media-rich opening audio montage sequence, featuring the sound of a plucked double-bass from the upbeat jazz score *Haitian Fight Song* by Charles Mingus. The music is evocative of the conceptual tensions that will emerge in *Neurodiverse Narratives*, a podcast that interrogates the representation of neurodivergent characters within fictional texts.

Additionally, gleaned from the internet, a News Reader's voice can be heard in the background, announcing 'a rise in autism rates', as well as faint snippets of the voice of Donald Trump's Health Secretary, Robert F Kennedy Junior, making a speech about

vaccines driving a rise in autism diagnoses and categorically stating that autistic children ‘will never write a poem’ or contribute meaningfully to life.

In combination, the sound-bytes of these panned, intersecting and overlapping voices merge with those of the three Podcast Guests. Together, they signal the underlying literary and conceptual concerns of the Major Work and feature intentionally provocative excerpts from to foreground the interviews conducted by the Producer/Presenter, including: Richard Powers stating, ‘I wanted to create a character who clearly was extremely distinctive, that would not be considered normative...’; Graeme Simsion explaining, ‘I’m seeing a wide range of autistic characters, and I’m trying to get that variability on the page...’ and Dr Viktoria Lloyd-Barlow commenting, ‘If I wanted to write about a straight, white, middle-aged man, I feel perfectly able to do that, because that’s what I’ve read since I first opened a book...and that’s the dominant narrative.’

An audio sting, from *Haitian Fight Song* is heard, and the bass line within the jazz music underscores the voice of the presenter speaking his introductory comments. Versions of the audio sting will feature as a recurring motif between each interview segment, to delineate the interviews.]

PRESENTER: Hello and welcome to Neurodiverse Narratives, a podcast exploring uncomfortable questions about the politics of representation in literature and popular culture. In this episode, we’ll consider the question: Who has the right to write?

Neurodivergent characters have always featured in our fiction, often hidden in plain sight. I have a particular interest in this kind of representation, as you guessed it, I’m neurodivergent.

[SFX: A soft musical swish is heard to mark the importance of the presenter’s admission of neurodivergence.]

When I’m invested in a topic, my brain is able to make connections at light speed. When I’m doing something I find laborious, by contrast, it feels like I’m wading through John Bunyan’s *Slough of Despond*. These differences can be perceived negatively, as a neurodevelopmental disorder, or positively, as a feature of human diversity.

And this is where the tricky subject of representation comes in. If you think you immediately know how a neurodivergent person thinks, how they are likely to act, or what it is that they actually feel, there’s a strong chance that your views about neurodiversity have been shaped by one of many facile, one-dimensional portrayals of neurodivergence...

[SFX: Three brief audio clips from popular film and television representations of iconic autistic protagonists can be heard in the background. They include Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman playing two brothers in the film *Rain Man*, with Tom Cruise's voice being heard saying, "Was I trying to say Raymond and it came out Rain Man?", followed by "I'm Dr. Sheldon Cooper.", followed by "And I'm Doctor Shaun Murphy..." The polyphony continues, fading under the Presenter's next line.]

PRESENTER: ...that reduce those of us who are atypical, to punchlines. [SFX: The sound of canned laughter from a sitcom.]

PRESENTER: Literary fiction, though, is different. Or at least, it should be.

Some fiction writers argue that great stories are achieved only through craft. Acclaimed author, Graeme Simsion, posits that it is his mastery of language which gives him the ability to represent neurodivergent characters. And I guess if you're a writer, who's been 65-weeks on the *New York Times Bestseller List*, you'd feel pretty sure that you had it all worked out.

PRESENTER throws to extract from an interview with Graeme Simsion, from an interview he recorded for this Major Work on 7 January, 2025.

PRESENTER: [Throws to interview content.] Let's hear directly from Graeme Simsion:

GRAEME SIMSION: I don't identify as autistic, but I wouldn't make the assumption that I'm not neurodivergent. Now, is it appropriate for somebody who doesn't identify as autistic, to write an autistic character? And my argument is, that if you do it authentically, then you have every right to, because autistic people may end up representing only their own autism.

The Rosie Project sold over 5 million copies, and I think you've got to balance that and say, well look, do we want that replaced with a neurodivergent person's book that sells 2000 copies?

PRESENTER: Of course, the extraordinary book sales support Simsion's position. However, if we accept his argument that commercial success is proof of truth, we must also accept that this validates his greater right to represent neurodivergent characters, than neurodivergent writers themselves.

I want to analyse Professor Don Tillman, *The Rosie Project's* neurodivergent narrator and Simsion's collective identification of neurodivergent children.

KS READING #1: Well, they were children, predominantly male, sitting at desks. Presumably these were the victims of *Asperger's Syndrome*. Almost all of the literature focuses on children. Despite their affliction, they were making better use of their time than their parents, who were chattering aimlessly. Most were operating portable computer devices.

PRESENTER: Yet despite Simson's inclusion of the Aspie professor Don Tillman at the heart of *The Rosie Project*, his representation of neurodivergence strikes me as being somewhat problematic.

Firstly, Simson's identification of high-functioning autistic children is predominantly male. This reaffirms a gendered diagnostic skew that is outdated.

In 2013, the same year that *The Rosie Project* was published, the DSM-5 reframed neurodivergence - retiring the term *Asperger's Syndrome* for a multiplicity of reasons, not least of which was Hans Asperger's historic association with Nazism and Eugenics.

Indeed, the lexical framing of Tillman's off-handed observations of child "victims" with "afflictions", is language that is loaded with dehumanising connotations, that frame neurodivergence as disease, rather than as an expression of human biological diversity. Simson's pathologising framing, in the pursuit of comedy, also sentences the broad community of individuals who are atypical, to a form of ridicule at best and ultimately, social isolation.

In this context, the choice of the noun, "victims", serves a metonymic function, which has the effect of elevating *Asperger's* from a condition to an all-encompassing identity - which engenders the harmful stereotype of *the savant* - the reductive and voracious trope that we are all too familiar with.

In chapter 24, when Don and Rosie go out to dinner, Graeme Simson's approach to character and situation deliberately 'codes' Don Tillman as autistic. 'Coding' a character, is when the narrator announces that a character is atypical and explicitly labelled as autistic. I'll take the matter of coding up later in the podcast, when I speak with Victoria Lloyd-Barlow, author of *All the Little Bird-Hearts*, to offer an atypical perspective.

The acutely observational first-person narrative of the ordering of food, the clientele in the restaurant and Don's moment-by-moment self-observation, screams that he is atypical, in a way that also makes a mockery of his neurodivergence. Consider, for example, Don's narrative commentary when he says...

[SFX: The reading from *The Rosie Project* is gently underscored by a subtle, elongated moment from the jazz standard *Gloomy Sunday*, by Hungarian composer Rezső Seress.]

KS READING #2: But informal interactions with another person had triggered my regular behaviour, and my regular behaviour and speaking style is, I am well aware, considered odd by others. The man with the piercings must have noticed.

[SFX: The music from *Gloomy Sunday* bleeds into a segue with the bass line from *Haitian Fight Song*.]

PRESENTER: While it provides an emotional revelation about his anxiety and social awkwardness, it also exposes that Simson's purpose, is not to provide the reader with an authentic representation of an atypical person, but to create maximum comic impact, by relying on stereotypes, that mock his protagonist's autistic traits.

Sadly, the politics of this kind of representation can have a profoundly negative impact on perceptions of autistic people. And even if the eccentric New York setting for the dinner might seem to be an environment which, being socially different is normalised, Simson's unfolding of Don's interior monologue seems to be telling the reader, that Don can't really fit with the normative expectations and that his efforts to do so, will ridicule the very traits that make him meaningfully unique.

Again, there is no doubting Simson's writerly craft. Don's adventurous eating, metaphorically symbolises that a rigid person is making a courageous shift, as he dives into the unknown realm of potential intimacy with a woman.

[SFX: The musical underscore again segues from the sound of *Gloomy Sunday* to the bass line from *Haitian Fight Song*, which ushers in the podcast identification, as it shifts from Graeme Simson as the first Podcast Guest, to the second Podcast Guest, Richard Powers. The music builds in energy and volume to sit under the podcast ident and audio sting.]

PRESENTER: You're listening to Neurodiverse Narratives: a podcast about the politics of representation in literature and popular culture.

[SFX: The bass line of the *Haitian Fight Song* continues under the PRESENTER and concludes with the energised trumpet at the end of the podcast's recurring motif and recognisable audio sting.]

When I read *Bewilderment* by Richard Powers, I was excited. In the narrative, Robin, the neurodivergent child of a brilliant young scientist, Theo Byrne, is treated with humanity and respect. I believe that Powers completely resists *othering* his atypical

character and presents him with dignity. And Powers' gently transgressive approach to narrative highlights the power of language to foster understanding and empathy.

PRESENTER throws to extract from an interview with Richard Powers, from an interview he recorded on Zoom, on 17 April, 2025.

[Throw to Richard Powers.] Powers is neurotypical, so I want us to investigate the way he approaches the atypical perspective in his refreshing prose.

RICHARD POWERS: So, I started with an observation that I had read in the work of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, that “every act of depicting is itself a depiction”, so that you can best understand the traits, mannerisms and interior values of an individual, by seeing what it is about the world outside that individual that most compels him or her.

PRESENTER: It's an attempt to create fiction, not through the typical means of attribution, but by allowing individual focalisers to attribute things to other people, or to the world. So, how does Powers inhabit the perspective of these two extremely different kinds of focalisers?

[SFX: Gentle underscoring of PRESENTER speaking begins here.] Well, it's a little asymmetrical. It seems to me that Powers wanted to do so in a way that didn't take Robin's neurodivergent character traits and identify him as somehow qualitatively different from the continuum of human experience.

RICHARD POWERS: Theo gets to tell the story in the first person, but Robin also gets to have direct discourse. I want to be careful about my vocabulary here, but I wanted to create a character who clearly was extremely distinctive, who had certain behavioural patterns that would not be considered normative by a large percentage of the population.

PRESENTER: So, in other words, to challenge the notion of definition by opposition of, “I'm normative, that person is not normative . . .”, Richard Powers' approach to writing, makes me think of a paper by Anna de Hooge, *Binary Boys: Autism, Aspie Supremacy and Post/Humanist Normativity*. She's a contemporary researcher, whose scholarship focalises the way that literary texts often exotify neurodivergent characters. And that the end result of such exotification, is that atypical characters, are ultimately stripped of their humanity.

As an avid reader of books that grapple with atypical identities, I love the way that Powers inhabits the richness and complexity of the atypical child character of Robin and of the robustness of Robin's relationships with others.

[Throw] Richard Powers.

RICHARD POWERS READING [SFX: The reading from *Bewilderment* is underscored by a subtle, elongated improvised saxophone moment from the jazz standard *Gloomy Sunday*, by Hungarian composer Rezső Seress.] Watching medicine fail my child, I developed the crackpot theory: Life is something we need to stop correcting. My boy was a pocket universe I could never hope to fathom. Every one of us is an experiment, and we don't even know what the experiment is testing.

My wife would have known how to talk to the doctors. 'Nobody's perfect', she liked to say. But, man, we all fall short and so beautifully.]

[SFX: The bass line of the *Haitian Fight Song* swells and then fades out under the PRESENTER, concluding with the energised trumpeting of the podcast's recurring motif and recognisable audio sting, which sits underneath the PRESENTER'S identification of the podcast and audio sting.]

PRESENTER: You're listening to Neurodiverse Narratives.

I want to conclude today's podcast by inviting contemporary writer, Victoria Lloyd-Barlow, author of *All the Little Bird-Hearts*, to speak about her novel. Longlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, the 2023 narrative brings to life atypical protagonist, Sunday Forrester, and the cruel prejudices that are imposed on her by neurotypical others.

The text is a personal favourite of mine. I love the way that it creatively and subjectively manages the experience of being on the autism spectrum, providing the reader with powerful, self-reflexive insights.

[SFX: Soft music underscores the reading of an extract from her novel *All the Little Bird-Hearts* by Viktoria Lloyd-Barlow who was recorded by the PRESENTER on 9 August, 2025.]

VIKTORIA LLOYD-BARLOW READING: For as a teenager, Dolly has naturally begun to observe me and my oddities, which alternately amused and concerned her, the latter becoming more common as she approached independence. It was like living with a former lover who no longer remembered you as such, but behaved as a lodger, parading his preferred girlfriends past you with a friendly wink.

PRESENTER: As the narrative unfolds, Sunday's neighbours provide distractions from her anxieties but emerge as darkly manipulative characters, who abuse her difference. I'm going to share clips from my interview with Lloyd-Barlow, who has a lived experience of being atypical.

VIKTORIA LLOYD-BARLOW: When I'm reading authentic narratives from those disenfranchised people, I do feel like they hit harder when they come from authentic place. Also, when I've read books that have autistic characters who are written by neurotypical people, often I feel kind of discomfort with certain elements of it.

PRESENTER: It strikes me that Lloyd-Barlow's political perspective on representation, is antithetical to that of Graeme Simsion. In thinking about the neurodivergent protagonist, Sunday Forrester, does a reader's experience of a narrative and the character change, if they are not explicitly coded as autistic?

VIKTORIA LLOYD-BARLOW: That's a really interesting question. As I watched a film recently and one of the characters was definitely coded autistic, I didn't feel it was the right thing to do to kind of out Sunday, because in the period that I was writing, she probably wouldn't have been diagnosed. So, it's a really complex area.

PRESENTER: As a reader, I became fascinated with the way that Sunday immersed herself in Sicilian folklore, a personal interest, to navigate the complexities of her world. Is this the place in the novel where the extra-diegetic world of a writer, intrudes into the diegetic world of the protagonist?

VIKTORIA LLOYD-BARLOW: I was looking at how, the chosen interests of autistic people can really connect them with the world, so the things they tend to lose themselves in can be harnessed to make a connection between themselves and the world and the people around them. I am really obsessed with Italian folklore and Sicilian history, so I wanted to explore that in my academic study and then bring it into the book. And I feel like as autistic people, our strengths really are in making connections between apparently unlike things.

PRESENTER: A standout feature of all the Little Bird-Hearts is its bold challenge to the way that relationships between neurodivergent and neurotypical people are represented.

VIKTORIA LLOYD-BARLOW: Relationships are difficult and always changing. And I think often autistic people have been portrayed as being less connected, less empathic. And it gives a really unfortunate misinterpretation.

PRESENTER: Of equal importance, is the matter of who tells the story. In her aforementioned PhD, Lloyd-Barlow posits a reframing of autism and rejects models that highlight perceived deficits.

[SFX: Concluding montage begins when PRESENTER says *aforementioned* PhD. It consists of the upbeat, plucked bass line from *Haitian Fight Song*, which gradually builds and sits under the other elements of the montage until the end.]

The challenge is to recalibrate what counts as knowledge and narrative.

PRESENTER: In *Neurodiverse Narrative* you heard the voices of Doctor Victoria Lloyd-Barlow, Graeme Simsion and Richard Powers.

I hope you've had an experience that allows you to arrive at a considered personal position about the politics of representation of neurodivergence in literature.

Thanks for your company and attention.

[SFX: The recognisable concluding audio sting is heard from *Haitian Fight Song*, this last time ending with a saxophone flourish and diminuendo.]

END OF PODCAST

Julian Criola

Critical Analysis (Portfolio of Theatre Criticism)

(Nominated for OnSTAGE)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

Theatre has always been more than a mere escapist pleasure or simply entertaining. For me, theatre reflects our lives in mysterious ways that alter how we perceive the world. Consequently, my motivation to write about theatre has taken the form of two goals. Firstly, that my writing becomes a purposeful vehicle in advocating for the arts. Secondly, that this process will manifest within me a more profound appreciation of the theatrical process, allowing my own performances to improve. I selected shows of varying styles to widen my scope of theatre and focused my reviews on a show's manipulation of production elements and character interpretations. With both performance experience and having studied various eras of theatre and literature, my theatre reviews aim to be relatable and ruthlessly truthful to the context of my peers and passionate thespian audience.

Frequenting three theatres, I reviewed Belvoir St's *August: Osage County* (22 Dec 2024) and *Jacky* (22 Jan 2025), as well as STC's RBG: *Of Many, One* (16 April 2025) and Ensemble Theatre's *Aria* (24 Jan 2025). Whilst they are all modern plays, they are vastly different – and therein lies the beauty. Much like the fabric of our society, each show was complex and individual. As such, my 'voice' attempted to mirror the sanctity of this artform, being both judicial and playful. Engagement was a primary focus for me as I sought to take readers on a journey through the production itself and bring even just a glimmer of the stage's wonder to the page. Through creating my own magazine, *The Curtain Call*, I toyed with different language styles to balance critical remarks with wit and satire.

I never feared genuinely interrogating the production elements, particularly in my review of *August: Osage County*, preferencing authenticity over following popular opinion. Ultimately, I hope that my portfolio is seen as earnest and resonates with my audience on both a personal and collective level.

“

Much like the fabric of our society, each show was complex and individual. As such, my 'voice' attempted to mirror the sanctity of this artform, being both judicial and playful.

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THE CURTAIN CALL



ARIA
Ensemble Theatre
24th January 2025

★★★★★

“There is no family without friction, but love is the oil that fixes everything,” insists Monique, the delusional matriarch of Williamson’s *Aria*. Amidst her family’s annual soirée, this narcissist presides over a dysfunctional clan eerily reminiscent of families from Sydney’s own North Shore or notoriously egotistical East. Is it Freud’s Oedipus complex that binds them, or maybe an appetite for an alcohol-fuelled debacle? Either way, who doesn’t love a mother-in-law fiasco?

Williamson’s *Aria* charts the story of Monique (Tracy Mann), who transcends mere motherhood to fashion herself into a full-blown fangirl of her three sons, Daniel (Sam O’Sullivan), Liam (Jack Starkey-Gill) and Charlie (Rowan Davie). Her devotion borders on delusion, as she struggles to comprehend why her beloved boys would ever need anyone else in their lives — least of all romantic partners. Yet it’s the wives, played by Suzannah McDonald, Danielle King and Tamara Lee Bailey, who provide the sharpest contrast to

Monique’s perennial disposition, refusing to bow to her emotional theatrics and instead challenging her grip on the family narrative.

Every year, Monique hosts a joint birthday celebration for her sons, corralling them and their partners into her home for an evening of carefully orchestrated emotional sabotage. As the anticipated annual Aria arrives, she’ll belt out and artfully blunder Mozart’s iconic *Queen of the Night*. Despite being her greatest undertaking in years, she’s convinced that if only she hadn’t married, she’d have taken up residence at La Scala Theatre. Mann is nothing short of an acting juggernaut: insufferable, hilarious and cruelly blasé in suggesting her sons consider divorce. Impeccably cast by six-time Ensemble Theatre director Janine Watson, Mann follows her acclaimed 2024 feature in Belvoir’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Williamson’s one-act wonder borrows from some of his most prolific Australian works, melding *The Club*’s egotism, *The Removalists*’ claustrophobic moral decay and the drunken disillusionment of *Don’s Party*. Yet, sadly, *Aria* lacks the emotional prowess of its predecessors. While this production’s black comedy functions as a satirical mirror of Sydney’s social stratification, without the working-class realism we’ve come to expect from Williamson, *Aria* feels almost desperate to not off end. Nevertheless, this new play slides neatly into Williamson’s hallmark style, condemning the characters to

a primary setting and relying heavily on witty dialogue to drive the storyline.

Aria's melodrama hinges on the hyper-realistic work of international set and costume designer Rose Montgomery, who transforms Ensemble's intimate stage to immerse the audience in Monique's opulent estate. Sterilely monochromatic, as modern luxury demands, a sleek piano and a liquor "station" lined with Veuve and Moët frame the living room. These centrepieces are flanked by two doors, one an entrance and the other leading to the garden as an asylum from the tension. Equally greyscale is Monique herself, clad in black and white with a striking silver necklace that extends both the set and her own brittle poise.

Monique's living room serves as the theatrical pressure cooker, where confrontation simmers and boils as sextets collapse into trios, and duos splinter into solos. But despite the clever staging, even within a mere hundred minutes, the constant reshuffling begins to undercut the dramatic momentum. Instead of escalating, the tension stalls, each new grouping monotonously circling similar familial grievances without quite landing a powerful blow.

With the family reassembled, the crescendo looms. Ensemble Theatre stalwart Matt Cox (Lighting Designer) and NIDA-trained David Bergman (Composer & Sound Designer) shift from subtle presences to command the theatrum mundi of Monique's climactic performance. The lights turn a brooding rouge as O'Sullivan dutifully plays the piano, lending just enough drama for Mann's enthusiasm and screechiness to be received in equal measure.



While the political message is undoubtedly basic at best, the play's soul lies in its simplistic socio-temporal relevance for its target audience – the North Shore. Whilst it's not all too often that parents find themselves battling familial legacy to switch their child to a *public* school, if it were to happen, perhaps this is the crowd that should best relate.

Williamson even attempted to relate to Gen Z with Bailey playing Midge, the outspoken and ditzy wife of youngest son Charlie. Montgomery's costuming pairs immaculately with Midge's highlighter orange dress and \$355 hair-do, perfectly suiting her farcical war against the "gusts" of wind in the backyard. While Bailey has the look and energy, her performance occasionally veers into caricature, perhaps a result of being saddled with some of the script's clunkiest lines. Lines like "lobotomised frog" and an ill-judged joke about a friend's pet leave Bailey with little to work with, ultimately undercutting what could be a stronger Ensemble Theatre debut.

Aria won't change minds, but it will spark laughter, especially for anyone who's survived a chaotic family lunch. Familiar, funny and just sharp enough to sting.

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THE CURTAIN CALL



RBG: Of Many, One
Sydney Opera House, Drama House
Theatre,
16th April 2025

★★★★★

From the darkness and silence emerges one woman. One lifetime. One enduring voice. A legacy to be remembered through the ages... the story of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

RBG: Of Many, One is not simply a tribute, nor a biography. It's a compelling tale of defiance, determination and love that celebrates one of the most remarkable women of modern history. Brought to life by Heather Mitchell in a career-defining performance, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the second woman to be appointed to the US Supreme Court. A feminist icon. A heroine in the fight against gender inequality and systemic injustice.

Following its standout success in STC's 2022 program, this one-woman, one-act show returns to reclaim the spotlight with fierce resolve. Internationally acclaimed Australian lawyer-turned-playwright, Suzie Miller, is no stranger to the gravitas of one-actor shows, authoring the 2019 *Prima Facie* which

premiered in Sydney before making its way to Broadway and the West End. Finessing her legal background into this stellar production alongside up-and-coming director Priscilla Jackman, Miller tracks RBG from the age of 13 to her last breath at 87. Together, they delicately balance Ginsburg's femininity with her social abnegation.

Mitchell, a veteran of STC's productions for over forty years, miraculously shifts between not only RBG's own epochs, but between the various characters that appear throughout her story, imbuing Ginsburg with a vivid soul. Structured in three sections, the play opens with RBG anxiously awaiting a call from President Clinton that would seat her on the Supreme Court — a gravitas which Mitchell transforms into a commanding presence.

Ginsburg's famous appraisal of the democratic separation of power between the Executive and Judiciary is underpinned by the poignancy of her mother's legacy. In a complete transformation of demeanour, voice, pose and spirit, Mitchell embodies the dreamily energetic 16-year-old RBG as she ventures into her first theatre adorned with her mother's brooch. As Puccini's *E lucevan le stelle* swells, Sydney Theatre Award-winning lighting designer, Alexander Berlage bathes the stage in a deep red and RBG's dream to sing opera flickers to life. With the glisten of tears in her eyes, Ginsburg cultivates her own voice. A voice that would echo

Puccini's power in the courtroom for years to come. In a montage of the famous cases she both worked and admired, this production breathes humanity into the victims behind the legalese. Mitchell does so within David Fleischer's flowing set that resembles the folded pages of a book formulated into pillars. Having recently designed STC's *Into the Shimmering World*, Fleischer brings a signature refined minimalism to amplify Mitchell's presence as she continually takes to Berlage's spotlight. As papers rain down from the roof, emboldened by another landmark victory, there is no mistaking it – *RBG: Of Many, One* is a production buoyed by courage.

This legal titan is relentlessly tested as a pillar of family and community — and still rises to pulverise the glass ceiling. Defying social paradigms, she pursues a legal career while raising a newborn and supporting her husband Marty through cancer. Sitting centre stage in an armchair, offering strength when no one else could, she doesn't pray – she hopes. Mitchell animates Marty with genuine warmth and depth, capturing their relationship with heartfelt sincerity. When she reads his last letter, penned just before his passing, a hush descends over the audience, broken only by quiet sobs. An ache that resonates long after the final blackout.

Streamers and rainbow lights punctuate the tension and welcome the new millennium, cheekily soundtracked by sound designer Paul Charlier's remix of Duran Duran's *Notorious* and Mozart's *Queen of the Night*. Just as the zeitgeist shifts, so too does the public image of RBG. Now memefied and, before long, posing on the cover of *Time Magazine*, Berlage unleashes two light boxes

trailing Ginsberg. The mounting pressure of the feminist movement, flashes, Trump's campaign and a biting mimicry fracture the steel of Ginsburg's principles. Silent no longer. Now the flashes intensify as sensationalism and criticism grow – her legacy tainted – a judge who overstepped. Emotion over process. Executive and Judiciary no more.



Ginsburg withstands Obama's call to resign, rather escalating the quality of her courtroom dissents. Now frail and elderly, Mitchell's craft becomes only more pronounced, channelling the force of Ginsburg's youth into the octogenarian contending to outlast the Trump administration. This, heartbreakingly, is a race she would lose, a failure received with a heavy heart. Perhaps she was guilty of too much hope.

Ginsburg faced three strikes – being a mother, a wife and Jewish, yet, inspired by her own mother, she overcame them all. Amid sobs and laughter, it is clear that *RBG: Of Many, One* is more than a portrait of a trailblazer. Her hope dares us to dismantle the barriers that still stand between ideals and reality, reminding us that justice demands both grit and grace.

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THE CURTAIN CALL



August: Osage County
Belvoir St Theatre, Upstairs Theatre
8th October 2024

★★★

Tracy Letts' *August: Osage County* reminds us of the indelible blood smeared across the North American Great Plains. *Great* in name only — the native peoples' culture, language and resistance buried far beneath the topsoil. The hangover of this barbaric past still lingers today — Osage County's own Weston Family, their addiction-fuelled delirium, untamed libido and infighting, just another link in this lineage of violence.

Letts' Pulitzer Prize-winning tragicomedy returns to Sydney in fierce competition to STC's exceptional 2010 production. This epic first premiered in Chicago (2007) before making its way to Broadway the same year. *August: Osage County* arrives now, timely as ever, ahead of the 2024 American presidential election with Belvoir's resident director, Eamon Flack, lambasting *The American Dream* as one of "great promise declined into pain."

Set in Oklahoma, *August: Osage County* follows the emotional detritus left by the disappearance of patriarch Beverly Weston

(John Howard), later revealed to have taken his own life. His death reunites the estranged Weston family and sends his pill-dependent wife, Violet (Pamela Rabe AM), spiralling. What follows is a slow unravelling of long-held family secrets, betrayals and bitterness as three generations clash over the wreckage left behind by their parents. At the centre of this chaos are the three Weston daughters: Barbara (Tamsin Carroll), Ivy (Amy Matthews) and Karen (Anna Samson).

The play opens in the Weston family living room, and regrettably, with a painfully slow monologue delivered by Howard about T.S. Eliot. This monologue is intended to frame Beverly's intellectualised despair as he drinks himself to death. However, despite Howard's theatrical pedigree, spanning back to a 1992 Critics Circle Award for *The Crucible*, Flack's direction drains the moment of its intended black satire, landing instead in a puddle of turgid melodrama.

Just as the show threatens to sink entirely, salvation arrives in the form of Pamela Rabe, no stranger to the Belvoir stage and the recipient of countless theatrical accolades, a Helpmann among them. Emerging from a looming silhouette in the window, Rabe quickly asserts herself as the show's comedic powerhouse. Her merciless impression of Barbara was just one of the moments that earned her the night's biggest laughs.



Fighting against the production once more, the staging does little to support Rabe's craft. In condensing Letts' three-level world into a single plane, designer Bob Cousins sacrifices any sense of realism. The staircase, scarcely wider than one of Violet's pill bottles, collides awkwardly with a haphazard clash of painted walls and outdoor tiling, jarring the audience before the drama even begins. Whilst Cousins admits he's "never been particularly bound by the notion of naturalism," the hard two-wall corner struggles against Belvoir's three-sided seating, awkwardly framing the action and forcing Act Two's dining table to face only one seating section.

Thankfully, the ensemble holds strong, with Helpmann-winner Carroll delivering a blistering portrayal of Barbara — sharp, layered, and heartbreakingly familiar. In slowly becoming her mother, the audience agonises over Carroll ripping off her stockings and shudders as her hair begins to resemble something of a bird's nest. The madness of the pair is artfully emphasised by costume designer Ella Butler, whose works are now touring in *RENT: The Musical*. Wrapping Barbara and Violet in cardigans to marinate in a room "hot enough to kill a tropical bird" is just a glimpse of her remarkable skill.

Act Two surges with momentum. At the wake, Violet launches into a generational

tirade, driving Barbara to finally snap. The resulting confrontation, part choreographed chaos, part primal purge, turns violent in a thrilling watch. Their fight is achingly visceral, the audience bearing witness as the mind-numbing medication of the "greatest generation" wears off.

Barbara's iconically tragic line, "We're your sisters, we might have given you some comfort," could just as easily sum up the final act, emotionally raw and harrowing. In its most unsettling scene, Barbara's daughter, Jean (Esther Williams in her Belvoir debut), is subjected to an unsolicited sexual advance from her future uncle. It's here that Morgan Moroney's lighting does its best work: not just illuminating the horror, but amplifying it. Moroney returns to Belvoir after working on *Shitty* earlier this year, reutilising shadow and silhouette to echo Violet's lament, "I've forgotten what I look like." He renders the characters exposed and invisible all at once. There is truly nowhere to hide.

As the play veers to a close, it's Charlie (Greg Stone) who unexpectedly steals the show. His thunderous monologue, a rebuke of his wife's (Helen Thomson) emotional abuse, earns spontaneous cheers from the audience. Perhaps it's catharsis. Or maybe, it's the play's one hopeful glimpse at generational change.

Letts serves up a legacy soaked in bitterness, and while Flack fumbles parts of this inheritance, the rot still seeps through. 'Act Four' belongs to us now, and if Barbara is any guide, it will be no small feat to rectify the wounds of the past.

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THE CURTAIN CALL



Jacky
Belvoir St Theatre,
22nd January 2025

★★★★★

A 'New Age' of theatre has been born, one that eschews metaphor and symbolism in favour of raw authenticity. Within this space emerges a bold, unflinchingly honest repudiation of social illusion, laying bare the inescapable realities of being an Indigenous Australian. It is in this artistic terrain that emerging Arrernte playwright Declan Furber Gillick begs the question: Is it possible to escape the confines of society?

Preceding the Voice referendum, the unapologetically uncomfortable *Jacky* debuted in Melbourne in May 2023. The play is an amalgamation of ideas from Gillick's earlier monologue-based work, *Bighouse Dreaming*, which he also developed in collaboration with this production's director, Mark Wilson. *Jacky*, played by 2024 Balnaves Fellowship recipient Guy Simon from the Melbourne production, follows a queer First Nations man caught between the idyllic promise of white professionalism and cultural obligations. As

a newly-Melbournian struggling to finesse his way into the business world, Jacky turns to sex work to survive in the costly city. All the while, his personal and private spheres unexpectedly converge and his Aboriginality is questioned, commodified and weaponised.

This hundred-minute exposé opens in chaos as Jacky's larrikin brother Keith (Danny Howard) bursts through the vomitorium, the only true 'exit' from Jacky's irreconcilable world. Keith boasts, "the world is your oyster," the irony of this idiom is lost on no spectator, unable to simplify the entire capitalist experience into a mere five words.

Howard, a recent NIDA and WAAPA graduate, makes his mainstage debut as Keith in a flawlessly authentic performance. His portrayal of the 'unemployed' Indigenous archetype, idling on the couch with Uber Eats three times a day, sheds light on the clash between the pressures of cultural legacy and the struggle to escape social marginalisation. As he bounces around the deliberately sparse stage, his vulgar vernacular and elastic physicality anchor the production's didactic bite in a visceral, lived experience.

Escalating throughout the entire performance is a brooding tension between Jacky's personal and business lives. He is complemented by three stand-out creatives, Christina Smith as set designer, costume designer Emily Barrie and Matt Scott on lighting. Staged over more

than five locations, Smith's intuitive lack of walls and use of simplistic props neatly dissolve the borders of Jacky's world. The show seamlessly transforms from fights with Keith in the apartment into a sex-charged scene with Glenn (Greg Stone) in the hotel just two paces away. This chaos is mirrored in Barrie's costuming, dressed, undressed, shirt in, shirt out, just in underwear. Day and night blend as Scott melds vibrant blue and searing orange. Time collapses. Jacky loses himself in a white man's world.

It is no question, then, that tangled in a sentimental gift exchange, Jacky breaks his key rule: no kissing clients. The client in question: Glenn. Stone is returning from Belvoir's recent production, *August: Osage County*, and now he is our comedic focus, perfectly awkward, funny and outrageous at all the right moments. Whether it be his voyeuristic kink for "big black c**k" or his pornography addiction, Stone has the audience in stitches. But, as the spotlights pin the hotel bed, Glenn delivers the straw that breaks the camel's back: he sneers, "dirty abo bastard," urging Jacky to unleash his inner "savage" — a paradox, no? Only to follow up with asking the price to add some "racism" to the package — the audience's audible gasping speaks for itself. All the while, unbeknownst to Jacky, Glenn's wife Linda (Mandy McElhinney) is running a reconciliation program offering him a job.

It would be impertinent not to mention the shattering climax of this heart-wrenching play. Glenn stumbles into Jacky's tribal dance as he impersonates a Langhorne family member to impress philanthropists for Linda's program. Wilson reflects their love triangle in the staging, Glenn stuttering on an arc then

delivering a commanding monologue at the vomitorium's entrance, castigating Jacky as a "dancing monkey". Now centre stage, backgrounded by Smith's set, Scott focuses the lights and Jacky's worlds finally collide.



Whilst this show certainly rattled the audience, it opens the floodgates to a myriad of questions: Does the current strategy for reconciliation permit *philanthropists* to obfuscate any enduring commitment to genuine inclusion? Is society any better than the missions, the "mish", which seek the betterment of First Nations peoples, but are complicit in creating problems they set themselves to solve? Does Jacky not just fight the same "hand to mouth" life in the city, forced into sex work? After all, Jacky himself accuses Keith of being the First Nation "victim" everyone expects of him.

Like Glenn's record played, "I'll be so glad when the sun goes down". *Jacky*. A thrilling journey of what it means to be an Indigenous Australian in the 21st Century and a worthy entrant into this year's Sydney Festival.

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William Bunton

“

Darrama (Dreamtime)

I was interested in interstitial spaces, the invisible and unseen gaps where things meet or come together... I chose to reflect this through the use of indistinct images that represented hazy moments of meetings between Colonists and Aboriginal people.

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REFLECTION STATEMENT

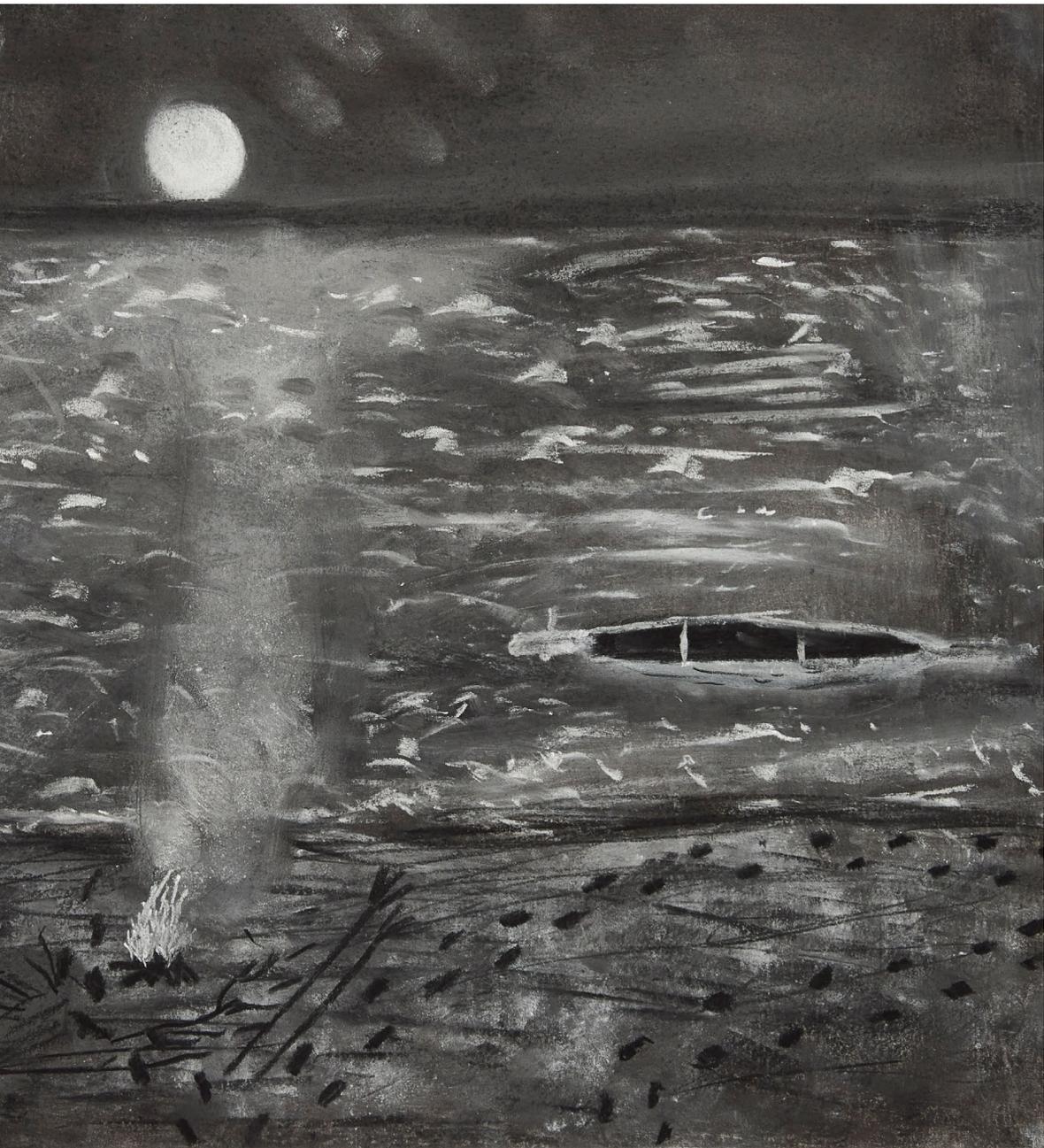
Darrama consists of dreamscapes. Each work figuratively is a time in 'Kamay (Botany Bay)' where there was tranquillity among the people, animals, land and ocean in comparison to the arrival of 'Cook', which exaggerates a destined calamity. The works are divided by a canon event which changed the flow of the harmonious world, the undisturbed works in the beginning of the story oppose the much darker and noisy works.

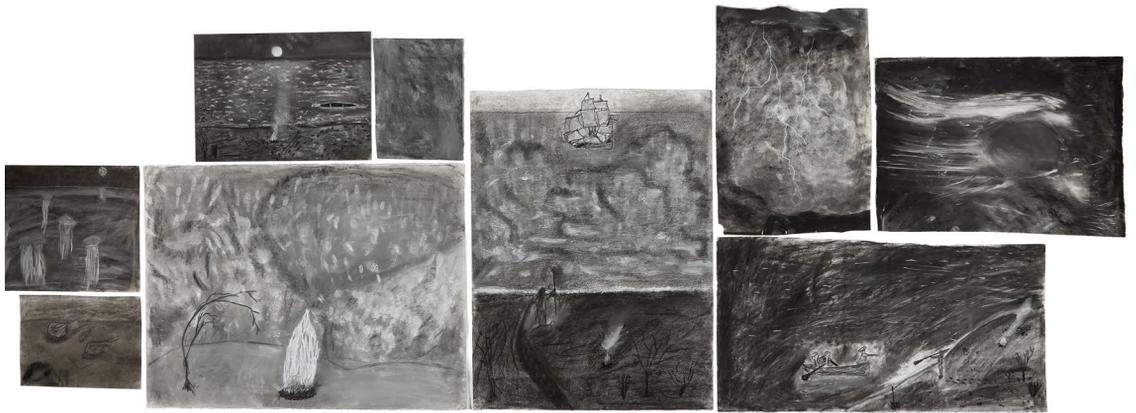
I was interested in interstitial spaces, the invisible and unseen gaps where things meet or come together. These spaces are often defined through language, and we understand them through words we use casually every day, such as horizons, shorelines, and borders. Yet these spaces are not delineated in space, and I chose to reflect this through the use of indistinct images that represented hazy moments of meetings between Colonists and Aboriginal people.

These meetings were not simple, clear moments of contact, but complex cascades of events that blurred the destiny of our People, and brought loss, suffering, and chaos. Western history tries to define these things into clear chronological timeframes sharply, but I intended to decolonise this narrative, providing an alternate reality where we are not bound to see things quite so clearly.

Using charcoal provided ways to evoke the materials left in the campsites that were soon abandoned. Renamed 'middens,' our homes became a memory, a dreamscape turned into an archaeological artifact, no longer belonging to us.







Harrison Hooper

“

This project deepened my interest in behavioural research and showed how targeted enrichment can improve welfare in under-studied species.

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Effects of environmental enrichment on the behaviour and welfare of *Aldabrachelys gigantea*

REFLECTION STATEMENT

In this project, I wanted to use the Science Extension course as an opportunity to investigate an area of animal welfare that is often overlooked: reptiles. Species like Aldabra Giant Tortoises receive far less research attention than mammals, so I aimed to help fill this gap by researching the effects of introducing new enrichment items to the Aldabra Giant Tortoises at Taronga Zoo in Mosman.

This investigation strengthened my understanding of how environmental enrichment can influence reptile welfare, and my results showed clear statistical significance across feeding times, locomotion, habitat use, and all-occurrence behaviours. These findings confirmed that the enrichment improved the tortoises' overall welfare and highlighted the importance of evidence-based enrichment.

A key insight was how differently individuals respond to enrichment. Esmerelda interacted with the items much more frequently than Lance, engaging on five of the six trial days compared to Lance's single use. Yet both tortoises showed significant increases in locomotion whenever enrichment was present, demonstrating that welfare benefits can occur even without high levels of interaction.

Working with only two individuals also made me aware of the limitations of small sample sizes and the importance of individual-level analysis. Overall, this project deepened my interest in behavioural research and showed how targeted enrichment can improve welfare in under-studied species.

ABSTRACT

Environmental enrichment is commonly used in zoological institutes around the world to enhance the welfare of their animals. It achieves this goal by providing a variety of stimuli (structural, food, sensory, cognitive, and social) that encourage the animals to display targeted species-specific natural behaviours and increase cognitive function. This study looks at whether these enrichment items have a similar impact on the behaviour and welfare of *Aldabrachelys gigantea* (Aldabra giant tortoise). A common zoo-housed species but one that has very little research done in a zoo-housed environment. For this study two individuals were looked at housed at Taronga Zoo Sydney; Lance a male aged approximately 85 and Esmerelda a female aged approximately 110. The study introduced two food-based environmental enrichment items to the tortoises enclosure; The vegetable kabob and the hanging browse. The study found that food-based enrichment can have a positive impact on the welfare of *Aldabrachelys gigantea*, although the extent of that benefit depends greatly on the individual and the enrichment item, with Esmerelda showing much higher benefit than Lance and both tortoises preferring the vegetable kabob over the hanging browse.

Keywords: *Aldabrachelys gigantea*, behaviour, environmental enrichment, welfare

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within modern zoological facilities environmental enrichment (EE) plays a crucial role in maintaining the welfare of zoo-housed animals. It does this by providing much needed mental stimulation by encouraging the expression of species-specific natural behaviour through a variety of stimuli (Smith, Verspeek, Laska, Salas, 2025) improving their welfare and overall quality of life. In order to maximise the impact of environmental enrichment however zoo's regularly conduct behavioural research on their animals to test whether their environmental enrichment items are producing a positive effect and improve animal management (Rose, Riley, 2021). The term 'environmental enrichment' was first coined by Robert Yerkes in the 1920's when he observed that wellbeing of primates in zoos was increased with the introduction of apparatus that they could physically interact with (Davis 2015). Over the hundred plus years of research on Environmental Enrichment, many studies have been published focusing on identifying, inventing and evaluating different environmental enrichment items to find the most effective ways of integrating them into habitats. (Shepherdson 1998).

Majority of research papers however have focused heavily on mammals and birds in particular those within the orders; parrots (Aves, Psittaciformes), primates (Mammalia, Primates), carnivores (Mammalia, Carnivora) or rodents (Mammalia, Rodentia). (Bachetti, Viol, Viana-Junior, Young, de Azevedo, 2024). With literature within the class of reptiles being severely lacking compared to the aforementioned groups (Eagan, 2018) there remains a large gap within literature and studies surrounding the welfare of reptiles within a zoo environment and how the introduction of EE could enhance it. This is due to a historical consensus that reptiles and amphibians (herpetofauna) were dumb, unintelligent animals with turtles/tortoises in particular being seen as so stupid “that one would not expect much in the way of intelligent actions” (Yerkes 1901). This is reflected in the enclosure design of many modern day zoos reptile enclosures, often lacking stimuli designed to maximise cognitive stimulation and reduce both boredom and stress (Burghardt, 2013). Historically environmental enrichment has been designed around the ideology that active engagement is required to improve an animals welfare, leading to behaviours that do not rely on active engagement being ignored in many previous investigations (Decker, Lavery, Mason 2023.) However more recent research suggests that even individuals who do not directly engage with presented EE can still receive benefits to their welfare. (Decker, 2023). Within recent years more literature has started to be published that focuses on reptiles, looking at there interactions with EE and their welfare (Burghardt, 2013), however many common zoo-housed reptiles especially those housed in zoos accredited by the ‘Zoos and Aquariums Association Australasia’ (ZAA) still lack sufficient research. Such as the Aldabra giant tortoise.

The Aldabra giant tortoise is the second largest species of tortoise, native to the Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles they have a lifespan reaching upwards of 150 years. (Sain, 2022). The species displays sexual dimorphism within their size with males being significantly larger than the females (Smithsonian National Zoological Park, 2016). In the wild Aldabra giant tortoises express species-specific natural behaviours in their ecological niche as seed dispersers and feeding as both grazers and browsers (Frazier, 1971). The species is also currently listed as vulnerable on the IUCN red list due to their limited distribution (IUCN 1996). In captivity the Aldabra giant tortoise is amongst the common tortoise species housed in ZAA accredited facilities across Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. Having a species management/breeding program supervised by Taronga Zoo Sydney under the ZAA ‘Species Management Program’ (Zoos and Aquariums Association Australasia, n.d). Currently Aldabra Giant tortoises are held by at least ten ZAA accredited facilities within the Australasian region (including; Adelaide Zoo, Australia Zoo, Darling Downs Zoo, Gorge Wildlife Park, Melbourne Zoo, Monarto Safari Park, Shoalhaven Zoo, Singapore Zoo, Taronga Zoo Sydney and the Wildcat Conservation Centre).

Given the species's high prevalence in zoos, their high lifespan and the emerging research on the the high cognitive capabilities of reptiles such as the Aldabra giant tortoise (Berghardt 2013). It is becoming increasing evident the importance of studying how the introduction of EE can impact the behaviour and welfare of the species within a zoo-housed environment. Not only to fill in the gap in existing literature but to ensure that zoological facilities both within Australasia but also globally are capable of providing the best possible care for their animals, fostering the expression of species-specific natural behaviours in species such as the Aldabra Giant tortoise in a zoo environment through the introduction of EE.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH QUESTION

How does the introduction of food-based environmental enrichment items impact the welfare of zoo- housed *Aldabrachelys gigantea*?

SCIENTIFIC HYPOTHESIS

Ho: The introduction of food-based environmental enrichment items will have no effect on the welfare of zoo-housed *Aldabrachelys gigantea*, and promote zero species specific natural behaviours.

HA: The introduction of food-based environmental enrichment items will promote an increase in the welfare of zoo-housed *Aldabrachelys gigantea*, by promoting increased locomotion/habitat use, feeding times and expression of species-specific natural behaviours.

METHODOLOGY

Ethical Statement

The experiment discussed here adheres to the Exhibited Animals Protection Act 1986 (EAPA) as well as international and industry standards in animal care. Due to the novel interventions with the animals in this investigation solely being the introduction of EE no further ethical approvals were needed. The conducting of this experiment was approved by the Taronga Conservation Society Australia and all environmental enrichment items provided to the animals were passed by Taronga's behavioural scientists and herpetofauna keepers.

Subjects and Housing Conditions

Behavioural data for this experiment was gathered from observations of two individuals housed at Taronga Zoo Sydney. Those individuals being a male, Lance aged approximately 85, and Esmerelda a female who is around 110 years old. These two animals live in an open air, predominantly terrestrial enclosure of approximately 410 square meters. The enclosure also includes a small shallow pond and a shelter for the tortoises which allows them to completely escape from public view, as well as providing heat lamps for days with little to no sun exposure. The terrestrial area of the enclosure is fitted with a primarily sandy substrate. The enclosure is decorated with a collection of small mature trees such as ponytail palms and a dragon tree and smaller shrubbery enclosed by rock barriers. The east side of the habitat is largely shaded by a Moreton bay fig tree outside the enclosure and contains specific rock placements to create areas only Esmerelda can go to escape Lance if need be. (Figures 1.1 & 1.2)



Figure 1.1 The east side of the Aldabra Giant Tortoise enclosure at Taronga Zoo Sydney, tortoise visible is Esmerelda



Figure 1.2 The centre and western side of the Aldabra Giant tortoise enclosure at Taronga Zoo Sydney, tortoise visible is Lance

Enrichment Items

The experiment saw the introduction of two food-based EE items which were novel to the two tortoises, these were a 'hanging browse' (H.B) enrichment item and a 'vegetable kabob' (V.K) enrichment item. The H.B was composed of a collection of mulberry tree branches attached to a bungee cord which was hung from an eyebolt screwed into one of two of the habitat's trees (northern and southern/central) (figure 2.1). The V.K was also hung from the same eyebolts but instead consisted of a rope pulley system with vegetables looped onto the rope (figure 2.2). Despite the differences within the construction of these EE items, both of them were designed to promote similar species specific natural behaviours, in particular more natural browsing behaviours with the animals having to different muscles and puzzle solving behaviours

to obtain their food rather than having it put on the ground in the front of them which fosters grazing behaviours. These included having to fully extend their legs and neck out of their shell in a high stand to reach their food. All food items used in the EE were already present in the animal's diets and had been fed to the tortoises with success. With the vegetables used being fed to the animals instead of hay on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Mulberry browse being fed on occasion as a treat. The animals regular diet was also given along with the EE (Hay on all days but Tuesdays and Thursday were vegetables were supplied, this food was given to the tortoises by being placed on the ground).



Figure 2.1 The hanging browse environmental enrichment item at the southern/central position



Figure 2.2 The vegetable kabob environmental enrichment item at the northern position

Procedure

The experiment was comprised of two testing/observation periods, a 'baseline period' conducted over six days within January of 2025 where no EE was present within the enclosure and an 'enrichment period' again conducted over six days of April with only one enrichment item being present each day and each EE item being present for three of the total six days (Appendices 1.1, 1.2). On each day observations were taken from 9am to 12pm on a program called 'ZooMonitor', recording the presence of a select group of behaviours within an ethogram previously determined based on prior observations of the tortoises and existing literature (Table 1.1). Using ZooMonitor observations were recorded in one minute intervals over 15 minute sessions. Within each interval both animal's had their current 'interval behaviour' (e.g. sitting, feeding, locomotion) and their position within the enclosure recorded. Throughout the whole 15 minute session a tally was recorded of how many times each animal performed an 'all occurrence behaviour' (e.g. throat pump, food sniff). During observation days within the enrichment period the amount of time spent directly interacting with an enrichment item was also recorded as a continuous recording.

Table 1.1 The ethogram used within the experiment to document what behaviours are being searched during observation periods and their descriptions.

Behavioural Category	Individual Behaviour	Description
All Occurrence Behaviour	Food Sniff	Individual explores a food item using their nose either by direct contact with the nose or through close proximity
	Throat Pump	A steady continuous inflating of the throat
	Head Jerk	A sudden retraction of the head and neck into the shell
	Urination	Individual urinates
	Defecation	Individual defecates
Continuous Recording	Vegetable Kabob	Individual is currently actively engaging with the vegetable kabob enrichment item
	Hanging Browse	Individual is currently actively engaging with the hanging browse enrichment item
Interval Behaviour	Feeding	Individual is currently digesting food
	Drinking	Individual is currently drinking
	Sitting	Individual is currently sitting, defined as the shell having direct contact with the ground
	Standing	Individual is currently standing, defined as the animals legs being partly extended and the shell having no direct contact with the ground
	High Stand	Individual is standing with its legs and neck fully extended
	Locomotion	Individual is currently moving/in locomotion
	Submerged in Water	Individual is currently fully or partially submerged in water
	Out of Sight	Individual cannot be physically seen and therefore no judgements can be made about it's current behaviour

Data Analysis

Once all observations had been taken, the data went through a process of data cleansing. Removing any unnecessary data points as well as finding any sessions that contained obvious outliers within their data, due to environmental factors on the day that led to skewed results (e.g animals being fed more food than they usually would so the data for that day showed disproportional amounts of time spent feeding). In order to streamline tally results for 'all occurrence behaviours' across sessions that went for less than 15 minutes, the amount of times the behaviour was observed was divided by the total session length to record the amount of times a behaviour was performed a minute. To determine whether or not the EE items had an effect on the tortoises welfare, three specific areas of the data were looked at to compare across the enrichment period and baseline period. Those were, 'number of all occurrence behaviours', 'time spent feeding and the percentage with/without an enrichment item', and 'time spent in locomotion/habitat use'. Across the categories each tortoise was looked at individually to see if the enrichment items had a different effect on each animal.

RESULTS

Time Spent Feeding and Percentage with/without Environmental Enrichment

Average time spent feeding from 9am - 12pm by Aldabra Giant Tortoises with different environmental enrichment items present

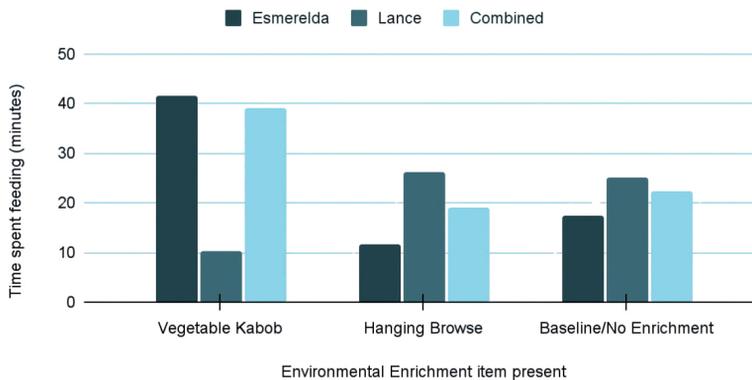


Figure 3.1 Graph showing the average total time spent feeding in a day by each tortoise within the presence of each environmental enrichment item.

Ho: There is zero relationship between the presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item and the time the tortoises spend eating each day.

HA: The presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item will promote an increase in the time the tortoises spend eating each day.

Table 2.1 A table showing the data relating to feeding time observations within the presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item (1) and the baseline period (2), as well as the corresponding T value and critical value when P=0.05

Animal	X1	X2	S1	S2	N1	N2	T-value	P=0.05
Esmerelda	41.67	17.45	10.65	13.08	3	4	2.7	2.57
Lance	10.33	25.2	16.81	19.17	3	5	1.24	2.45
Combined	39	22.42	20.22	17.14	6	9	1.65	2.16

- Since T-Value Esmerelda (2.7) > P=0.05 Esmerelda (2.57) the vegetable kabob correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount of time Esmerelda spent eating each day, therefore Ho is rejected for Esmerelda.
- Since T-Value Lance (1.24) < P=0.05 Lance (2.45) the vegetable kabob did not correlate a statistically significant effect in the amount of time Lance spent eating each day, therefore Ho is accepted for Lance.
- Since T-Value combined (1.65) < P=0.05 combined (2.16) the vegetable kabob did not correlate a statistically significant effect in the amount of spent eating each day by the population, therefore Ho is accepted for the tortoises in general.

Ho: There is zero relationship between the presence of the hanging browse enrichment item and the time the tortoises spend eating each day.

HA: The presence of the hanging browse enrichment item will promote an increase in the time the tortoises spend eating each day.

Table 2.2 A table showing the data relating to feeding time observations within the presence of the hanging browse enrichment item (1) and the baseline period (2), as well as the corresponding T value and critical value when P=0.05

Animal	X1	X2	S1	S2	N1	N2	T-value	P=0.05
Esmerelda	11.67	17.45	8.34	13.08	3	4	0.71	2.57
Lance	26.33	25.2	16.9	19.17	3	5	0.09	2.45
Combined	19	22.42	15.16	17.14	6	9	0.37	2.16

- Since T-Value Esmerelda (0.71) < P=0.05 Esmerelda (2.57) the hanging browse did not correlate a statistically significant effect in the amount of time Esmerelda spent eating each day, therefore Ho is accepted for Esmerelda.
- Since T-Value Lance (0.09) < P=0.05 Lance (2.45) the hanging browse did not correlate a statistically significant effect in the amount of time Lance spent eating each day, therefore Ho is accepted for Lance.
- Since T-Value combined (0.37) < P=0.05 combined (2.16) the hanging browse did not correlate a statistically significant effect in the amount of spent eating each day by the population, therefore Ho is accepted for the tortoises in general.

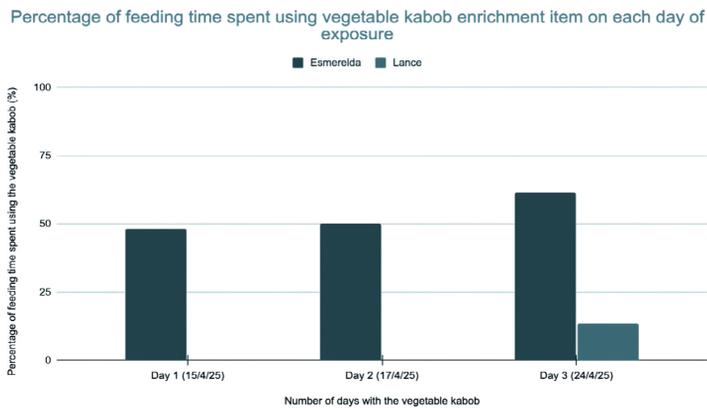


Figure 3.2 Graph showing the percentage of feeding time spent using the vegetable kabob by each tortoise on each day it was present in chronological order.

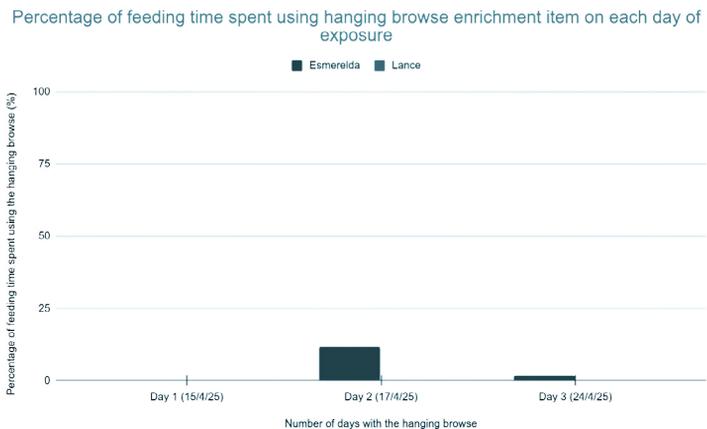


Figure 3.3 Graph showing the percentage of feeding time spent using the hanging browse enrichment item by each tortoise on each day it was present in chronological order.

Table 2.3 A table showing the results of a spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the percentage of feeding time Esmerelda spent using an enrichment item after each day of introduction (Lance's data did not suit this test due to the repeated values)

	Esmerelda V.K	Esmerelda H.B
r	1	0
P-value	0.5	0.5
n	3	3

Esmerelda shows a non significant positive correlation between the percentage of feeding time spent with the vegetable kabob and the number of days of introduction and no correlation for the hanging browse.

Time Spent Moving/in Locomotion and Habitat Use

Average Time (minutes) Spent in Locomotion from Each Tortoise from 9am-12pm Within the Presence of Different Enrichment Items

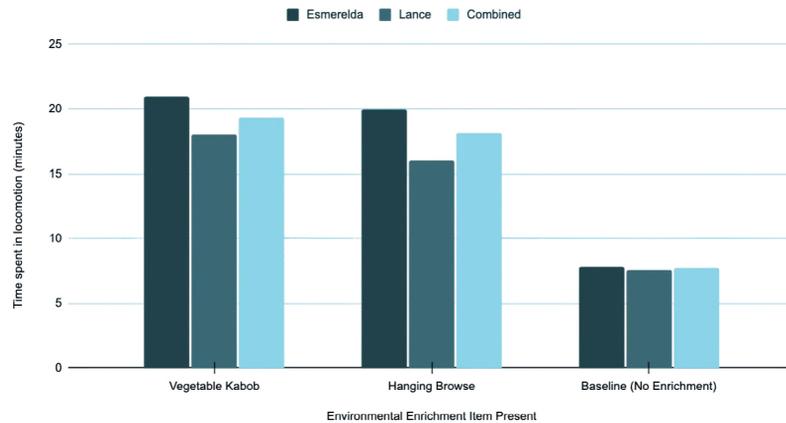


Figure 4.1 Graph showing the average time in minutes spent within the observation period in locomotion by each tortoise, within the presence of each environmental enrichment item.

HO: There is zero relationship between the presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item and the time the tortoises spend in locomotion each day.

HA: The presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item will promote an increase in the time the tortoises spend in locomotion each day.

Table 3.1 A table showing the data relating to locomotion observations within the presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item (1) and the baseline period (2), as well as the corresponding T value and critical value when $P=0.05$

Animal	X1	X2	S1	S2	N1	N2	T-value	P=0.05
Esmerelda	21	7.8	1.89	5.6	3	5	4.83	2.45
Lance	18	7.6	6.53	3.32	3	5	2.57	2.45
Combined	19.33	7.7	4.99	4.61	6	10	4.64	2.15

- Since T-Value Esmerelda (4.83) > P=0.05 Esmerelda (2.45) the vegetable kabob correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount of time Esmerelda spent in locomotion each day, therefore HO is rejected for Esmerelda.
- Since T-Value Lance (2.57) > P=0.05 Lance (2.45) the vegetable kabob correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount of time Lance spent in locomotion each day, therefore Ho is rejected for Lance
- Since T-Value combined (4.64) > P=0.05 combined (2.16) the vegetable kabob correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount spent in locomotion each day by the population, therefore Ho is rejected for the tortoises in general.

HO: There is zero relationship between the presence of the hanging browse enrichment item and the time the tortoises spend in locomotion each day

HA: The presence of the hanging browse enrichment item will promote an increase in the time the tortoises spend in locomotion each day.

Table 3.2 A table showing the data relating to feeding time observations within the presence of the hanging browse enrichment item (1) and the baseline period (2), as well as the corresponding T value and critical value when P=0.05

Animal	X1	X2	S1	S2	N1	N2	T-value	P=0.05
Esmerelda	20	7.8	4.11	5.6	3	5	3.53	2.45
Lance	16	7.6	4.54	3.32	3	5	2.79	2.45
Combined	18	7.7	4.84	4.61	6	10	4.19	2.15

- Since T-Value Esmerelda (3.53) > P=0.05 Esmerelda (2.45) the hanging browse correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount of time Esmerelda spent in locomotion each day, therefore Ho is rejected for Esmerelda.
- Since T-Value Lance (2.79) > P=0.05 Lance (2.45) the hanging browse correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount of time Lance spent in locomotion each day, therefore Ho is rejected for Lance
- Since T-Value combined (4.2) > P=0.05 combined (2.15) the hanging browse correlated with a statistically significance increase in the amount spent in locomotion each day by the population, therefore Ho is rejected for the tortoises in general.

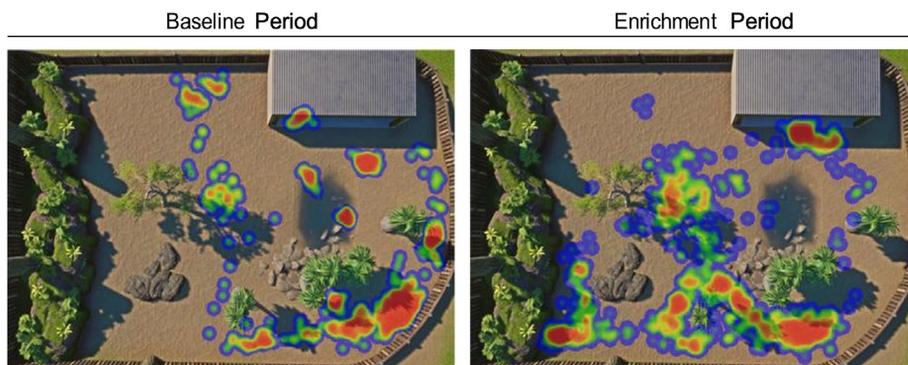


Figure 5.1 Spatial heat maps showing the combined habitat use of the tortoises across the 'Baseline Period' and the 'Enrichment Period'. (Map is not real enclosure but a scale replica made in the video game 'Planet Zoo')

Baseline Period

Enrichment Period

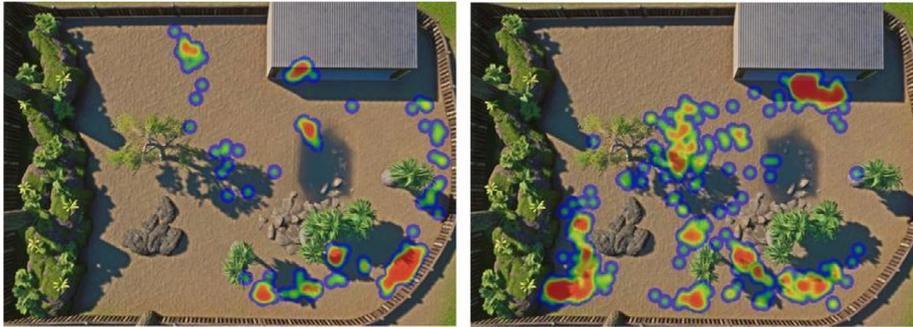


Figure 5.2 Spatial heat maps showing the habitat use of Esmerelda across the 'Baseline Period' and the 'Enrichment Period'. (Map is not real enclosure but a scale replica made in the video game 'Planet Zoo')

Baseline Period

Enrichment Period

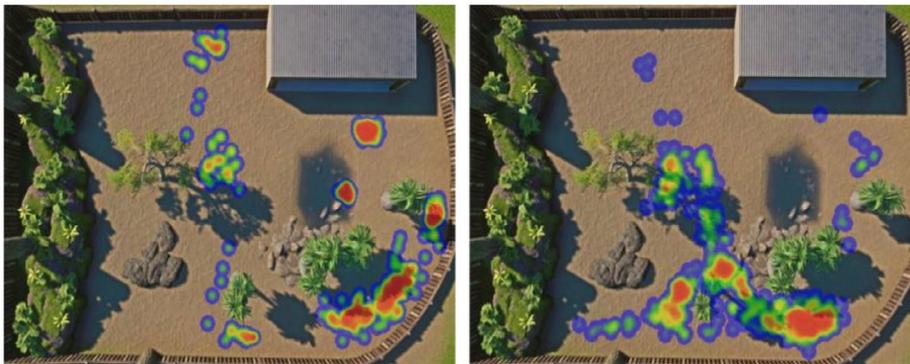


Figure 5.3 Spatial heat maps showing the habitat use of Lance across the 'Baseline Period' and the 'Enrichment Period'. (Map is not real enclosure but a scale replica made in the video game 'Planet Zoo')

Number of 'All Occurrence Behaviours'

Average Number of 'All Occurrence Behaviours' per Minute by Each Tortoise Within the Presence of Different Enrichment Items.

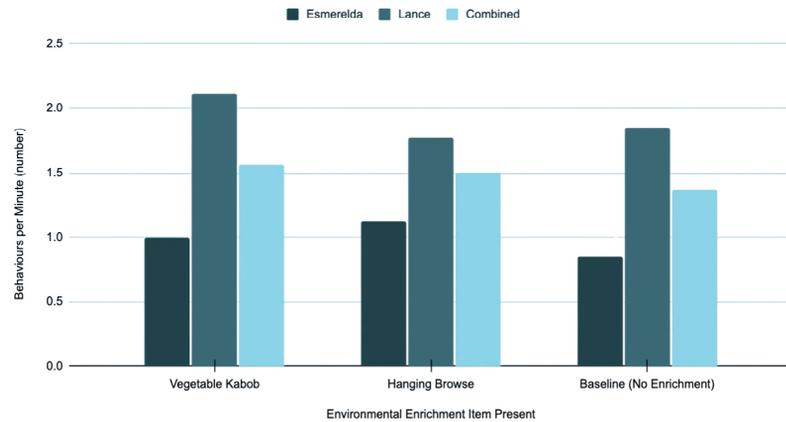


Figure 6.1 Graph showing the average amount of 'All Occurrence Behaviours' performed per minute by each tortoise, within the presence of each environmental enrichment item.

Ho: There is zero relationship between the presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item and the amount of times the tortoises performed 'all occurrence behaviours' each minute.

HA: The presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item will promote an increase in the amount of times the tortoises performed 'all occurrence behaviours' each minute.

Table 4.1 A table showing the data relating to number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute within the presence of the vegetable kabob enrichment item (1) and the baseline period (2), as well as the corresponding T value and critical value when $P=0.05$

Animal	X1	X2	S1	S2	N1	N2	T-value	P=0.05
Esmerelda	1	0.59	0.91	0.79	26	36	1.84	1.67
Lance	2.11	1.85	1.57	1.89	34	59	0.64	1.67
Combined	1.56	1.37	1.43	1.68	60	95	0.51	1.98

- Since T-Value Esmerelda (1.84) > P=0.05 Esmerelda (1.67) the vegetable kabob correlated with a statistically significance increase to the number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute by Esmerelda, therefore Ho is rejected for Esmerelda.

- Since T-Value Lance (0.64) < P=0.05 Lance (1.67) the vegetable kabob did not correlate a statistically significance difference to the number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute by Lance, therefore Ho is accepted for Lance.
- Since T-Value combined (0.51) < P=0.05 combined (1.98) the vegetable kabob did not correlate a statistically significance difference to the number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute by the population, therefore Ho is accepted for the tortoises in general.

HO: There is zero relationship between the presence of the hanging browse enrichment item and the amount of times the tortoises performed 'all occurrence behaviours' each minute.

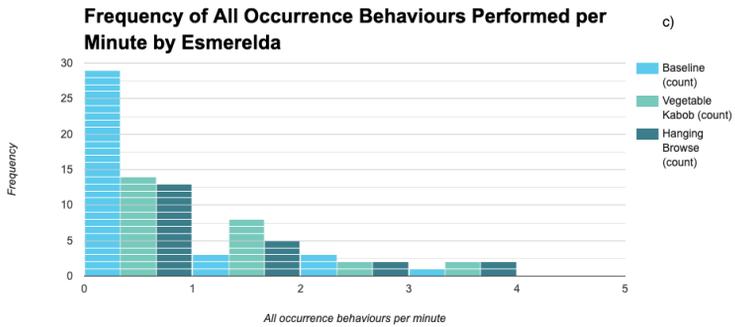
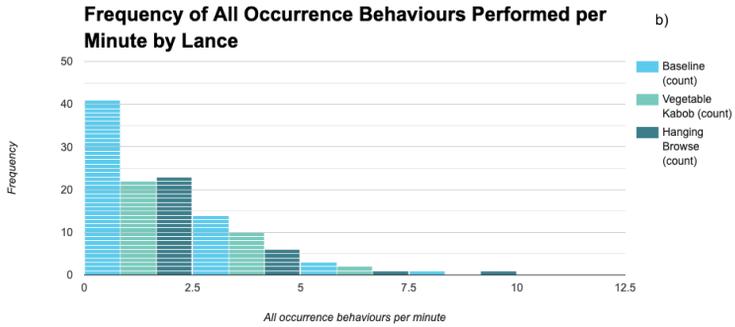
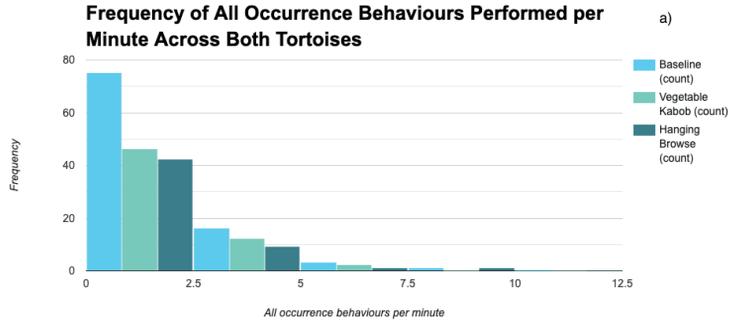
HA: The presence of the hanging browse enrichment item will promote an increase in the amount of times the tortoises performed 'all occurrence behaviours' each minute.

Table 4.2 A table showing the data relating to number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute within the presence of the hanging browse enrichment item (1) and the baseline period (2), as well as the corresponding T value and critical value when P=0.05

Animal	X1	X2	S1	S2	N1	N2	T-value	P=0.05
Esmerelda	1.12	0.59	0.96	0.79	22	36	2.18	2
Lance	1.77	1.85	1.82	1.89	31	59	0.2	1.66
Combined	1.5	1.37	1.56	1.68	53	95	0.47	1.98

- Since T-Value Esmerelda (1.94) > P=0.05 Esmerelda (2) the hanging browse correlated a statistically significance increase to the number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute by Esmerelda, therefore Ho is rejected for Esmerelda.
- Since T-Value Lance (0.2) < P=0.05 Lance (1.66) the hanging browse did not correlate a statistically significance difference to the number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute by Lance, therefore Ho is accepted for Lance.
- Since T-Value combined (0.47) < P=0.05 combined (1.98) the hanging browse did not correlate a statistically significance difference to the number of 'all occurrence behaviours' performed per minute by the population, therefore Ho is accepted for the tortoises in general.

Figure 7.1 Histograms showing the frequencies of the amount of 'All Occurrence Behaviours' performed per minute by each tortoise, within the presence of each environmental enrichment item.



DISCUSSION

Analysis of Results

The investigation aimed to determine whether or not the introduction of food-based EE items would have an impact on the welfare of zoo-housed *Aldabrachelys gigantea* (Aldabra giant tortoises). Statistical analysis revealed that whilst the initial hypothesis was correct in that EE has a positive impact on the welfare of Aldabra giant tortoises. The extent to which it impacts the animal's welfare differs greatly depending on the item used and the individual.

Results showed that both tortoises showed a preference for the vegetable kabob and most significant results came from observations with the vegetable kabob. Amongst all areas of behaviour looked at, Esmerelda showed significantly higher amounts of significant increases in behaviours compared to Lance. Suggesting that Esmerelda received a much higher increase in welfare than Lance did.

When looking at the results surrounding feeding habits, Esmerelda only used the hanging browse for at most 11.77% of her time spent feeding (Figure 3.3). Compared to at the lowest 48.12% of her time spent feeding using the vegetable kabob which was also the first day with the V.K with her percent usage only increasing on subsequent days (Figure 3.2). The data also showed that the use of the vegetable kabob also correlated with a higher total time spent feeding for Esmerelda (238.79% increase in average feeding time after introduction of V.K). Meanwhile Lance showed zero interest in the hanging browse enrichment item across all days of observation and only interacted with the vegetable kabob on the final day of observation. This suggests that each individual tortoise will react differently to EE, and the presence of individual learning curves in adjusting to novel stimuli. This co-insides with the positive correlation ($r_2=1$) between the percentage of Esmerelda's time spent feeding using the vegetable kabob and the amount of days the animals had been exposed to the EE. Which despite being non-significant due to low sample group, supports the idea that animals face a learning curve in understanding how to use the new items. This learning curve also further supports the idea that the enrichment is increasing the animals welfare as it is a sign of cognitive function which is often associated with positive welfare (Franks, 2018). Whilst the data for Lance can't be used in spearman correlative test due to the repeated o, him eventually using the V.K on the third day does support this conclusion especially when considering Lance's personality is often referred to as 'stubborn' by his keepers. This aligns with prior research done on Aldabra giant tortoise personalities which have found that individual Aldabra giant tortoises act significantly differently when compared to each other in response to a stimuli (Pastorino, Smith, Faustini, Bonacina, Guadagnini, Robbiati, Cavalleri, Brereton, Preziosi, 2022).

When looking at the data regarding time spent in locomotion, both tortoises showed a statistically significant increase in their average times spent in locomotion for both enrichment items. This suggests that regardless of whether they actually use the enrichment items presented the introduction of new items into an Aldabra giant tortoises environment will promote an increase in their movement most likely due to curiosity and a desire to investigate the new inclusion to their enclosure (Decker, 2023). Despite this use of the EE does appear to further this impact most likely to return visits to the areas of the enclosure with the EE present. As the T-value for Esmeralda's data with the Vegetable kabob (the conditions with the most EE use) was 2.38 higher than it's critical value (Table 3.1). Compared to Lance's T-value for the hanging browse (the conditions with the least EE) which was only 0.34 higher than it's critical value (Table 3.4). Habitat use also greatly increased with the introduction of E.E with the spatial heat maps (Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) for both Lance and Esmerelda showing far greater distribution in the enrichment period, with the eastern side of the enclosure being basically unused during the baseline period, this is likely due to the placements of enrichment items incentivising the tortoises to go over to that side of the enclosure. Although notably the top of the enclosure to the east of the shelter was used far less in the enrichment period.

Finally looking at the observations surrounding the number of 'all occurrence behaviours', the data showed no statistically significant differences in the number of all occurrence behaviours performed per minute for Lance with each enrichment item. However Esmerelda saw a significant difference for both the vegetable kabob and the hanging browse. Where the V.K saw the average increase from 0.59 to 1 and a T-value 0.17 above the critical value (Table 4.1). The hanging browse saw the average increase from 0.59 to 1.12 and a T-value 0.18 above the critical value (Table 4.2). When looking at the raw data from 'ZooMonitor' most of this increase was attributed to a rise in 'food sniffs' and 'head jerks' (Appendix 2.1; Appendix 2.2) which aligns with the increased feeding times, the nature of the EE introduced being food-based and the way in which the EE was designed to be interacted with, requiring the animals to enter a high stand and tug (which can involve head jerking) on the food to release it (Figure 8.1). This increase in 'all-occurrence behaviours' from Esmerelda also suggests increased cognitive behaviour in learning about the new items and discovering ways to effectively obtain the food contained within the EE.



Figure 8.1: Photograph of Esmerelda in a high stand with her neck fully extended using the vegetable kabob during the observation period

Validity of Results

Extensive measures were made to control as many external variables that could be physically controlled such as; ensuring that the observation window was the same each day (9am-12pm), the physical environment/enclosure stayed the same apart from the introduction of the E.E items and daily cleaning procedure's from keepers, the same individuals were studied throughout the experiment and that keepers stuck to the same daily schedule. However due to the investigation occurring in a zoo environment there were multiple variables that could not feasibly be controlled such as guest flow (although this did follow a somewhat similar pattern from day to day), guest encounters with the animals that had not been made aware to the behavioural team (this occurred twice throughout the investigation and lasted for no longer than 15-30 minutes each) and weather. Although these variables were not able to be strictly controlled, since their spontaneity makes up a crucial part of the zoo environment the tortoises live in and are present amongst studies within other zoo environments (Smith 2025), the data observed during these periods is not rendered invalid. They also provide vital insights to Taronga's herpetofauna keepers and behavioural scientists about how the tortoises behave during these conditions.

Reliability/Accuracy of Results

The investigation had a moderate reliability and accuracy, whilst the observations gathered on ZooMonitor produced big data. The process of standardising the data and making it manageable for a research project of this size meant that the sample sizes were significantly reduced for feeding and locomotion data. The timeframe for the research project when given the restraints of the zoo environment also only allowed for three days of each environmental enrichment item were possible. This meant that

the data surrounding the learning curve faced with the enrichment items couldn't studied to the preferred extent. Only having two tortoises also limits the ability to study how different individuals react to the enrichment however within the scope of this project and the tools being used studying more individuals would not only be impossible due to holdings of *Aldabrachelys gigantea* within NSW but the accuracy of measurements would decrease with the amount of tortoises being observed at the same time. However the data that was collected was largely uniform across both tortoises with minimal outliers.

The accuracy of the experiment also suffered from observation bias and the fact that whilst only one tortoise could be properly observed at a time observations were needed to be taken on both at the same time, this mainly impacted 'All Occurrence behaviour results.) Issues also arose in the analysis of the spatial heat maps (Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) as since I wasn't provided with the raw data used for the creation of the heat maps, I had no mathematical way of proving whether any difference in habitat use was significant. This meant I instead had to rely on visual observation and use the maps, only to see what areas of the enclosure were used rather than to interpret how much they were used.

Future Investigation Opportunities/Improvements

This investigation has opened the door for many future studies looking at Environmental Enrichment in not just Aldabra giant tortoises but within other reptile species. For future studies more repeats of Enrichment period observation days with more tortoises and observation volunteers would be necessary to draw stronger and more accurate correlations and see the true impact of potential learning curves.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this investigation was achieved as the results found statistical significance between the introduction of the food-based environmental enrichment items and the display of targeted behaviours (feeding times, locomotion/habitat use and all occurrence behaviours). Which in-turn suggests that the welfare of the animals had been improved since the introduction of enrichment.

The results also suggested that each individual will be affected differently by the presence of enrichment as well as respond differently to different items. With majority of the significant results coming from the presence vegetable kabob and in particular

found within Esmerelda's behaviour (who used the enrichment items significantly more than Lance, using the enrichment item on five of the six days (three days V.K, two days H.B) compared to just one (V.K) for Lance. Results showed that Locomotion was most significantly affected by the presence of environmental enrichment with both tortoises showing a significant increase in movement for both enrichment items regardless of how much they actually interacted with them.

Esmerelda's results also suggest that prolonged physical interaction with the enrichment items can result in a significant difference in feeding time (V.K) and 'all occurrence behaviours (V.K & H.B). Which imply a higher level of cognitive function and puzzle solving skills are being used when using the enrichment and hence their overall welfare. Whilst initially data combining the data from both tortoises was analysed The low sample size of only two individuals meant that the combined data never supplied new findings. With the significant/non significant difference from tortoises always resulting in a significant/non significant combined and when there was a difference in both tortoises it would always be insignificant. Which whilst would be relevant data if there were a larger sample of tortoises, but since only two individuals were studied the sample size of combined tortoise data isn't large enough to be reliable. The study's results have provided crucial insights into how not only Taronga but zoological facilities globally can enhance their welfare practices of Aldabra giant tortoises through the introduction of food-based enrichment items. As well as hopefully inspire future studies on both Aldabra giant tortoises but other less studied zoo-housed species.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the Taronga Conservation Society Australia for the facilitation of the investigation. In particular to Brendan Host (Behavioural Husbandry Supervisor) and Bronwyn Parker (Assistant Behavioural Biologist) for guiding me through this process and providing the tools to be able to complete this investigation with the same level of professionalism as other, published investigations in the same field. Also a huge thanks to the herpetofauna team at Taronga Zoo Sydney for volunteering Lance and Esmerelda as the investigations subjects. As well as to the enrichment volunteers for the construction of the EE items and kitchen staff for all the food prep required for the investigation.

Heath Mercer

“

My work was made in the hope that people could see a clear example of how the strength of a family can help regain partially lost identity.

”

Wendouree

A Story of Heritage and Identity

REFLECTION STATEMENT

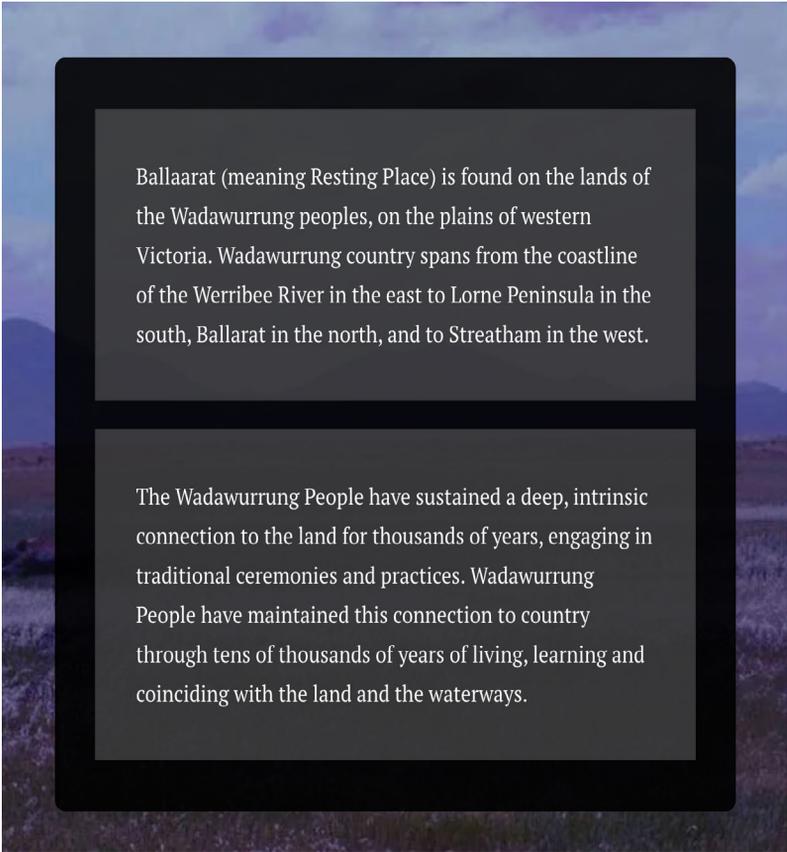
My major work was inspired by my mother's strength to regain connection with her identity, as well as the Stolen Generations, where heritage and identity were taken away from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. My work was made in the hope that people could see a clear example of how the strength of a family can help regain partially lost identity.

I chose to interview some of my family members as I found that I shared a very close resemblance with them but also wanted to learn more about their experiences over their lifetime in regards to their Aboriginality. Some of the processes in making my major project included writing my thoughts, actions, and decisions about my major work in an extensive log book which ensured I engaged in research in an ethical way. My project also consisted of three long interviews with four of my family members, asking them questions about their positive and negative experiences in relation to their Aboriginality, through which I gained valuable insight into how they all express their identity.

I loved doing this project as I am very passionate about the topic and loved learning more about my family as well as Waddawurrung Country and how the history of the place has shaped communities and individual identities.



View *Heath's story*
here



Ballaarat (meaning Resting Place) is found on the lands of the Wadawurrung peoples, on the plains of western Victoria. Wadawurrung country spans from the coastline of the Werribee River in the east to Lorne Peninsula in the south, Ballarat in the north, and to Streatham in the west.

The Wadawurrung People have sustained a deep, intrinsic connection to the land for thousands of years, engaging in traditional ceremonies and practices. Wadawurrung People have maintained this connection to country through tens of thousands of years of living, learning and coinciding with the land and the waterways.





Colonisation, "the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the Indigenous people of an area".

Colonisation has undoubtedly had a severe and lasting impact on Indigenous Peoples, including displacement from traditional land, loss of culture and language, violence, disease, and negative intergenerational trauma.

These impacts continue to have a lasting effect on Indigenous Peoples today, contributing to low socio-economic status, health and education disparities, and economic and financial opportunities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been greatly impacted due to the colonisation of the land of Australia, which was claimed to be 'Terra Nullius' for many years.

Wadawurrung country significant sites

Ballarat is where my family lives and have grown up since 2015.

It is also the area where in 1838, 6 men settled meaning the start of Ballarat as a gold mining town.



My Family

My family is originally from Melbourne, where my mother and father were both born.

My dad is Irish and English and my mum is Aboriginal and English. Both grew up in Bentleigh, Melbourne.

My mother who is a proud Wadawurung woman, grew up in a family of seven with confusion and misinformation surrounding her family's search for their heritage and sense of identity.

For myself, growing up with four older siblings and two younger siblings of a range of 15 years between the oldest and youngest, it is clear to see the differences in how society and life has changed.

Pat, Madi, Tom, and Scarlett are the oldest four and in some ways lived pretty similar childhoods and experiences. Jed and Bede on the other hand have lived slightly differently whilst growing up with more community group involvement and different, more updated knowledge being taught in school about Aboriginal culture and history.

My family is testimony of how over time, a culture and identity can in some parts be reclaimed and learnt in a different way. My mother being proud of her culture and heritage once she found it showed, to us as her kids how important learning our culture really is because she never had the resources, knowledge or support from her parents to do it.

I know that my oldest siblings growing up shared largely different experiences to us littler siblings but also it was clear to see the similar ground we do share.

Racism has never gone away since mum was a little girl all the way up to present day, which sadly has been a main similarity when discussing our Aboriginal heritage.

My family is still learning so much about our culture as we know the great importance of reclaiming forced lost identity and heritage through the Eurocentric nature and of colonisation and assimilation of our peoples.

Indy Beck

Modern Study Desk

(Nominated for SHAPE)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

For my Major Work, I set out to challenge the boundaries of what could be accomplished within the given timeframe. My goal was to design and construct a piece that not only showcased a diverse range of advanced joinery and woodworking techniques but also served as a striking centrepiece in any space. To ensure the success of my project, I undertook extensive research into a variety of methods and stylistic approaches. The guidance and expertise of my teachers were also instrumental in refining my ideas and elevating the overall quality of the final product. While the process presented its fair share of challenges, it has ultimately been a deeply rewarding experience, one that has taught me valuable lessons in persistence, problem-solving, and resilience.



THE KIRCHER COLLECTION
HSC MAJOR WORKS FROM
THE CLASS OF 2025

TAS INDUSTRIAL
TECHNOLOGY
TIMBER





THE KIRCHER COLLECTION
HSC MAJOR WORKS FROM
THE CLASS OF 2025

TAS INDUSTRIAL
TECHNOLOGY
TIMBER

ENGLISH EXTENSION 2

Archie Timmins

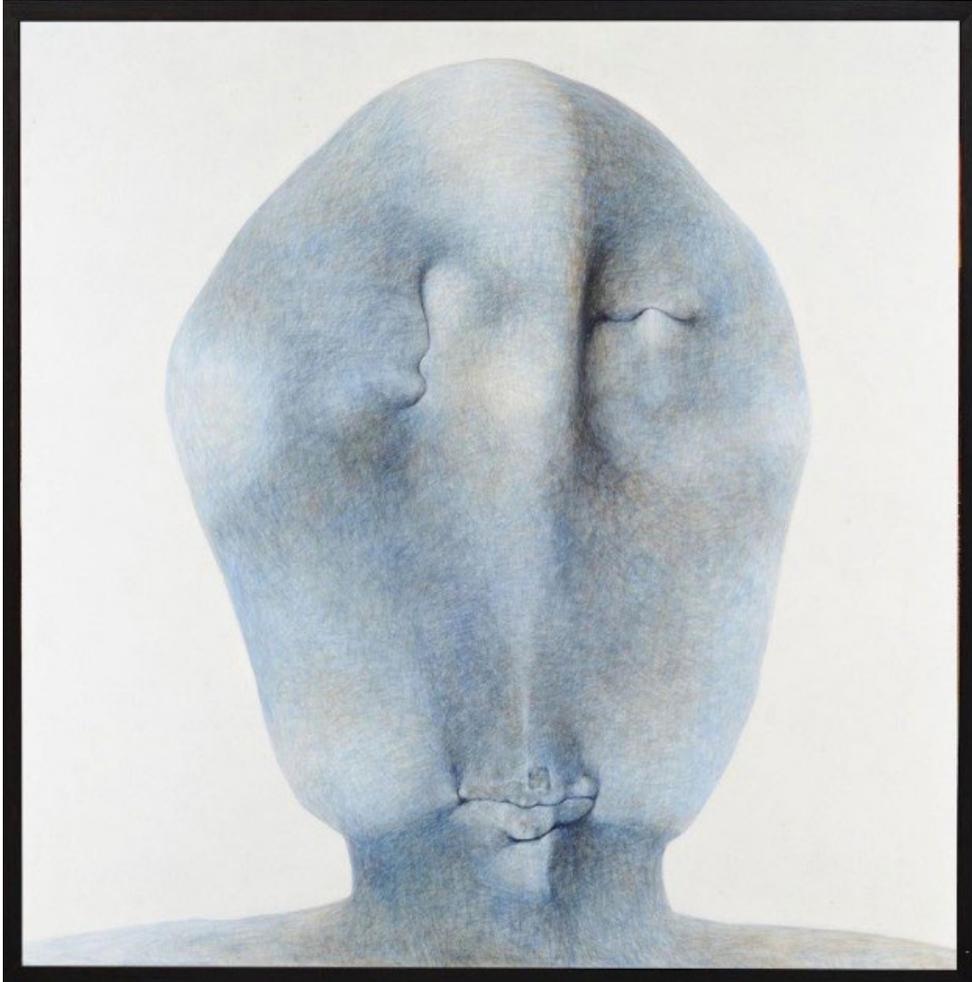
Journal of a Talking Head

(Nominated for the Young Writers Showcase)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

My major work “Journal of a Talking Head” is my intimate exploration of the broken minds destined to rule our politics. Mirroring the existential journey of the protagonist in Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Nausea,” my protagonist’s shift from caution to apathy was my way of modelling the very greatest figures of history as both daring, depressive, and unpredictable. This deeply broken mind is promoted by the weaknesses and apathies of an increasingly meaningless system of two major parties in my view, evidenced by the rise of the Greens and the concerning surge of One Nation in recent polls.

Journal of a Talking Head



"W4" by Zdzislaw Beksincki

“But I must finally realize that I am subject to these sudden transformations. The thing is that I rarely think; a crowd of small metamorphoses accumulate in me without my noticing it, and then, one fine day, a veritable revolution takes place.”

—Jean-Paul Sartre, “Nausea”

Undated

“The more contemptible his life, the more a man clings to it; it thus becomes a protest, a retribution for every moment.”

— Honoré de Balzac

Broadhurst Street curves languorously around the sapphire sweep of harbour, studded with Moreton Park figs. The eminences of Federation estates sit stately, set back discretely from the road side behind gabled fences. Couples stride down the footpath, enrobed in comfortable combinations of formal dress and running gear.

They stop briefly to inspect my face, which adorns the frontage of the office magnified four-fold, beaming benevolently, clipped brown hair, greying at the fringes, straight nose, broad jaw, piercing green eyes that almost unsettle. A face with four-quadrant appeal.

“Andrew Quentin, Federal Member for McIntyre,” the sign reads. “Safe seat, safe hands, safe values,” the sign implies.

The more receptive voters linger for a while before walking on; the more bothersome ones open the door. When you enter the office, you will meet my secretary, Janice. If you ask for me, I will be busy or I will be out. Inaccessibility builds a certain mystique.

I am never in my office because this is where it started. I had an appointment with a constituent. Taxation, labour conditions, local regulations, the usual vexations. Something to do with my actions as assistant minister for whatever the title of it is.

The constituent regaled me with the trials of the saintly suffering small business owner. He was a big bear of a man, with an ill-fitting suit that bunched at the midriff and pinched at all the wrong places. My desperate nods affirmed his grievance, “whatever you say.”

He spoke across from his punching bag, his lips curling and flexing like obscene pink caterpillars in the forest of his beard. His tongue darted out furtively as he lectured me on the finer points of supply chain disruptions, flecks of spittle staining my lacquered desk.

My inners spasmed, a wave of bile emanating upward to my esophagus. My hands began to tremor as I slumped further into my leather chair, my stomach lurching and heaving. I politely excused myself, left the office and have never returned.

That is beside the point. For I am now changing, transforming. I am constructing a chrysalis. When I break through the carapace, I will emerge as something different. I will be -

4 February

“He gazed at the concrete landscape, the endless plains of tarmac and cement, and felt a curious kind of peace, a peace that was not quite human.”

— J.G. Ballard, Concrete Island

If I am not in my office in sunny, seaside, sullen suburbia, it is because I am here: the nation’s capital. Canberra is a truly miserable city in the summer. The great parliamentary anthill empties, its sun-blind residents scuttling to the coasts. Even the parasites in the press gallery, losing their hosts, dissipate into the breeze.

In the heat, the symbols of national pride and political power squat disconsolately like mausoleums beside the foetid lake. The eucalypts are weighed down by an accumulated layer of dust. The voids in between the monuments gape even more widely. You can get lost in the bush in the heart of the city, die of dehydration, or perhaps despair, on your daily commute.

This is an election year and I’ve never been more engaged in my work, my office becoming a second home of sorts. Word is that my Victorian collaborator in Elizabeth Hotham is moving into a major portfolio in the next big reshuffle; as she likes to put it, “we’re moving up.” We receive an invitation, *the* invitation. Could this be the fabled tap on the shoulder?

Bill Downer, former leader of the opposition, is not known for his charisma, but he has a reputation as a king maker. I sense that he is searching for the next coterie of fresh-faced rising stars to groom. Elizabeth and I meet him, together with some other anonymous bigwigs, at the antiseptic cafe deep within the bowels of parliament. Her irritably fake laughter accompanies mine, appropriately obsequious.

Downer is unassuming, his blazer cheap and loosely fitting, and he speaks bluntly and without flourish. His self-confidence, though, is palpable. He riddles his address with expletives, confidently declaring his contempt for his colleagues, as if he is thrashing violently out of his senator’s costume. I squint.

Any other late middle-aged male might face a wall of obfuscation, even be politely escorted out of the premises. But, no, Downer's apparatchiks sit there patiently, like tolerant children listening to a painfully rambling grandparent. There is some power in a personality like his; he is genuine even in his lingering expression of disappointment.

I sit across from him, another one of his sycophants; more dotting, yet no more memorable. Suddenly I feel light-headed and then, there it is, a premonition of the sickness. Soon, my face turns red and I cannot breathe. I sit patiently until I can retire to the bathroom. Shaken, I gaze at my reflection under the harsh overhead lighting.

It is then that I realise the unironed creases of my suit, my unkempt hair, my cheeks exuding an unhealthy sallowness. Crow's feet radiate from the corners of my eyes, deep purple circles shading them now. Good figureheads hold themselves to a higher standard.

As I inspect a face lined now by years and experience, years spent grasping, canvassing, appeasing, genuflecting at the altar of power, the only emotion it deserves is pity. I emerge, that feeling extending to all things outside of my skull.

Downer tries to mold the next generation in his image. He hopes the party creates a legacy for him, knowing he can have no living one in his bitterness. His presence now invites polite contempt. Across from him is something more malleable. He looks into my eyes, his brow furrowing in scepticism. His compliment is sufficient.

I return to the welcoming cocoon of my office, a hushed place filled with eclectic art where the sickness begins to wane. Downer rests in mind; like a shabby Caesar, he strides the corridors of power, unaware of the conspirators lurking in the wings and sharpening their knives. It will be a mercy killing.

16 April

“All he wanted was to reach the unknown, to make something new. But instead, he was given a post.”

— Franz Kafka

The low rumblings around Canberra prove prophetic as we are summoned to a caucus meeting. When I proceed down the corridor from the central atrium of the parliament, I am stunned to see a waiting scrum of press. The Dear Leader himself is a study in

beige, indistinguishable from any other middle-aged, besuited professional. He parts the press pack like Moses at the Red Sea.

He enters the assembly room, shaking hands with the party faithful in a grand gesture of false bonhomie. My mouth turns to foam with this ulcer I've been burdened by for the last week, nagging at me like the precarious exercise of conscience voting. Fortunately, others are doing the talking for me.

The Dear Leader approaches. "Good to see you, mate."

"There it is," I think, that tone, that dishonest puzzle of a tongue. Real mates get favours; roads, bike lanes, and whatever else concerns the mothers of St Kevin's College. It is unclear whether he knows my name. I nod.

They say that the Great Men make you feel like you are the only person in the room. Alas, the Dear Leader is not a great man. His gaze roves above my right shoulder, as he scans the room for the more influential, more notable, more powerful to engage. I forgive this as I am also an "over-the-shoulder" person.

After the ritual greetings, the Dear Leader mounts the podium with plans of the awaited election season cabinet reshuffle.

I sit stiffly in the front row, Elizabeth beside me chattering about our big day. Will Childs shoots an eerie grin. His teeth glint like serrated knives. Childs is a sharp dresser: Versace suits, Hermes silk ties, pocket handkerchief immaculately folded. Childs, by reputation, doesn't covet leadership. He covets access. He is the Dear Leader's gatekeeper.

I watch with some boredom as each new name is read, the usual thugs of factional politics. Elizabeth jabs me in the ribs, my eyes lazily focusing on the words of the Dear Leader.

"...most of all I think we're all excited to see the work of our newest Minister for Infrastructure, Andrew Quentin."

I look at Elizabeth. Her grin smug and unsurprised. I rise from my seat, sceptically smug.

So as I shake this man's hand, I discover my unappreciated victories are very much vindicated, the smugness of the Dear Leader justified. Ministry is no longer a hope, nor a speculative prize dangled before the fresh-faced. It's all mine. Infrastructure.

No meeting, no phone call, no job application. Roles ought to be passed down with a little more confidence, intentionality. The ministry is more important than that. The public deserves better. No briefing, no maneuvering, just a job dropped at my lap. A pit forms in my stomach.

The press continues to gaggle outside the room as the meeting is adjourned. They stare blankly past me on egress, not realising how careless their government seems to be. I smile, of course. That cool, straight-line smile I've mastered. It says, "I'm in control," and also, "I'm not afraid of you." I am made for bigger things.

21 April

"People. You must love people."

— Jean-Paul Sartre, "Nausea"

My wife Hannah is unoccupied now that she has finished setting up our apartment in a perfectly fashionable way. The place is furnished with the usual marks of a modern home, spotless marble islands and geometrically shaped tables, and my collection of art which is my only personal contribution. Hannah seems to take a strange pride in the endless polishing of her life like this, though, and I really do fail to respect that about her.

I thought it was only fitting to invite our Melburnian friend Elizabeth to dinner, and she seems to get along with Hannah quite well. Hannah is in a garrulous mood, liberally pouring the good red wine that we middle-aged professionals seem to take as a token of friendship.

Liquored up and giggling rapidly, we sit on artsy seats slightly less comfortable than they look. These are the moments when people feel connected, when the sharp edges of the personality are smoothed away.

Today's topic of discussion is Edith Broughton. Elizabeth passes me her phone to inspect the campaign photo. Edith is a woman with the appearance of the most youthful of aged librarians. Clear-rimmed glasses, grey hair defiantly undyed, the swoop of a blanched scarf encircling her neck. Of course, the most interesting thing about her is that she's running against me, with her own brand of the grey and dull world of halfway politics, but only framed as something different.

Hannah chimes in, "It's a shame she's running against us - I mean, I wish her well. This parliament is enough of a sausage fest."

She and Elizabeth pout smugly at each other.

I can't help but roll my eyes at all the other identity groups it's fashionable to promote, but with women it's a uniquely vapid fad. If we're being entirely honest, politics is not a woman's game. You have to be overcome by some incredible amount of hubris or folly to chase this profession, and women generally lack those qualities... And I'm no misogynist, I have sisters after all.

Unfortunately, my scepticism does not spur a reactive sense of comradeship with other men. A stark reminder of that is that Elizabeth's husband happens to be the single most docile, boring person I've ever met.

Wearing an unironed oxford cotton shirt and a grovellingly apologetic smile, he adds insipidly, "You've got nothing to worry about, though. She doesn't stand a chance against the good ol' knockabout man of the people Andy."

The table breaks into peals of laughter.

How easily they laugh at stupid things, how easily they trust each other, how easy it is to continue feigning what it means to be human. The privilege of being so simple as to connect to someone like puzzle pieces. I would love to cry, laugh like they do.

But I have other instincts. I have to stifle my impulse to scream, to flip the table over, to call out the whole farce. I continue to smile, nod along, striving to suppress the nausea welling up inside of me.

9 June

**"Every existing thing is born without reason,
prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance."**

— Jean-Paul Sartre, "Nausea"

Cabinet discussions have a rhythm to them, like slow, off-beat jazz. I listen more than I speak.

"Fear the quiet man. For while others speak, he watches..."

Cracks are forming in the Dear Leader's government. His eyes are grey and limpid. His avuncular persona is becoming strained.

His face is tight, squeezed by its pressure. My stomach protests.

Successive Newspolls have the government behind by eight points. Recent policy announcements have fallen flat.

I attempt an ingratiating grin across the desk, conscious that my association with the Dear Leader is becoming a liability, like being locked in a death roll.

Today my sickness is the kind that only fades with a full stomach. Not in a literal sense; in fact I've been skipping meals. Forgetful, I suppose. I envy the animals; they eat out of instinct. The Buddhists say hunger allows the mind to calm itself better. But what of sickness?

Insiders want me to challenge for the leadership, but not yet. Elizabeth and her numbers crew indecisively wring their hands. A fresh lick of paint on the government will surely keep this ship running.

I'm even more engaged than they realise. Late nights are where I tend to get most work done. Infrastructure is an ideal springboard. You can confer benefits on allies, potentially undermine detractors in a rug pull. There is nothing like announcing a new community hall to shore up factional support.

I like to rewatch clips of the major players, my rivals, learning as much about their personal lives as I can. Who knows, maybe someday you could strike a nerve. That niggling is what kept Evatt in opposition longer than he probably deserved. I certainly know what would make me snap.

Just a few dinner conversations, an offhand comment here, a raised eyebrow there. That falsely concerned face I make. "We've lost ground in the most preferred leader poll." I call my favourite journalist, I have another story.

I'm comfortably in control when I'm on the campaign trail. It takes tremendous preparation for the big crowds; they're unpredictable. Every interaction must be stage-managed, every individual that shakes my hand vetted, every photo opportunity telegraphed.

I take particular pleasure in the cosplay, donning the hard-hat and hi-vis, brandishing the spanners and the welding tools, quacking platitudes about "nationbuilding" and "community reinvestment." I'm most appealing when captured by the flash of a camera bulb, foot poised on a spade cutting through the soil, the sacredness of the sod turning ceremony.

The press are taking note, too. *The Good Weekend* profiles me: "Andrew Quentin: The Accidental Minister." The most benign of puff pieces. A virtual debutante ball for a man who covets the ultimate prize.

But of course I'm ambitious for our Dear Leader, and when prompted, I vehemently asseverate my unyielding loyalty. All the while, I'm biding my time, tapping impatiently on my desk with a knowing counting of my chips. The midwinter ball approaches.

"...And while others act, he plans. And when they finally rest... he strikes." I am the most innocent, sincere of cannibals.

12 June

"We are all monsters, some of us are just better at hiding it.."

— Fyodor Dostoesky

It is a sparkling winter day in the Harbour City, the kind that presages spring. Ferries ply the great body of water, cutting ribbons through the swell. Sail boats bob and weave through the wake. In the background, the iron struts of the Harbour Bridge tessellate the azure sky, while the creamy shell of the Opera House is limned by the opalescent light refracting from the rippling sea.

A zephyr teases my hair, although not a single gelled strand is pushed out of place. A bad hair day connotes a loss of control. And I am resolutely in control. Broughton's "local issues, local candidate" spin is resonating. But I'm still relaxed and comfortable. I'm campaigning.

I'm consulting. I'm selling.

The steady stream of commuters recedes to a trickle as I spy Broughton's campaign vehicle pulling into the carpark. She clambers out, accompanied by three of her teal volunteers, footsoldiers in her campaign of attrition against me.

Our eyes meet and she approaches in greeting. It's a rather magnanimous gesture in the circumstances, I have to admit.

"Andrew Quentin, I presume. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Well Edith, likewise. I do appreciate your challenging me. I do love the opportunity to debate."

She twitches at the slight dismissal, her middle-aged mafia curious about the interaction.

“Well Andrew, I wanted to talk to you about the direction you’re going to take on the environment...”

I put my arm on her shoulder, facing her away from the crowd, and subtly highlighting our height difference, a surprising indicator of poll results.

“Look Edith... what’s your goal in all this?”

“Well, Andrew, my goal is to represent the community and what they care about...”. “Be specific, Edith. What’s your climate policy?”

“Well, I think we need to do a lot more to be more ambitious in reducing emissions in the next ten years...”

“What’s your target? Fifty percent? Sixty percent? I’ll tell you now, if I didn’t have to agree to things in a caucus with the actual power to govern, I’d be much more ambitious than that.”

She hesitates at my snort. I continue.

“Don’t get any illusions. You believe in whatever the community believes, so you don’t believe in anything.”

She pauses, pursing her lips and canting her head to the side. “I believe in people, Andrew.”

I scoff, revealing a tad too much frustration.

“People? Yeah right... People are short-sighted, selfish and stupid. They are the sand in the gears, the selfish face of ‘not in my backyard’.”

A longer pause now.

Broughton attempts a weary smile and returns to her waiting huddle of volunteers.

I stare back out at the harbour. The wind has picked up and the ferries now lurch through the white caps. I feel for the passengers inside, pitching and rolling vertiginously on the incessant swell. My abdomen stirs, Broughton’s face smug in the distance.

18 June

“The evil that is in the world always comes from ignorance... the most incorrigible evil is that which thinks it knows best.”

— Albert Camus, *The Plague*

The buzzing of my mobile phone arouses me from the warm fug of sleep. I check my alarm clock; it's one o'clock in the morning. The caller ID says: William Childs.

“Andrew, I'm reaching out to you as a courtesy. It'll be all over the press in the morning. They're calling it the Night of the Long Knives.”

Here we have it: the ritual of execution. An enfeebled leader, a teetering government, a strategic leak. The Dear Leader hasn't kept his house in order. A secret trust, assets squirreled away, multiple conflicts of interest.

“There'll be a spill today. I think you've got the numbers. I can help you over the line if you give me the green light.”

A voice that could be Mephistopheles himself proffering the Faustian pact.

This is a “smooth transition,” they say. If you ask me, I'd say there's nothing smooth about knifing a man in the back, as much as you limit the bleeding.

I hesitate.

“Andrew, are you there? Listen, your hands will be clean. I'll make sure of it.” Clean. Sterilised. Rot isn't something you scrub out.

Etiquette dictates a further pause. I cannot convey being too eager or take too much pleasure in the defenestration.

Was it Machiavelli who said that we must never waste a broken promise?

The Dear Leader is called on to speak before the awaiting media. The imperative is to ensure continuity, avoid humiliation. He pats me on the back, paternalistically, as he introduces me to the public. “This is my leader.”

Prime Minister Quentin. The words don't register as real yet. Maybe that's the kind of numb feeling you get when you evolve from human to figurehead.

There is no parade, no moment of triumph. Just another press conference, another series of flashbulbs, and the weight of a machine that never stops moving.

The man beside me sobs. And that's all he really is; a man. I am something more.

Tolstoy perhaps said it best: "In historic events, the so-called great men are labels giving names to events, and like labels they have but the smallest connection with the event itself." The Quentin Prime Ministership is now the subject of history, but Quentin, the man, is curiously impassive, quizzical, queasy.

31 August

"The public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything except genius."

— Oscar Wilde

Sometimes, I like to imagine that I remember being born. The agonising experience of coming to life, being wrenched from gentle amniotic slumber and extruded naked and whimpering into the world of things. Every other disappointment seems to pale into insignificance compared to this indignity.

Interacting with my new cabinet comes close, though. The first meeting is quiet. Everyone scrutinises me carefully. Measuring. Holding back. The taste of bile rests on the back of my tongue.

I deliver the expected lines. "Continuity with change." "Modern leadership." "Forward-looking." My agenda, cause and mission, rolled into one, is re-election.

But how to secure this? Surround myself with those even more enamoured of power than me? Childs certainly qualifies. His mantra is that you need to lead the public like a bull by its horns. You must periodically rouse it to anger, flashing it the red flag, then delicately pirouette while it charges. You must deflect its force, while you plunge the sword in. The public, like the bull, must end up exhausted, slaving, defeated by its own misguided momentum.

Under Childs's direction, a hardline style emerges. "The best defence is offence." The campaign trail becomes a forum for gladiatorial combat. Nothing is off limits. In Question Time, I attack like a rabid dog with Keatingesque flourish, one particular clip going viral:

"Mr Speaker, the leader of the opposition raises a question of character. Well, I for one will not be lectured about character by this man. All this toadying around, because Mr Langford's back pocket doesn't agree with giving Australians a fair go. And here he goes again, the limp wristed bastard begging to be bailed out. You sit down and take it, you fraud, you absolute wretch of a man you..."

There are do's and don'ts of a carnivorous diet; it satisfies the hunger, but leaves a weight in the stomach. Childs hands me the numbers, seeking to assuage my reservations. A swing of six points in "Preferred Prime Minister". Just one poll, but the focus group comments are astounding. "The PM says what he thinks." The taste of iron is oddly sweet.

Andrew Quentin is a mask from which my eyes gaze out like smouldering coals.

15 September

"Man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

— Ernest Hemingway

When the parliament is prorogued, the campaign machine swings into overdrive. My circle shrinks to the bevy of advisers, media managers and security heavies that revolve around me like cold and lifeless planets around a dying sun.

At night, I drink. Times like this require a bit of levity. No ground beneath me. Just the slow drift of light and heat, trying to work up the Dutch courage to do this. This party needs strength and I must project it. It doesn't help that I've been waking up exhausted. Xanax doesn't help. Nothing does. My GP says it's stress. I say what's the point of going to professionals to be told things I already know? He laughs nervously and hands me a refill script.

Always, behind it all, the nausea lurks, stalking me relentlessly through airport departure lounges, television studios, community prayer circles, university campuses, central business districts; it's like trying to outrun my own shadow.

My fixation with Broughton and her ploy for middle-aged votes outweighs my worry of the Opposition. Fortunately, Childs and his 'dirt squad' are on the case. They commence their 'deep research'. They speak to anyone receptive: ex-employers, ex-partners, ex-friends. They surveil her house, her partner, her children. "Perfectly legal," Childs nags at me.

The problem is that Broughton herself is squeaky clean. Her husband, though, is another matter. He's a serial philanderer. How fortunate. They've got the photographic evidence to prove it, Child attests.

"One leak to a receptive journalist I've lined up, Andrew, and the collateral damage will be immense."

"Bill, her husband isn't running for office. She is."

"You've got to hold your seat if you want to get re-elected. You're fighting a two-front war here, Andrew. This is not a time for social niceties."

We leak. Even for the press, the story is voyeuristic, but it begins to circulate, gain traction. Broughton has to field more questions on character. Quentin has to answer less. Quentin's character is unimpeachable.

22 October

"Existence is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance; it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart like a great motionless beast - or else there is nothing at all."

— Jean-Paul Sartre, "Nausea"

The winter rains have failed and summer has come earlier than ever to the Capital. The wind gusts from the west, hitting the face like dogs' breath. The eucalypts are brown and withered. Sirens punctuate the suffocating nights, signs of frantic backburning, digging of firebreaks, diverting of streams. The air is so thick with grit it gives off a metallic taste. The city waits with bated breath.

The ash-flecked gale wallops the windows, as I sit in my office. Elizabeth is opposite me, paper in hand, her face tight as if dehydrated, shifting in her seat. I squint at her, caught off guard by her tone. I let her continue. Her words wash over me.

"The inner city is a lost cause. It's been captured by radicals. We have more cut-through in the mortgage belt."

Everything is in service of the bellwether voters, in their bumbings over what they really want. Her voice fades for a moment. A shudder comes over me. Every wrinkle of a forced smile leaves my face. My sickness rises from its deep forgotten place.

I try to imagine myself anywhere but this room. Perhaps outside. Perhaps somewhere elevated above all this. From Mount Majura, the city is arrayed like a grid, a cryptic cypher of asphalt, brick and terracotta.

“The Moorabbin highway upgrade has bolstered our numbers in Eden-Monaro.”

I imagine lighting the spark, watching the match head smoke in the dry grass, seeing the slow ignition take on oxygen and build into a marching row of flame. The fire front licks at the base of the gums, advancing up to their crowns, sparking the pop and sizzle of the resin. The flames begin to leap and gambol as they advance down the hill, spitting embers and exhaling billowing plumes of smoke. The great wall of flame breaks against the great facade of the parliament, its timber walls igniting, fumes pouring out of its windows, purging and purifying.

“We’ve got a strong candidate in La Trobe. Former mayor. Stems some of the bleeding from the hospital debacle.”

I see myself now engulfed in those same flames, Andrew Quentin’s funerary pyre. I will be dust, detritus, fertiliser for the soil left by the smouldering ruin. I feel a freedom, peace even, at the thought. It’s the sort of vertigo you experience when standing at the edge of space.

Andrew Quentin has always lived for the future, for legacy even. And legacies are forged in fire, germinating from the wreckage of what has come before. What lies behind this impulse, this need to burnish my own image, is an image of eruption. Without erupting, volcanos fade into any other mark on the horizon.

“Howard is going to be a coin-toss. They’re running hard on cost of living, kitchen sink economics.”

I am not listening to Elizabeth but I can hear her clearly now: she is angling for Deputy if we win re-election.

The sickness that roils is no longer inside me; it is me.

9 October

“Is it such a dreadful thing then to die?”

— Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus

Snatches of sound emanate from the ballroom far below, where the official party is being held: clinking of glasses, the boom of musical hooks, the clamour of crowds backslapping. The victory speech is secured in my right pocket, the concession speech in my left, read over by every professional lecturer and political climber. Buried in the inside of my suitcoat is a third speech.

When I part the curtains to the ballroom stage a few hours later, I am haloed by the backlights. Cheering crests and breaks like a great wave around the room. I look out at the assembled crowd, whose welling eyes are raised in expectation, supplication even.

“Thank you everybody. This is a victory for the true believers. The people who have kept the faith.”

The energy surges in the room.

“Of course, I could not have done this without you all so some thank yous are in order. I’d firstly like to thank my trusted adviser, my consigliere, Will Childs.”

The crowd parts around Childs who takes a small bow, a modest concession to the public adulation.

“Don, thank you for your relentlessness, your ruthlessness, your monomaniacal pursuit of power. You strove to subvert everyone who challenged me and you succeeded brilliantly. Nero poisoned his predecessor, kicked his wife to death and framed the Christians for the burning of Rome. For you, Don, Nero didn’t go far enough.”

The mood has curdled. Childs looks stunned, almost chokes on his canape.

“Of course, I need to give thanks to Elizabeth, too, my loyal lieutenant. Thank you, Elizabeth, for being you, for being a woman. When you lose the next leadership spill to a middle-aged lawyer or economist in a suit, I have every hope it will be for who you are.”

Elizabeth stares daggers at me from the front row.

“To Edith Broughton, my challenger in McIntyre. Thank you for having the bad judgement to marry a cad. Your messy personal life really got me over the line in that tight contest. And it would be remiss of me here not to thank the media, too, for reporting this cheap and tawdry tabloid story like it was the Watergate Conspiracy.”

A slow revolt is brewing now in the crowd.

“To my wife, Hannah. Thank you for being my rock. Thank you for always standing by me, with eyes closed, ears blocked and mouth closed. Your lack of judgement has really allowed me to fulfil every amoral ambition I’ve ever had.”

Boos and jeering are now starting to break out.

“Finally, to the Australian public. Our party ran without policy, without principle, stoking fear and division at every turn. And you bought it, lapped it up. Along with every prime minister of the past, I thank you for your ignorance, your indolence, your impotence.”

The crowd is beginning to drown me out now.

“What you might not know is that I’ve been sick. Sick for months now. I thought I, alone, was sick. But what I realise now is that this is a collective illness. It’s a sickness in our democracy. It is obvious to most of us that this country needs a new approach. Special interests can no longer control the politics of this country. We in Canberra are beholden to the coal barons, and not the children. We are beholden to property owners and not to the buyers. We are beholden to the monsters we created in privatisation. We are beholden to the Parties that treat the political process like a hall-of-mirrors. That’s exactly why tonight...well, tonight, I resign.”

I now need to shout over the hubbub.

“History remembers the breakers, and now is our moment.

This rotting government will never accept this truth laid bare. They want you to believe a leader’s legacy is his ability to offend nobody, to make his party into the ‘party of government’ while narrowing what it represents to a useless stub. That way nothing ever happens and any change is a source of fear and loathing. I am just another one of its creatures. When you’re choking, boiling, you’ll wish you were governed by someone who gives a damn. You’ll wish you showed some fight, some resistance to the takeover of the totally inhuman.”

The power to my microphone abruptly cuts out.

January 1st

**“Icarus laughed as he fell for he knew to fall
means to once have soared”**

— Jack Gilbert, “Failing and Flying”

One of my favourite paintings is by the Flemish artist Jacob Peter Gowy. It depicts an Icarus, pink and cherubic, rays of sun bathing him like some gentle blessing, as he somersaults through the air. His expression is ambiguous in its shock. Most see despair; I see gasps of delight.

Is this how I'll be remembered?

Holt was towed out to sea by the fatal rip, McMahon inherited the poisoned chalice, Whitlam was knee-capped on the steps of parliament, and Quentin?

What has my journaling amounted to? Am I writing to reclaim, rehabilitate, renounce?

For Machiavelli, writing was no consolation for the indignity of exile. He expired, bilious and penurious, abandoned and forgotten by his beloved Florence.

Tolstoy spent his career ascending to the very pinnacle of literary celebrity. He then spent his final months casting everything aside: marriage, family, money, heritage, tracing a line of flight from his ancestral estate. He died in a train station, waiting eternally for the deliverance that never arrived. His final words? “We must escape.”

I drive past Edith Broughton's new campaign office, her squinting face printed across windows she hides behind. Across the bridge, unrest of the thousands. My own visage fills the street like some offensive symbol of uprising. The popularity of Prime Minister Hotham plummets. Andrew Quentin drifts into tides of popular fantasy, far beyond my reach.

I proceed past the smooth sweep of harbour, waves cresting and scalloping on to shore, past the regal mansions, past the Kirribilli jacarandas, which line the street like mute sentries. I turn on to the highway. Traffic, buildings, fences recede as the speedometer pushes past one hundred. I barrel through a green tunnel of forest and emerge into wide, dun-coloured pastureland. The sky is a dome of blue and the road unfurls before me like a thin black ribbon.

A kind of calm rests in me as the sickness begins to slowly fade. I look up, wincing at the sun's kiss of harsh light.

MUSIC 2

Nelson Meehan

Performance (Clarinet)

“

...the preparation process allowed me to grow as a performer by balancing technical challenges with personal musical expression.

”

MUSIC 2

‘Stone Sutra’ by Antony Wheeler

‘Dat Dere’ by Bobby Timmons

‘One for Mum’ by Lachlan Davidson

REFLECTION STATEMENT

The pieces that I chose to perform for Music 2 HSC were ‘Stone Sutra’ by Antony Wheeler, ‘Dat Dere’ by Bobby Timmons, and ‘One for Mum’ by Lachlan Davidson. The process of choosing these works involved extensive discussions with my tutor, Antony Wheeler, and the Riverview Music Faculty, who helped me consider pieces that aligned with my playstyle while also pushing me technically and musically. Because jazz is my favourite genre to play, this strongly influenced my decision to include the two jazz pieces, ‘Dat Dere’ and ‘One for Mum’, which immediately appealed to me through their rhythmic drive, expressive phrasing, and opportunities for interpretation.

A large part of my preparation involved experimenting with tone colours, articulation patterns, and stylistic nuances to ensure I could authentically convey the character of each jazz piece. With ‘Dat Dere’, I spent significant time refining my swing feel and improving the clarity of my articulation at faster tempos. ‘One for Mum’ required a different kind of preparation, focusing on shaping melodic lines, and nailing some fast fingerings and higher notes.

‘Stone Sutra’ provided contrast within my program and demanded a more technical approach to preparation. I worked through the piece slowly with my tutor to master its extended techniques and dynamic precision, deliberately breaking it into sections to ensure consistency and accuracy. This methodical practice strengthened my control and confidence with contemporary repertoire.

Overall, the preparation process allowed me to grow as a performer by balancing technical challenges with personal musical expression. My final program reflects the skills I developed through consistent, thoughtful rehearsal.



Watch Nelson's
performances here







Angus Martinez

In the Stillness, a Burning Flame

(Nominated for the Young Writers Showcase)

“

...why do some of us clutch faith like a candle in the dark, while others let it glow quietly without ever naming it?"

”

REFLECTION STATEMENT

My creative nonfiction piece emerged from a profound contradiction: my grandmother Oma, the architect of our family's faith, sat unbaptised in the pew each Sunday. Her terminal diagnosis in April 2024 forced me to confront whether my frantic attempts to secure her baptism revealed more about my own need for institutional certainty than genuine understanding of grace.

The central craft challenge became excavating Oma's wordless faith without presuming unauthorised knowledge of her interior life. I employed retrospective italicised commentary throughout, distinguishing between the experiencing self and the reflecting self. Helen Garner's *The Spare Room* provided an ethical model for representing another's experience with honesty while respecting boundaries. The question "why do some of us clutch faith like a candle in the dark, while others let it glow quietly without ever naming it?" exemplifies this reflective approach.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' letters to Robert Bridges became my primary interpretive lens. His sprung rhythm embodied spiritual struggle through language itself, demonstrating how poetry articulates what conventional religious discourse cannot. I positioned his correspondence architecturally throughout the work, creating dialogue between his creative sterility in 1880s Dublin and my spiritual desperation beside Oma's hospice bed.

The flame motif provided structural unity, evolving from the literal sanctuary lamp at St. Thomas' to a complex symbol of resilience forged through wartime extremity. In the final verse section, I wove Hopkins' poetry through significant moments in Oma's life, demonstrating how his verse became the vessel for understanding what her silence preserved.

The piece ultimately discovers that Oma's stillness was not absence but profound presence. Her faith burned most purely in the space where institutional frameworks could not reach, revealing grace operating beyond sacramental boundaries.

In the Stillness, a Burning Flame

“All things therefore are charged with love, are charged with God and if we knew how to touch them, give off sparks and take fire, yield drops and flow, ring and tell of Him.”

– Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*

Aan Oma, Marian Rozema, wiens licht mijn pad verlichtte door de schaduwen van onzekerheid. De vezels van jouw ongedoopte geloof, verweven door het getekende oorlogslandschap, leerden mij mezelf te binden aan het weefsel van het immateriële. Dit werk is van jou, een bewijs van dankbaarheid voor de kracht die je in het weefsel van onze familie hebt geweven terwijl ik je blijvende vlam voortdraag.

To Oma, Marian Rozema, whose light illuminated my path through the shadows of uncertainty. The fibres of your unbaptised faith, interwoven through the scarred landscape of war, taught me to bind myself to the fabric of the immaterial. This work is yours, a testament of gratitude for the strength you wove into our family's fabric as I carry forward your enduring flame.

My fondest memories are those of Christmas Eve.

St. Thomas' would be charged with anticipation, the church packed with families in their finest clothes, children fidgeting with excitement, the air thick with perfume, aftershave and incense. The organ's low rumble hummed through the air, the choir's voices "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," reverberating off the stained-glass glow of Mary and the shepherds.

Every Sunday, my family piled into the same pew, third from the back on the left, the wood worn smooth by decades of worshippers. During homilies, I would count the flickering shadows cast by the sanctuary lamp, burning cerise above the tabernacle, a silent spectral ballet on lime-washed walls.

The flow of the service, waves of movement to stand, to kneel, to recite, were ebbs of a wide tide; the words were effortless breaths.

"Glory to you, Oh Lord"

My memories are of an unbroken continuity of bodies moving toward the altar. My father, broad-shouldered and greying, hands clasped tightly as he bowed before the chalice.

"The blood of Christ"

"Amen"

My mother approached quietly, her blue scarf slipping as she received the wafer with trembling hands, lips moving in silent prayer.

My little sister Madeleine, eight and glowing in her cream dress, stepped forward on tiptoe. The host dissolved on her tongue as her wide eyes searched the priest's face, uncertain if she'd done it right. Behind her, Lachlan, my older brother, stood awkwardly in his new suit, hands buried in his pockets, watching his sister with nervous pride.

Then there is Oma.

My grandmother.

Oma's stillness commanded attention. While the rest of us fumbled with prayer books and whispered responses, she sat with her hands folded in perfect symmetry, her charcoal wool coat buttoned methodically to the chin, each mother-of-pearl button catching the amber light from the altar candles like captured moonlight.

Her weathered face remained serene as carved marble, but her steel-green eyes held the weight of countless Christmas Eves.

"Let us pray," Father Michael intones, his voice echoing off the rafters, "Please stand."

She does not rise.

"Let us now offer each other the sign of peace," he says.

She does not extend her hand.

"The Lord be with you," he calls.

She stays silent.

I assumed she was being stubborn, perhaps even rude. Her refusal to join the ritual responses struck me as defiant, and I felt embarrassed by her difference, her failure to conform to what faith should look like.

Maybe it was age. Stand for the Gospel, kneel for the consecration, stand again for the Our Father, sit for the homily. That could exhaust anyone, let alone someone born in the shadow of war.

But that was not the reason.

Oma could navigate the polished steps of St. Thomas' after Mass, her leather-soled shoes finding purchase on the uneven pavement. She hefted her canvas shopping bags with arthritic fingers, batting away my offered hand with a curt "Ik kan het zelf" (I can do it myself) as we made our way to the car.

It wasn't until I was eleven, trudging back to our pew one Christmas Eve, that I asked my mother the question.

Shifting my body weight with my hands in my jacket pockets, my voice low over the squeak of my sneakers, I asked, "Why doesn't Oma take the Eucharist?"

My mother adjusted herself, her hands folded reverently, and said,

"She's never been baptised."

Oma was the architect of our faith, dragging us to Mass each week, hushing us when we giggled during the offertory.

At the linoleum-clad kitchen table, Oma crossed herself before every meal, "In de naam van de Vader, de Zoon, en de Heilige Geest", her Dutch a soft cadence over the clatter of plates. She had traced the sign of the cross on our foreheads as we slept, her touch cool and deliberate. I'd heard her whisper prayers in the dark, when she thought the house was asleep. "Heer, bescherm ons" (Lord, protect us).

How could the woman who had taught me to pray, who crossed herself before every meal, who insisted we attend Mass even when we complained, be unbaptised? It seemed almost scandalous. Why would she fan religion's flame, weaving it through our family's rituals, when she refused to join the pattern?



This rhythm of doubt and devotion has shaped storytelling for millennia. Understanding the nature of belief through the crucible of language, one realises that religion is a steady ember, warming and sustaining the life-force of many narratives. From Dante's "Divine Comedy" to Donne's Holy Sonnets, from Herbert's "The Collar" to Hopkins' terrible sonnets, literature's fusion with faith has been both instructive and unpredictable, creating what T.S. Eliot termed "the intersection of the timeless with time" (Four Quartets, "The Dry Salvages," V).

In Victorian England, a young Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) walked the cobbled streets of Oxford, his cassock rustling against Cotswold stone walls as he wrestled with a conversion that would alienate him from family and society. The year was 1866, and the religious upheaval mirrored his own interior struggle. England was convulsing with the Second Spring of Catholicism. Newman's defection to Rome in 1845 still sent shockwaves through society, while "Papal Aggression" remained a rallying cry against Catholic resurgence. To "go over to Rome" was to commit social suicide, choosing theological precision over familial harmony, foreign allegiance over English identity.

Hopkins was born into Anglicanism in 1844, but something in the Catholic liturgy stirred within him an irresistible longing. Perhaps it was the same inexplicable pull that would later draw him to ordain as a Jesuit priest in 1877, creating a tension between poetic calling and religious duty that would define his artistic output.

Posthumously, Hopkins would be known as one of the most innovative and spiritually complex poets in the English canon. Christopher Ricks (1991) called Hopkins "the most original poet of the Victorian age" (p. 238), while Eliot (1932) observed that Hopkins' technical innovations "could not have been made at any other period, and could not have been made at all except by a man of the highest intellectual powers" (p. 123).

In his sparse Dublin lodgings in July 1883, the Irish rain drumming against his window, Hopkins dipped his pen in ink grown thick with hesitation. To his friend, Robert Bridges, he wrote:

"I have no disease, but I am always tired, always jaded, though work is not heavy, and the impulse to do anything fails me or has in it no continuance" (*Letters*, p. 187).

The letters from Hopkins to Bridges, published by Oxford University Press in 1935 with the authorisation of the Society of Jesus, reveal the intimate spiritual struggles of a poet-priest wrestling with faith, doubt, and creative sterility. Bridges, Hopkins' former Oxford companion and eventual Poet Laureate, served as confessor to Hopkins' artistic and spiritual anguish, preserving correspondence that illuminates the complex relationship between suffering and transcendence.



It's a question that lingers: *why do some of us clutch faith like a candle in the dark, while others let it glow quietly without ever naming it?*

Theologians trace the flame's symbolism through centuries of exegesis. Christ's eternal presence is depicted as a guide through darkness: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Yet the flame speaks in languages older than Christianity. Heraclitean fire, Promethean spark, the Jewish *ner tamid* burning in Temple and synagogue alike. The power of ritual lies not merely in its prescribed motions but in its capacity to create sacred spaces, to establish what anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) calls "liminality", a threshold between the ordinary and the divine. Turner describes how "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (p. 359), existing in a transformative space where normal social categories dissolve. In Turner's analysis, ritual provides structure for experiences that transcend everyday understanding, creating communities of shared meaning that persist beyond the ceremony itself.

Hopkins discovered such liminal spaces in the landscape of Wales. At St. Beuno's College in 1877, his breath ghosting white in the bitter dawn, he stood on a wind-scoured ridge where heather met sky, the Clwydian hills rolling away like frozen waves beneath him. Below, the Irish Sea churned pewter-dark, and somewhere beyond the horizon's knife-edge, the *Deutschland* foundered in mountainous swells, her hull groaning as she broke apart on the Kentish Knock.

In this threshold moment, perched between cloistered sanctuary and tempest, between observer and participant in suffering, he would find the voice that could speak of ultimate transformation. The terrible beauty of the wreck was a baptism by catastrophe, where death and divine calling converged. This is poetically expressed in:

Away in the loveable west,
On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
I was under a roof here, I was at rest,
And they the prey of the gales;
She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly
Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails
Was calling "O Christ, Christ, come quickly":
The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wildworst Best.

(The Wreck of the Deutschland)

Hopkins contemplated that mystery could be articulated without being diminished, that the ineffable became *more* rather than less profound through careful attention to language. In "The Wreck of the Deutschland" (1875-76), his first major poem after converting to Catholicism, he writes of the nun who cried "O Christ, Christ, come quickly" as the ship foundered: "The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best". The alliteration and internal rhyme, "Christ...christens...calls", create a baptismal rhythm, words becoming sacrament. His sprung rhythm carries meaning in its restraint, each pause a pulse of faith, as he wrote to Bridges: "The stress is on silence as much as sound" (*Letters*, p. 267).

Theological necessity catalysed Hopkins' technically innovative sprung rhythm. "God's Grandeur" (1877) demonstrates this: "The world is charged with God's grandeur. / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil" (*Poems*, ll. 1-2). The stressed syllables, "WORLD," "CHARGED," "GRAND-*eur*," "FLAME", echo electricity crackling through creation, each beat a divine pulse that conventional metrics couldn't contain.

In his cramped study at University College Dublin, surrounded by marking and the endless rain against his window, Hopkins contemplated the paradox of faith itself.

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University College, Stephens Green, Dublin, March 25 1884

Dearest Bridges, ...

But a Catholic by mystery means an incomprehensible certainty: without certainty, without formulation, there is no interest... the clearer the formulation, the greater the interest.

Affectionately yours,

Gerard Manley Hopkins S.J.

(Letters, p. 187).



This understanding of mystery as an *incomprehensible certainty* shows how faith can be understood not as the absence of knowledge, but as the presence of trust that transcends explanation.

At St. Beuno's College, Hopkins was consumed by the revelation that would become "The Windhover." His sprung rhythm – staccato, pulsing – carries the weight of awe, each stress a faithful heartbeat: "BRUTE BEAUty and VALour and ACT, oh, AIR, pride, PLUME, here / BUCKle!" (*Poems*, ll. 4-5). Hopkins had stood spellbound as a kestrel rode the wind, the moment crystallising into revelation: "I caught this morning morning's minion, king- / dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon" (*Poems*, ll. 1-2; Hopkins, 1918/1970). The falcon becomes Christ's emblem not through allegory but through observed beauty; the bird's mastery of wind and air mirroring the divine mastery of creation itself. Hopkins watches the kestrel "riding" the morning air with such grace that earthbound observers can only marvel at the display, each quality reflecting Christ's own nature made manifest in the natural world.



We sat in a sterile consulting room at the Mater Hospital Oncology Unit in April 2024, the walls a bright white, the air thick with the unmistakable hospital smell of disinfectant that catches in your throat. The oncologist, a wiry man with a clipped voice, laid out the facts: stage IV bowel cancer, metastasised to her lungs, confirmed by biopsy. He clicked through scans on his laptop, dark grey blobs blooming like ink stains across her organs.

Treatment options were slim: chemotherapy might slow the spread, palliative care could ease the pain, but the five-year survival rate was 5%.

"We're looking at months, not years," he said, his tone practised, neutral.

Oma nodded, her hands steady in her lap.

"Can I go home now?"

While I sat there mentally cataloguing everything she would miss: future Christmases, birthdays, the simple pleasure of her beloved afternoon tea, she seemed almost relieved to have the uncertainty resolved. Her quiet acceptance of her mortality, as if death was an expected guest, arriving punctually for a long-anticipated appointment, rattled me. I found myself thinking of Eliot.

"In my end is my beginning".

I immediately shifted into problem-solving mode. I called our parish priest on a rain-soaked Tuesday, my voice trembling: "Father, it's about my grandmother. She's sick. Stage IV cancer, and she's never been baptised. Is there a way, even now? Please call me back." I rang the diocesan office, speaking to a receptionist who promised to pass my query to a canon lawyer trained in Church law, who could interpret the bureaucratic regulations surrounding emergency baptisms and the salvation of souls outside formal sacramental bounds. I emailed Dr. Harris, a theology professor I'd met at a youth group, my subject line desperate: "Emergency Baptism—Is It Possible?"

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In Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical. The baptismal, water, symbolising cleansing and rebirth, resonates beyond Christianity's Jordan River where John baptised Christ (Matthew 3:16). This motif flows through global traditions: Hinduism's Ganges purifies souls in the Mahabharata; Egypt's Nile, hymned c. 2000 BCE, mirrors Osiris's resurrection; Shinto's misogi under waterfalls, evoked in Basho's haiku; Yoruba's Oshun heals through rivers; and Aboriginal Dreamtime's Rainbow Serpent shapes waterways. Water rites weave a universal literary tapestry, transforming the numinous into meaning through currents that connect body, spirit, and cosmos.

I pictured myself as Hopkins in his letters to Bridges: urgent, passionate, and seeking solace through correspondence with a fellow poet who might comprehend what he could not grasp alone. I imagined the scene, Oma in her hospice bed, Father Michael dipping his fingers in holy water, the ancient words ringing out: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." I saw grace descending like Eliot's "dove descending" in "Little Gidding," a flame flaring against mortality's abyss, white wings folding around what language cannot hold

Hopkins felt the weight of creative sterility pressing down on him like Dublin's plumbeous sky as he confessed his deepest fears about artistic impotence to his friend, Bridges.

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University College, Stephens Green, Dublin, September 1885

Dearest Bridges, ...

"It kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget... soon I am afraid I shall be ground down to a state like this last spring's and summer's, when my spirits were so crushed that madness seemed to be making approaches"

Believe me, with kind wishes to Mrs. Bridges, your affectionate friend,

Gerard M. Hopkins S.J. (*Letters*, p. 222)

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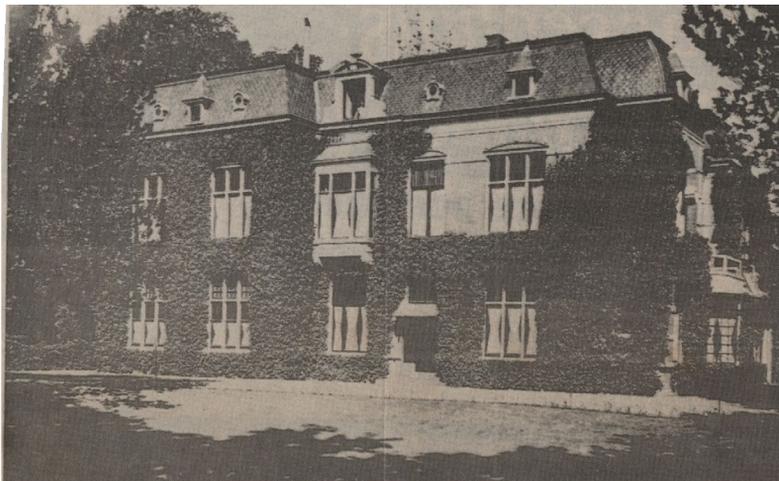


Photo: Sint Bonifatius Psychiatric Hospital in Leeuwarden. Oma was born here on the 19th of January 1945

Oma's birth story became the foundation upon which her entire spiritual identity was built.

Marian Rozema, my Oma, was born on January 19, 1945, in Sint Bonifatius, a psychiatric hospital on the windswept outskirts of Leeuwarden, a Frisian city in the Netherlands, buckling under Nazi occupation.

The building loomed like a fortress: red brick walls streaked with damp, iron-barred windows rattling in the North Sea gales, a labyrinth of corridors echoing with the cries of the forsaken. It was a dumping ground for the war's refuse: mental patients strapped to beds, resistance fighters' families left to rot ... those too inconvenient to shoot outright.

Her mother, Aaltje Rozema, gave birth on a narrow cot in a mildew-stained ward, surrounded by four SS soldiers in mud-spattered grey uniforms. Their rifles hung heavy over their shoulders, their backs turned to her screams, their boots scuffing the cracked linoleum as they guarded against escape or mercy. The sheets were stiff with cold, the air thick with the stench of unwashed bodies, carbolic soap, and despair.

No fire warmed the space; coal was rationed to the German barracks, and the hospital's furnace had sputtered out in the winter of 1944, leaving only a faint memory of heat. The midwife, a gaunt woman with hollow cheeks, worked with trembling hands, her apron smeared with blood from a dozen births that week. She cut the umbilical cord with a blade dulled by overuse, her breath hitching as Aaltje's groans filled the room.



Photo (L-R): Bert Rozema (brother), Hendryk Westerdyk (grandfather), Oma, Aaltje Rozema (mother), Griet Westerdyk (née Schulting) (grandmother)

Oma's father, Bertus Rozema, wasn't there to witness her birth. As a shipbuilder with calloused hands and a quiet defiance, he'd joined the *Knokploegen* (the Dutch Resistance's armed units) in the spring of 1944, after the Nazis deported the Cohen family from their tenement next door.

He had spent nights hammering false walls into their attic on the Kelders, a cobbled street in Leeuwarden's medieval heart, hiding Jewish families beneath the eaves; first the Cohens, then the Levys, then a widow named Miriam. He had forged identity cards, slipped bread and potatoes past checkpoints, and whispered warnings to the underground. The SS caught wind in October 1944, their boots pounding up the stairs of Number 17 as Bertus fled through a back alley, disappearing into Friesland's fog-choked fields.

In an imagined moment, I see Oma as a toddler in 1946, her small hands clutching Aaltje's coat as they walk Leeuwarden's shattered streets, the Grote Kerk's spire looming through the mist. I picture her mother whispering, "Blijf dichtbij, Marian," as they pass a burned-out bakery, its windows jagged like broken teeth.

In my mind, I sit across from psychologist Erik Erikson in a dimly lit café, his pipe smoke curling as he muses, "Her identity was forged in those ruins, a trust in survival that became her faith." I nod, imagining Oma's flame as a spark struck in that cold ward, her thread of resilience woven through the rubble of war.

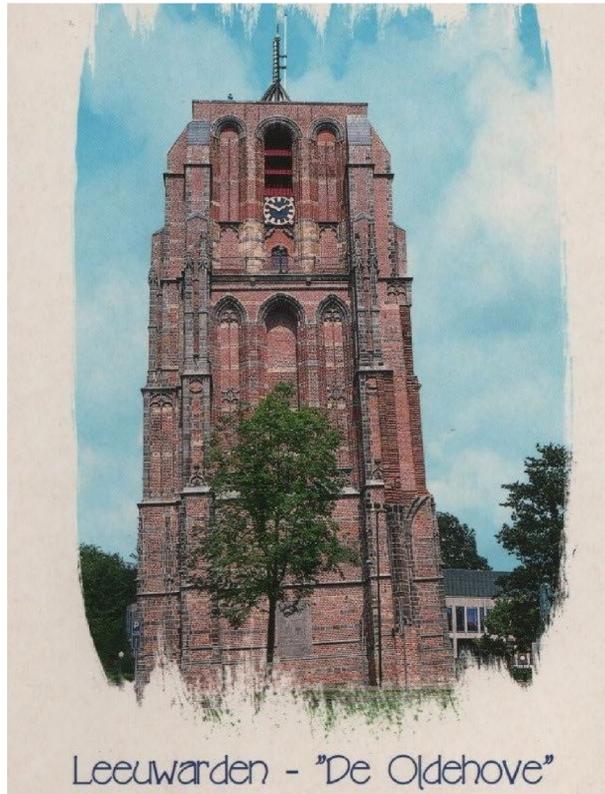


Literary tradition provides frameworks for understanding how extreme circumstances forge spiritual character. When we read poetry about suffering, we are moved to a new understanding precisely because the aesthetic form transforms raw experience into meaning. Hopkins' own suffering, shaped by his dual identity as priest and poet, his 1880s Dublin, found expression in the ambiguously termed "terrible sonnets", poems wrested from spiritual desolation. In "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day" (1885), he writes:

"I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree /
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me".

The rhyme of "decree" and "me" suggests that suffering reveals essential identity rather than destroying it. When Hopkins wrote to Bridges about his trials: "Weather has been very wet and cold and has made me ill a little" (*Letters*, p.96), he continued to find in suffering not defeat but transformation.

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Postcard from Bertus to Oma, "De Oldehove" - a leaning and unfinished church tower in the medieval centre of the Dutch city of Leeuwarden.

The postcard reads: "Hello, dear daughter. You will remember this, I hope"

Childhood shaped Oma's spiritual topography just as wartime Friesland shaped her identity. By the Grote of Jacobijnerkerk in Leeuwarden – the Gothic stones weathered by centuries of Frisian rain, the bells silenced by Nazi occupation - her landscape of faith took form.

Her early years were a tapestry of loss and endurance. In 1946, Leeuwarden's canals mirrored a sky bruised by war's end, the water sluggish with ash and debris. She toddled beside her mother, her wooden clogs clacking on the cobbles, as Aaltje bartered their last silver spoon for a loaf of bread, its crust dusted with sawdust to stretch the flour.

The city's churches, once sanctuaries, stood half-ruined, their stained glass shattered, their altars stripped for firewood. One might glimpse a single candle flickering amidst a church's ruins, or overhear a whispered moonlit prayer as a family buried a resistance fighter.

By the time she sat in St. Thomas' each Christmas, her linen shirt buttoned against Sydney's fickle summer drizzle, her presence was a silent hymn. Its melody, unheard but deeply felt, was a tapestry where wartime trauma, immigrant displacement, family devotion, and personal resilience were woven into a single, complex design.



In September 1885, Hopkins sat in his sparse Dublin lodgings, pen poised over paper as he contemplated the public nature of art versus the private nature of suffering. The question haunted him: what purpose did poetry serve if it remained hidden, unread, unheard?

The poetry from Hopkins' Dublin period reveals how spiritual complexity and formal constraint coexist. September 1885 found Hopkins reflecting to Bridges on art's deeper purpose: "What are works of art for? to educate, to be standards. Education is meant for the many, and standards are for public use. To produce then is of little use unless what we produce is known" (*Letters*, p. 231). He understood that poetry is the soul's mirror, reflecting pristine verity, burgeoning potentialities, and ineffable truths beyond the diaphanous curtain of appearances.

While Hopkins approached poetry as a conduit to "educate," often celebrating divinity's immediacy, T.S. Eliot confronts the aftermath of spiritual exile: what it costs to recognise those truths too late. His "The Waste Land" (1922), written in World War I's shadowy devastation, offers a fractured vision of spiritual drought: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (*Collected Poems*, l. 30).

The poem's fragmented structure, alternating between languages and mythologies, mirrors the fragmented consciousness of modernity, where traditional sources of meaning have crumbled. Yet within this desolation, Eliot plants seeds of renewal: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" (Give. Sympathise. Control), Sanskrit wisdom emerging from Western wasteland, suggesting that spiritual regeneration might come from unexpected sources.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' spiritual identity was also forged through demanding circumstances. In the 1880s, while teaching at University College Dublin as a Jesuit priest, he was physically and emotionally unravelling; battling ill health, profound isolation, and the daily indifference of students who yawned through his lectures on

Latin scansion, their boots scuffing the floor as Irish rain lashed the windows. This period gave rise to what are now known as his “terrible sonnets,” a series of wrenching poems that articulate the spiritual desolation he endured.

Hopkins is not merely in pain; he is pain. The night becomes not a temporal condition but a metaphysical state, where God feels absent and the self is unrecognisable. This interior anguish echoes through “No worst, there is none”, where he confesses being “pitched past pitch of grief,” a phrase that suggests both depthless despair and the vertiginous absence of divine consolation. Hopkins, sitting at his desk after another arduous day teaching Latin grammar to indifferent Irish students, his chalk-dusted fingers cramped around his pen, yearned to redefine what it meant to serve God through verse when God himself seemed to have withdrawn into cosmic silence. The gaslight guttered across his manuscript as he expunged recalcitrant lines, each revision a theodicy wrestled from divine silence. Yet, through these sonnets, Hopkins redefines faith, no longer rooted in felt assurance but in the sheer persistence of spiritual struggle.

Hopkins' struggle with spiritual desolation reaches its most visceral expression in "Carrion Comfort" (1885), where the opening line's defiant repetition...

"Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee"

... creates a linguistic battlefield. The verb "feast" wrestles violently with its object, "Despair," personified as carrion that would nourish the speaker's darkest impulses. This syntactic struggle mirrors the soul's desperate resistance against nihilism, with the repeated negations ("Not," "I'll not," "not") functioning as verbal shields wielded against spiritual collapse.

The sprung rhythm throughout the poem, particularly evident in lines like "But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me", embodies the irregular, hammering heartbeat of belief under extreme pressure. Where traditional meter would provide comfort, Hopkins deliberately disrupts our expectations, forcing stressed syllables to collide ("But ah," "thou terrible") in a way that makes the reader experience the speaker's spiritual vertigo.

In his Dublin study, surrounded by an endless stack of student papers and the amber October light filtering through grimy casements, he pondered the cruel paradox of artistic calling: the need to be known warring against the demands of humility and service.

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University College, Stephen's Green, Dublin, Oct. 13 1886.

Dearest Bridges, ...

"I say it deliberately and before God, I would have you and Canon Dixon and all true poets remember that fame, the being known, though in itself one of the most dangerous things to man, is nevertheless the true and appointed air, element, and setting of genius and its works"

Yours,

Gerard M. Hopkins S.J. (*Letters*, p. 231).

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Reading Hopkins and Eliot became a form of spiritual excavation for me. I pored over their poetry and their struggles, my desk littered with dog-eared books and coffee-stained notes. Eliot in London, 1920s, his faith a fragile thread woven through a city still scarred by war, his "Ash-Wednesday" (1930) mapping the geography of conversion ... I traced its lines, wondering why Oma sat apart yet stayed. Hopkins in 1880s Dublin, his chalk-dusted cassock darkened by the city's brooding dampness as he stared from classroom windows, his lungs compromised by poor health, his sonnets blazing with sound and fury born from spiritual extremity.

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Sitting quietly across from her at the kitchen table in April 2024, I watched her frail hands wrap around a chipped mug of tea and tried to decode her tranquillity.

"Why don't you want it?"

My voice was tight with the weight of her refusal. She looked at me with those green eyes, a faint smile tugging at her lips, and said nothing, just sipping her tea.

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University College, Stephen's Green, May 4, 1885

Dearest Bridges,

It is the refusal of a thing that we like to have. So with me, if I could but get on, if I could but produce work, I should not mind its being buried, silenced, and going no further; but it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget

Yours faithfully,

Gerard Manley Hopkins S.J. (*Letters*, p. 220).



This period of theological wrestling forced me to confront uncomfortable questions about the nature of salvation.

Was my desire to baptise Oma about her spiritual welfare, or was it about my own need for certainty, my inability to trust in a God whose grace might extend beyond institutional parameters?



I approached faith like a prosecutor assembling a case, demanding evidence, seeking certainty in doctrines and rituals. I was impatient, frustrated by silence, and irritated by my Oma's resistance.

Harold Bloom, in *The Art of Reading Poetry*, argues that "consciousness is to poetry what marble is to sculpture: the material that is being worked." (2004, p.12). Perhaps faith, like poetry, resists direct statement, requiring instead the oblique approach of metaphor and careful sculpture.

At Stonyhurst in October 1883, Hopkins contemplated the mystery of the Trinity with a mind that had learned to embrace paradox rather than resolve it. Writing by beeswax candlelight as autumn wind rattled the windows, he tried to capture for Bridges the delicate balance between certainty and wonder that defined his faith.



Stonyhurst, Blackburn. Oct. 24 1883

Dearest Bridges, ...

There are three persons, each God and each the same, the one, the only God: to some people this is a 'dogma'... to others it is news of their dearest friend or friends, leaving them all their lives balancing whether they have three heavenly friends or one, not that they have any doubt on the subject, but that their knowledge leaves their minds swinging, poised, but on the quiver

Your affectionate friend,

Gerard M. Hopkins S.J. (*Letters*, p. 187).



Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry pirouettes with ecstasy and despair. His verses, etched in the shadow of personal and spiritual struggle, reveal a thread stitched through creation's wild beauty and the soul's dark nights, where doubt and faith dance in fierce tension.

Viktor Shklovsky's (1917) concept of defamiliarisation is relevant here: Hopkins' rhythm makes language strange, forcing readers to experience familiar words with fresh intensity. Similarly, Oma's silence in St. Thomas' defamiliarised conventional faith, stripping it to its essence, revealing what remained when ritual and doctrine fell away.

I imagine Hopkins on that Welsh hill, his cassock damp with dew, his eyes fixed on the falcon's arc, finding God in motion where Oma found Him in stillness. Her gaze on St. Thomas' sanctuary lamp, her hands folded in her charcoal wool coat, held a similar reverence, her faith a quiet flame needing no words to burn.

Susan Kwilecki's observation that "the effort to straddle the divide between desire and reality when it splits wide open is the essence of coping" (1999, p. 112) illuminates both Hopkins' terrible sonnets and Oma's hospital calm. Both faced ultimate questions: Hopkins confronting spiritual desolation, Oma confronting mortality, yet neither collapsed into despair. Their coping strategies differed; his was linguistic, hers was silent, but both demonstrated what Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain* (1985) identifies as hardship's capacity to strip experience to its essential truth.





IN MEMORIAM BERTUS ROZEMA

1915 ~ 2002

submitted by J. Giezen

On Sunday 14th July, Bertus Rozema left this world. He had been in the Nambour hospital with serious problems. Sometime before his funeral we were in an RSL club at the right time and observed the 6 o'clock ceremony. Many people were there and repeated the "lest we forget". At that time I thought forget what? The places where these men were active? Their names? Their regiments? or their sacrifices? When at Bert's funeral these thoughts came back to me.

Who would ever remember in what actions Bert was involved in WWII? Two books were written about the actions of the Knok Ploeg, KP, (a fighting unit of the Dutch underground in Friesland), that mention amongst many others Bert Rozema. Because he was one of us I will tell one of the stories again that he told me and that is mentioned in one of those books.

I select this one because it was a personal action, not a group, although other members were in the neighbourhood. As I did not tape it, I must apologise for some possible factual errors, but the essential part of the story is correct.

We have to go back first to WWII, 1940, to get the picture correct. The Germans overran the Netherlands in May. Initially very little changed, there was still a lot for sale in the shops. But that changed. In 1941 the Germans starting recruiting labour, not by advertising, but by force. These men were sent to Germany to work in the factories. More and more people went underground and started an underground movement. Their actions irritated the occupiers to a high degree. In all provinces they started to assemble "todeskandidate"(candidates for execution). These were socially important people, heads of schools, lawyers, town mayors, etc. also some suspected underground people, these were put into prisons and camps. Its purpose was only that when the time came, i.e when some action of the underground was considered irritating enough, a number of them would be shot.

In 1942 the Germans increased the transport of Jews to Germany, with an interim station in Westerbork. The population stood by, powerless. Until the railway workers began their strike that stopped those transports, albeit temporarily.

In that period a convoy arrived at the Leeuwarder prison. An officer in the first car presented his papers and got a number of prisoners to load in the truck following him., these were almost all todeskandidate. The third truck had a platoon of soldiers armed with automatic weapons to avoid any prisoner escaping..

Some distance outside Leeuwarden, direction Harlingen, they stopped. In this area the paddocks were low lying, surrounded by 10 ft wide canals. There was one with a light bridge to the roadside. The prisoners were put in the centre of that paddock and a group of soldiers got orders to shoot all prisoners, with their Mausers, this was quickly done. The group left the scene, but one truck with a few soldiers was left to guard the site and make sure that no corpse was removed and that by daytime all passers by could see the revenge taken by the Nazis.

The owner of the land and his people who lived a few paddocks further away from the road had witnessed the incident and had warned the KP. It was assumed all were dead. However when darkness fell in the quiet evening one could hear moaning, indicating there must be at least one survivor.

How to get him out? Here is where Bert came in.

When darkness was complete he got one of the boats, flat bottomed shallow draft and wide, that were used to transfer cattle from one paddock to the other and for carrying milk and fodder, and started on his own towards the fallen prisoners.

When close by, he had to paddle with his hands, laying flat on the boat. All the time avoiding alerting the guards. Crawling towards the heap of bodies he had found the only survivor quick enough, but had to remove corpses to get him free. This man, Gerardus, was unharmed and had kept himself quiet when the officer had inspected the corpses and had shot some of the other survivors. There were still within sixty meters from the truck.

Gerardus and Bertus crawled back in the boat and Bertus pushed the thing back all the way back to the farm. Gerardus was brought into another secret address and survived the war. Bertus saw him in the early nineties for the last time, he died thereafter.

It strikes the author how simply a thing like this is told, but what tragedy it in fact was.

Putting your own life at such a high risk to save one, possibly more, possibly seriously wounded others. Lest we forget, how appropriate.

It is interesting, to say the least, that stories appeared recently in The Netherlands, about others being mentioned for the above actions, even telling that Gerardus was wounded and had to be brought to a hospital.

In Memoriam of Bertus Rozema, 2002. Produced by J. Giezen on behalf of Wapenbroeders,
NESWA Queensland



The final months of Oma's life became an alchemical process that transformed my understanding completely. I entered this period still clinging to institutional solutions like base metal, but through the slow work of dissolution and distillation, these rigid certainties were transmuted into something entirely different: a more supple comprehension of how grace operates in the world.

Oma didn't want baptism because her troubles *were* her baptism, a rite of passage etched in war's cold grip and cancer's slow, relentless march. In 1945, as Oma drew her first breath, while Dutch families knelt in secret, their rosaries hidden beneath floorboards, their whispered "Heer, help ons" a thread of hope amid curfews and raids emerged.

In Friesland, resistance fighters like Bertus carried pocket Bibles alongside their pistols, their faith a shield against the Gestapo's knock. I imagine him slipping through Leeuwarden's alleys, his breath fogging in the frost, muttering, "Heer, wees met ons," as he hid a Jewish child's shoes beneath his coat. Oma's faith didn't need such acts. It was a thread woven through experience, a flame kindled by survival, not extinguished by its absence from the baptismal font.

Oma refused baptism because she was already saved, not by water, not by words, but by a trust forged in Sint Bonifatius's shadows, carried through decades of quiet resilience. "God knows me," she said that day at the kitchen table, her tea cooling untouched, her voice a soft rebuke. "He doesn't need a priest to tell Him."

Through the spring and summer of 2024/25, as Oma's condition deteriorated, I found myself leaning on Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry, whose poetry became a lens to articulate the grace I came to see in her stillness. In his verses, charged with the tension of doubt and devotion, I came to see grace in Oma's stillness.





M1056/2: The Rozema family, now of Devonport, Tasmania, Australia. L. to R. Mrs. Ali Rozema, 36, Bert, 11, Mr. Bert Rozema, 42, and Marian, 13. Australian Official Photograph by Don Edwards. February, 1958.

Oma peacefully passed away in a hospice room at Wolper Jewish Hospital in Woollahra, its sandstone walls glowing under a heavy June sky. The hospital, a haven of quiet dignity, stood as a testament to resilience, its history tied to Sydney's Jewish community, who built it as a refuge after their own trials of displacement and survival – a fitting place for Oma's final moments, an ode to her father's efforts all those years ago, her thread of faith echoing his unyielding spirit.

In the hush that falls when the final sentence is written, and life's book is finally closed, there is the kestral. In that moment, I could almost hear the whispered thank-yous of all those who would carry forward her stories, her recipes, her fierce insistence that kindness was not weakness but the strongest foundation upon which to build a world.

I held her hand as her breathing slowed, her chest diminishing with each exhale, her cool, fragile fingers loosening in mine. The monitor's beep faded to a flat hum, a sound swallowed by the room's quiet: the tick of a clock, the rustle of a nurse's footsteps, the distant hum of nearby traffic, a reminder of life pulsing beyond the walls.

No priest came, no water touched her brow, no last rites to mark her passage, no hurried baptism to assuage my fear. Yet her flame glowed, warm, eternal, a quiet ember.

✘ ✘ ✘

In Sint Bonifatius, SS guards turned from her mother's cries.

"O Christ, Christ, come quickly"

Bertus fled through Friesland's fog, false papers in hand.

"The cross to her she calls Christ to her".

In Leeuwarden in 1946, churches crumbled, yet prayers rose.

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God"

Cancer's verdict came in 2024; Oma sought only her tea.

"In my end is my beginning"

My frantic calls to priests sought her soul's salvation.

"I am gall, I am heartburn"

"Why fear God's love?" she asked, tea cooling in April's light.

"Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata"

At Wolper Hospital, her breath slowed, hand soft in mine.

"Brute beauty and valour and act"

Her life, a silent hymn, wove faith through war's ruins and hospice calm.

"It is the refusal of a thing that we like to have"

✘ ✘ ✘

Woollahra, Jun. 15, 2025

Dearest Oma,

The kettle still whistles the same way it did when you made our afternoon tea. Some mornings I hear it and forget, for a fleeting moment, that you're not here. I keep thinking of Hopkins in his Dublin room, writing to Bridges about education, art, poetry, and life's mystery. He wrote poetry, believing no one would read it. But he was compelled to write his poems anyway.

I sit in your pew now. Third from the back, on the left side. The sanctuary lamp still dances in pirouettes, its eternal arabesque a graceful reminder of your love.

Affectionately yours, forever,

Liefje

✘ ✘ ✘

*“To do the useful thing, to say the courageous thing, to contemplate the beautiful thing: that is
enough for one man’s life.”*

— T.S. Eliot

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Max Sheffield

The Tender Affect

“

My body of work examines interspecies connection as an affective imprint that persists beyond physical presence.

”

REFLECTION STATEMENT

When the inevitable clock of life strikes twelve, what remains to animate us? For my grandfather, perhaps it is his years as a gardener. For his late rescued greyhound, Katie, perhaps it is the memory of a coerced life on the racetrack. These reflections led me to question the idea of legacy, which often privileges achievement over connection. I intend to reposition meaning in the quiet but enduring relationships we share with other beings.

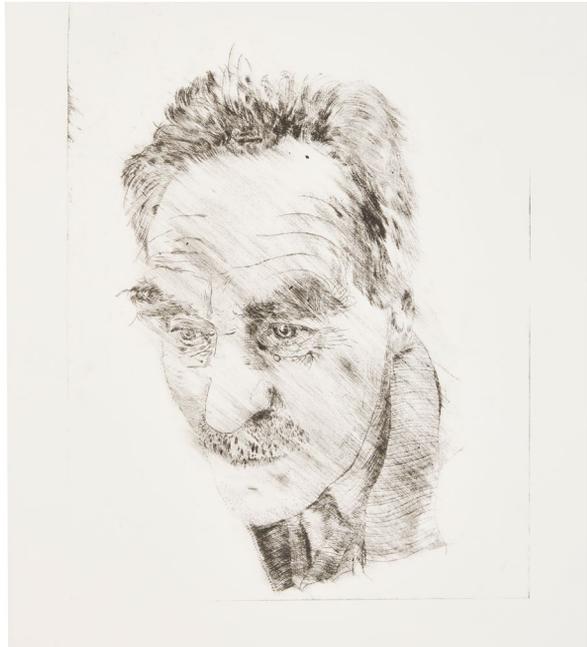
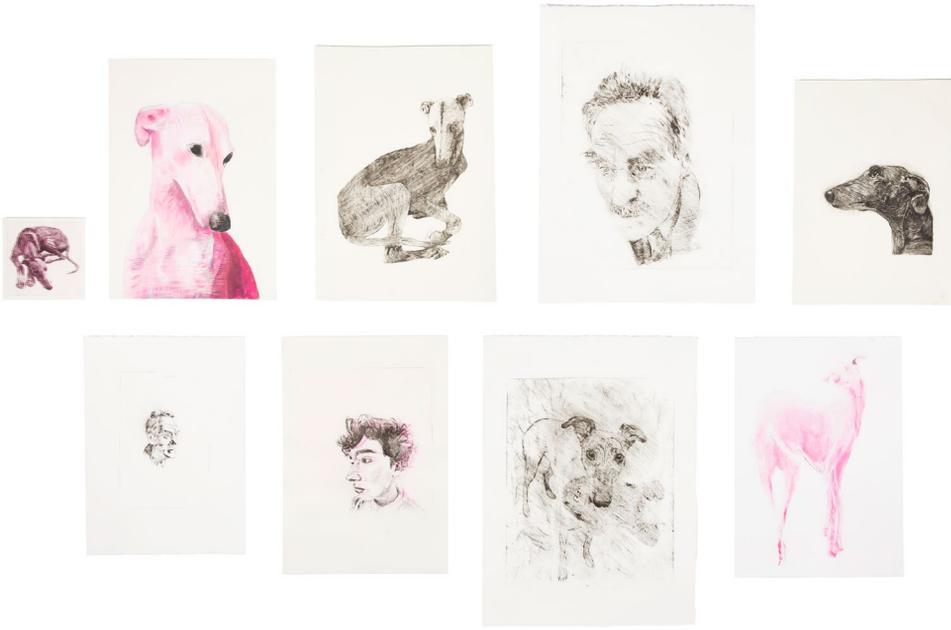
My body of work examines interspecies connection as an affective imprint that persists beyond physical presence. Through drypoint etching, I render each strand of fur and each crease in my grandfather's skin with intricate linework that invites closeness and embraces imperfection. The tactility of the technique aligns with affect theory because the burrs retain ink in unpredictable ways, creating a sensory analogue for the ruptures and inconsistencies of memory.

I chose drypoint for its resistance and the physical negotiation it demands. The unpredictable retention of ink becomes a visual record of emotional residue. In contrast, the restrained introduction of painting brings soft washes and gestural warmth that temper the severity of the etched marks. The dialogue between the two media reflects the tension between the indelible traces of memory and the ephemeral tenderness of lived experience.

The limited palette of black and pink carries symbolic weight. Black gestures toward grief and the obscured nature of recollection. Pink introduces warmth, care and human vulnerability. These colours operate together to reinforce the central inquiry of the work, which is the interplay of presence and loss through connection.

Influential Artists: Lucian Freud, Käthe Kollwitz, Jake Muirhead, and Diane Victor.







Charles Biddle

Cardboard Furniture for Cambodian School

(Nominated for SHAPE)

“

The integration of bilingual English-Khmer learning resources transformed the furniture from a static object into an active educational tool.

”

REFLECTION STATEMENT

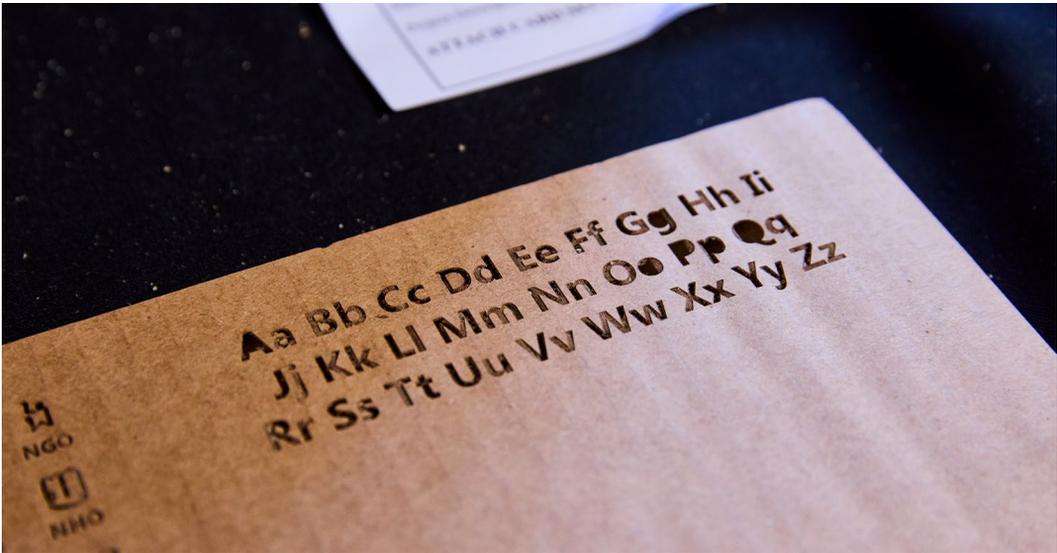
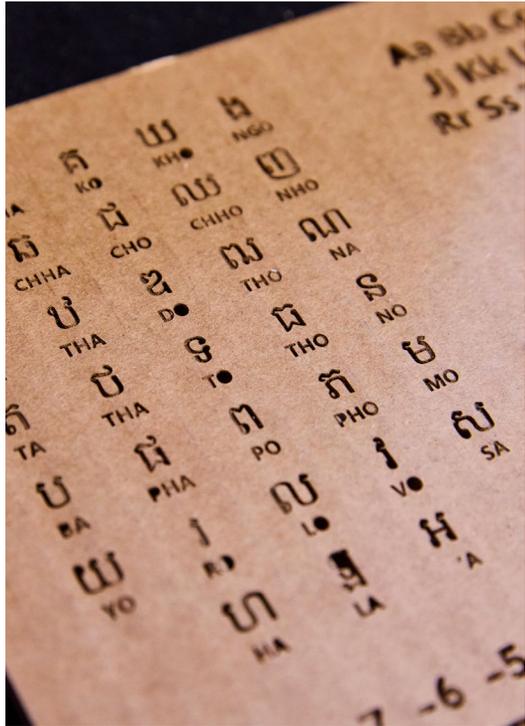
Project Resala represents the culmination of my learning in Design and Technology and reflects a deliberate shift from designing for assessment to designing for real-world impact. From the outset, my intention was not simply to produce a functional piece of furniture, but to address an authentic need faced by students in rural Cambodian classrooms: access to durable, ergonomic, and educational learning resources.

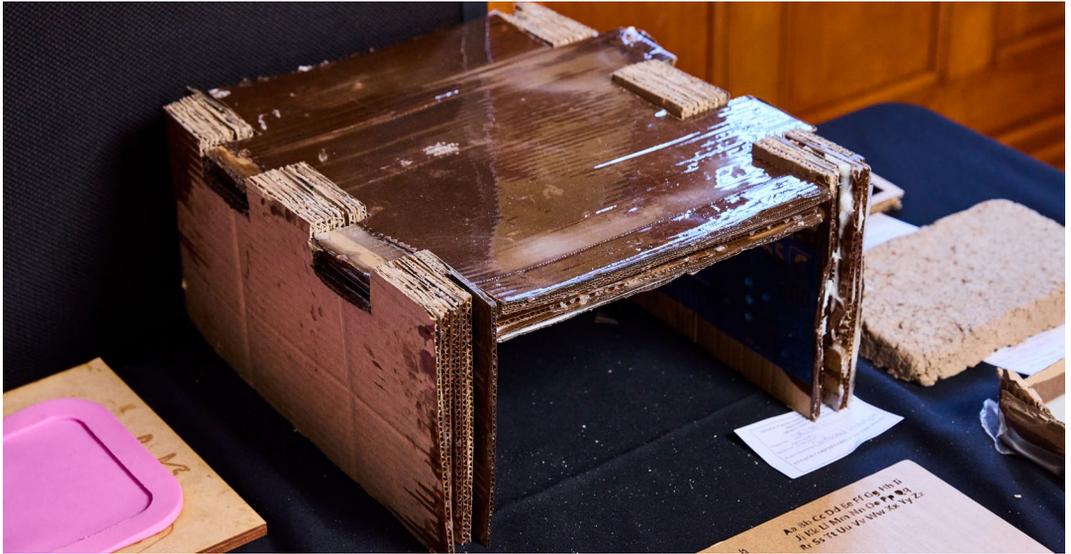
Throughout the process, I was challenged to balance sustainability with structural integrity. Using recycled cardboard as the base material forced me to rigorously test reinforcements, adhesives, and resin coatings to ensure the final desk and chair were strong enough for daily use while remaining environmentally responsible. This iterative prototyping process sharpened my problem-solving skills and reinforced the importance of evidence-based design decisions rather than assumptions.

The integration of bilingual English-Khmer learning resources transformed the furniture from a static object into an active educational tool, reinforcing my belief that good design should extend beyond form and function to social impact. Developing a donation website further expanded the project's scope, teaching me how design can mobilise community involvement and sustain long-term change.

Overall, Project Resala reflects my growth as a designer who values purpose, accountability, and empathy, and has confirmed my desire to pursue design that meaningfully improves lives beyond my immediate context.







Alexander Bradley

Mandate



Watch *Mandate* here

“

My short film, 'Mandate', interrogates the paralytic conscience of the contemporary centre-left politician... juxtapos[ing] futile political obstinacy with the unrelenting rhythms of the land.

”

REFLECTION STATEMENT

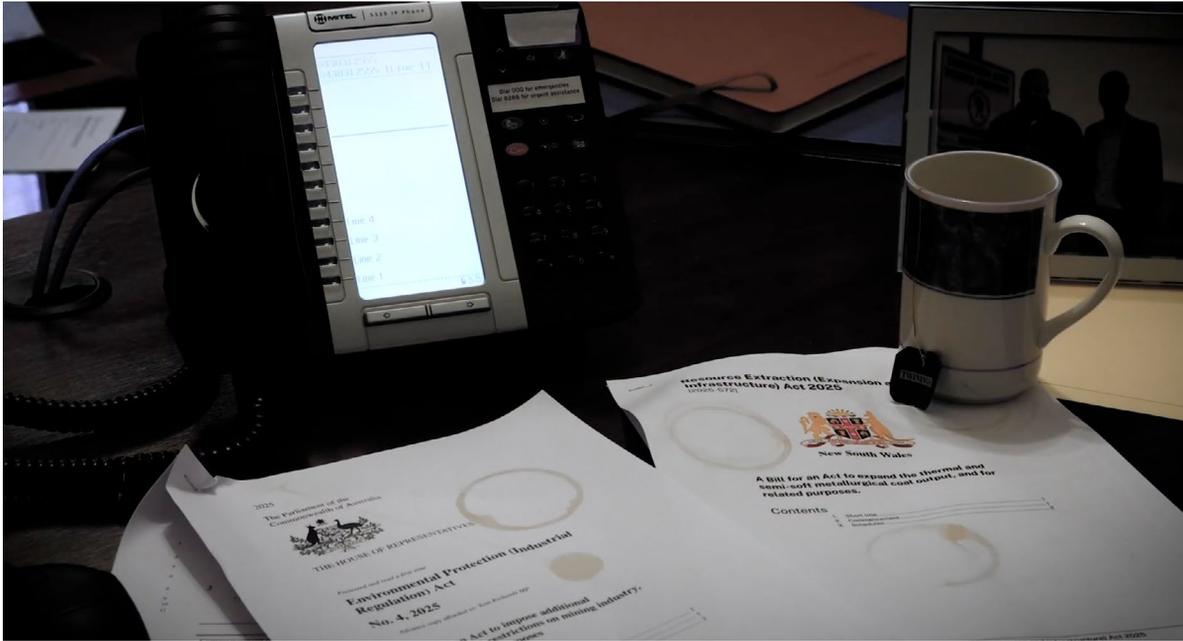
Caught between the economic allure of coal and the escalating imperative of ecological preservation, Australia's political debate remains immobilised in cycles of indecision. My short film, *'Mandate'*, interrogates the paralytic conscience of the contemporary centre-left politician. Drawing from the conceptual framework of deep ecology, my film anthropomorphises the Hunter Valley landscape as a spectral presence, ancient and unyielding, set against the fleeting vanity of human politics. In doing so, I juxtapose futile political obstinacy with the unrelenting rhythms of the land, exploring how moral paralysis and structural complicity perpetuate environmental degradation.

My project developed from an interest in the causes of contemporary civic disengagement, though the overwhelming demonstration of engagement during the 2025 Federal Election tempered the contextual power of a critique of apathy. This facilitated a recalibration of purpose into an examination of structural complicity, ecological temporality, and the fractured subjectivity of political actors.

I drew on deep ecology and Australian Gothic aesthetics that prompted an approach in which the Hunter Valley landscape assumed rhetorical agency within my film. Filming on location intensified this thematic direction, revealing the disquieting coexistence of pastoral beauty and industrial incisions that informed the film's *mise en scène*.

The film also needed to avoid oversimplification of a complex political issue. The development of the character of Tom Richards as a deliberately opaque anti-hero allowed internal conflict to replace facile moral didacticism. His hesitancy is reinforced through the appropriation of recursive symbolic motifs, such as tea, telephone, and his sterile ritual that defers decision. The ambiguity of my film's denouement deliberately refuses false catharsis, forcing the audience to confront Australian and global climate politics marked by an extreme paucity of action. The land's spectral resurgence in the closing sequence compounds Tom's Prufrockian uncertainty, dominating the frame with its subterranean rumble, yet ambiguous in meaning – groaning in terminal decline or reasserting its endurance.

Ultimately, the paralysis of my protagonist serves as an analogue for a national malady that must be disrupted if genuine climate action is ever to emerge.



EPIGRAPH

'This is the way the world ends'

BLACK SCREEN.

Vibrant sounds of birdsong fades in.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUNTER VALLEY – MORNING

A wide ESTABLISHING SHOT. Rolling green hills bisect fog clinging to the tree lines. Farmland patchworked across the landscape. Birds wheel slowly through the sky. Thin power lines divide the frame. Barbed wire fences guard the edges of the paddocks

The LOUD RINGING of a telephone pierces the silence.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN.

A deep, low HUM begins, a sound that resembles wind, slowly intensifying — not music, but a vibrating ambient rumble.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK ROOM - MORNING

The LOUD RINGING continues.

Windows with shutters drawn block the morning light. A DESK sits in near-darkness; old wooden surface, scratched, worn. Dust dances in streaks of invading light. A classic black office phone vibrates, feverish with each ring. An ageing desktop computer casts stark blue light over the surface of the desk. A mug half-full of stale tea leaves dark rings on the pages of two government reports: One reads - Environmental Protection (Industrial Regulation) Act 2025; the other reads - Resource Extraction (Expansion and Infrastructure) Act 2025.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUNTER VALLEY – MORNING

A wide ESTABLISHING SHOT. A green hill, cut at its peak to expose its skeleton. It is an open cut mine. The volume of trees deteriorates approaching the top – which holds few leafless trunks standing isolated.

The SOUND of the PHONE continues, incongruously.

The ‘ambient rumble’ resumes, wind rushing through the valley. Industrial ambiance and roaring are audible.

CUT TO:

EXT. COAL MINE – MORNING

The camera GLIDES FORWARD, slow and mechanical, as if pulled along a conveyor.

On either side: terraced walls of exposed earth, jagged machinery, powerlines strung taut against the sky.

Haul roads cut through the land like scars.

The INDUSTRIAL ROAR intensifies — closer now, suffocating. The grinding, clanging, and low tremors of extraction merge into a single relentless clamour.

Dust drifts across the frame, veiling the horizon in a pale haze.

CROSS-FADE TO:

INT. DARK OFFICE - MORNING

A MEDIUM SHOT reveals more of the dark office: A kitchenette with kettle and tea cup.

The PHONE continues to RING. Behind the kitchenette, the camera pans to reveal a faded political poster — slogans deprived of energy when concealed by the darkness.

The telephone answering service is heard from across the room.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

You’ve reached the office of TOM RICHARDS, Member for New England. Please leave a message after the tone.

A BEEP.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUNTER VALLEY - DAY

A freight train ROLLS forward, its carriages clattering across the frame, intruding upon the open fields.

The IMAGE BLENDS with a COAL TRUCK driving in the same direction, left to right. Its bulk swallows the horizon, absorbing the blue of the sky into its motion.

The mechanical intrusion grates against the stillness of the land.

CALLER (V.O.)

(hesitant, restrained) Hey... it's me.

(beat)

I saw the trucks rolling in this morning. We won't be left in the dark. Not this time.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWCASTLE COAL PORT - CONTINUOUS

WIDE SHOT from across the water. Black mounds of coal piled high. Conveyor belts stretch out like veins. Ships anchored, waiting. The SOUND here is gentler, windier — the call continues over this image.

CALLER (V.O.) (cont'd)

(a breath, barely audible snuffle)

To swell some progress, I'll start a scene or two, if that's what needs to be done.

CUT TO:

INT. SAME OFFICE - MORNING

A wide, still shot. No phone in frame. SOUND of the message echoes from another room.

CALLER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Do you dare?

BEEP.

A light flicks on, illuminating the kitchenette. TOM RICHARDS enters; pristine suit, yawning.

The SOUND of news broadcasts as voiceovers detailing coal mine expansions and environmental crisis, then reports of economic reliance and jobs.

He drops his briefcase on the bench and activates the kettle. A screeching WHISTLE reverberates through the office. On the table: a single teaspoon glints. Steam snakes upward.

The SOUND of the KETTLE merges with echoes of the mine and industrial clamour.

TENSE and DEPRESSIVE MUSIC begins.

TOM RICHARDS walks to sit at his desk, replacing the stale tea and stirring slowly.

T.S. ELIOT (V.O.)

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, Then how should I begin

To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?

And how should I presume?

The TELEPHONE rings. TOM RICHARDS' hand creeps towards the receiver, before withdrawing.

Silence swells. The air is heavy.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

TOM RICHARDS turns over the HOURGLASS on his desk.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

Annotated bills lie open in front of him – a facade purporting to order a chaotic political system.

NEW SOUTH WALES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
RESOURCE EXTRACTION (EXPANSION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE) ACT 2025

A Bill for an Act to expand the thermal and semi-soft metallurgical coal output, and for related purposes.

PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (INDUSTRIAL REGULATION)
ACT 2025

A Bill for an Act to impose additional environmental restrictions on mining industry, and for related purposes.

He opens the bill on his left.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

TOM RICHARDS picks up the FRAMED PHOTO on his desk. The photo depicts him and his father, standing in front of the gated entrance to a coal mine.

The SOUND of MINING and INDUSTRY returns.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUNTER VALLEY LANDSCAPE – AFTERNOON

TITLE: *'This is the way the world ends'*

The wind howls through skeletal gums. Cloud shadows sweep across the wounded slopes. The rumble grows — as if the land groans.

A DARK SHADOW creeps across the landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. COAL MINE – AFTERNOON

A mine roars, its whetted protrusions filling the frame, with only a slither of Hunter verdure peaking over its rim. In the foreground: pouring sable black coal into piles. Dust lifts from the soil and hangs in the air.

The grinding rattle of industry reverberates through the afternoon air. The image slowly fades to black and white.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION – AFTERNOON

A COAL TRAIN roars into view. The image slowly fades to black and white. An overlay from METROPOLIS emerges.

FADE TO:

METROPOLIS: THE MOLOCH

The Moloch absorbs the frame, yet the SOUND of the COAL TRAIN continues beneath.

SOUND intensifies: wind, earth shifting, rising tension.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – WAITING ROOM

Sarah sits tense in the office waiting room, gripping an envelope and environmental report tightly.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – LATE AFTERNOON

The telephone intercom buzzes.

SECRETARY (V.O.)

Sarah De Marco from the Muswellbrook Environmental Action Group is here to see you.

TOM reluctantly moves his hand to press a button on the telephone. He sighs.

TOM

(a sorrowful tone)

Send her in.

Sarah enters, a folder thick with annotated reports tucked under her arm. Her gaze meets his, and in that moment — familiarity, history, and silent disappointment.

She sits. The report opens between them like a gulf. It reads: Annual Climate Change Statement 2024.

No dialogue. Just the rustle of paper as Tom flips through the report. Tight framing on his eyes: distant.

SARAH

(a militant tone)

You're gonna want to read that.

TOM finally meets her gaze.

CLOSE-UP: His hand gesturing towards the mug of tea.

TOM

Tea?

SARAH sighs.

The telephone rings sharply.

SARAH reaches to pick up the FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH. She holds it in front of TOM.

SARAH CONT'D

We were twenty when we marched with him. Your father believed in more than work.

(beat)

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERCUT SHOTS OF LANDSCAPE AND INDUSTRY

Cut to the ticking of the clock.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE

SARAH throws the BROWN ENVELOPE on TOM'S desk.

SARAH CONT'D

Are you going to answer that, Tom?

TOM

Just ignore it.

(beat)

Look, there will be time...

Sarah stands, and silently exits, sending an exhausted glance before closing the door behind her.

MUSIC from Picnic at Hanging Rock plays, as images of landscape infiltrate the office through cross-fade.

TOM stirs his tea as SARAH exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE HUNTER VALLEY – MONTAGE

Various foreboding shots of the hunter, some low-angle, reflections of the ancient power of the land. Time-lapses transition from afternoon sun to cold dusk, shadows migrating across rocks and hills.

A CLOSE-UP of the HOURGLASS is blended against the sky.

TITLE: *'This is the way the world ends'*

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – EVENING

TOM RICHARDS slowly opens the brown envelope.

He reluctantly reaches out to reveal its contents: a coroner's report on the death of ARTHUR RICHARDS, dated 2004.

CORONERS COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Inquest: Inquest into the death of Arthur Richards

Date of Death: November 12, 2004

Cause of Death: Complications of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and Progressive Massive Fibrosis, consistent with prolonged occupational exposure to coal dust (Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis, CWP - "Black Lung Disease").

Manner of Death: Occupational exposure to hazard.

Tom's breath stutters. A jittering hand crawls to his desk drawer, sliding it open to reveal a carefully preserved framed payslip from 1983. A yellowed stub, encased in cheap glass. Scrawled in pen on the white frame:

Dad's First Paycheck!

The company logo is etched into the cheque — a deep blue globe behind staunch text that reads LATITUDE ENERGY.

The MUSIC from Picnic at Hanging Rock intensifies.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOM'S FATHER AND COAL PILES – FLASHBACK - NIGHT

A flashback to TOM'S father, ARTHUR RICHARDS, tending to a fire against the backdrop of piles of coal, ominously lit by floodlights at night.

SEAMUS HEANEY (V.O.)

Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – EVENING

TOM'S clock is overlaid with the CLOCK from METROPOLIS, signalling his return to the present and the fleeting time.

Tom drops his teaspoon as an email announces itself on his computer with a gentle ding. A cold, sterile glow from the computer screen cuts the darkness. Switching from an ordered calendar, he opens his inbox.

NEW EMAIL – SUBJECT: “Great to Catch Up – Let’s Talk Strategy”
FROM: Mitchell Carrow, mcarrow@latitudeenergy.com.au

He opens it. The same logo beams from the header. A contrived message awaits him.

“Tom, fantastic to hear from the party about your position on the resource bill – the board was thrilled! Let’s lock in that dinner before the vote. There’s funding and other support available for aligned messaging. You’re not alone in this fight! See attached talking points for tomorrow.”

RAPID CUTS between close-up shots scrolling across emails from his constituents. Disruptive and disjointed, melancholic music intensifies.

He stares in silent stasis.

Slumped into the corner of his office, he scrolls, his face carved in flickering blue light, eyes dragging over each email from members of his community...

“Why won’t you return our calls?”

“We backed you. You backed out.”

“You said you’d listen.”

“Do you dare?”

“Are you a good person or was I wrong?”

Each word impacts him deeply, as compounded dread precipitates disquietude.

RAPID CUTS CEASE.

He begins typing a response to one email.

Tense music begins: sounds and motifs re-emerge – howling winds and the deep hum of the land.

He pauses for a moment, then deletes the last few words.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLIAMENT OFFICE – CONTINUOUS – NIGHT

The office is in near darkness, with only thin shafts of stark light cast from TOM'S computer screen.

The desk is bare except for TWO BILLS: one legislating coal expansion, the other environmental restriction.

Tom sits motionless. His hand hovers, then grips the PEN.

The CAMERA SLOWLY PULLS BACK as he SIGNS one of the bills.

The MELANCHOLIC, TENSE MUSIC FADES, ending with the final stroke of his signature.

He SNAPS the pen cap closed.

The PHONE RINGS.

A beat of silence — then the eerie score from Picnic at Hanging Rock seeps in.

The FRAME WARPS, water spilling across it, engulfing Tom in a vision of Prufrockian drowning.

The water subsides.

Tom's HAND creeps, hesitant, toward the PHONE.

As his fingers touch the receiver—

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN

The SOUND of him lifting the phone, answering it for the first time.

A rapid montage flashes; The Hunter Valley, scarred and mined, as the land reinserts itself.

On screen:

TITLE: *'Until human voices wake us, and we drown.'*

THE END.



Traevion Forrester

“

Miyagan Ngurambang

Miyagan Ngurambang is a celebration of connection. It reflects my gratitude for the relationships that strengthen me, the memories that shape me, and the cultural heritage that grounds me.

”

REFLECTION STATEMENT

Miyagan Ngurambang (Family Home/Country) is a personal reflection on my identity as a proud Wiradjuri man and the relationships, memories, and cultural ties that anchor me. This artwork represents my ongoing journey of understanding who I am, where I come from, and the significance of the people and places that continue to shape my life. As I grow older, I have become more aware of how deeply family, community, and Country influence my values and the way I move through the world.

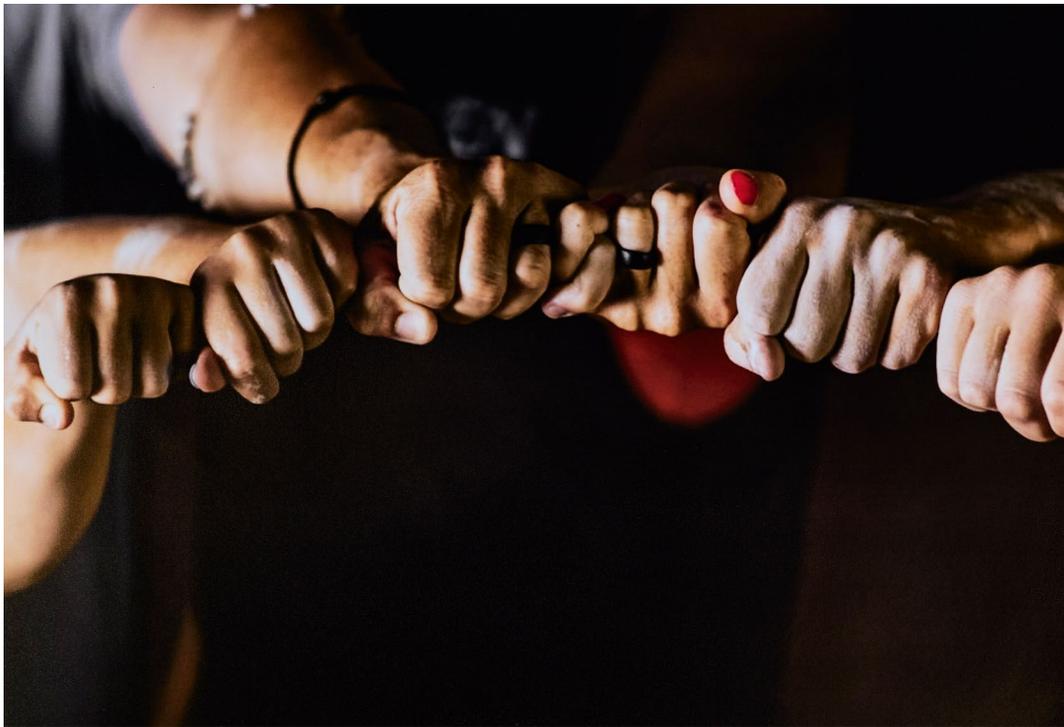
I chose to include Emu tracks throughout the artwork as a representation of ongoing journey and forward momentum. They speak to the resilience required to face life's difficulties, as well as the determination to keep progressing with purpose and cultural strength. Surrounding the central elements are shapes of different sizes and forms, symbolising memories that have impacted me in unique ways. Some moments have been small but meaningful, while others have shifted the direction of my life entirely. Together, they represent the complexity of personal growth.

Beneath these shapes are three figures representing my ancestors. Their presence acknowledges the deep cultural foundation that supports me, reminding me that my identity is connected to generations that came long before me. They guide me in ways that are not always visible but are always felt.

Miyagan Ngurambang is a celebration of connection. It reflects my gratitude for the relationships that strengthen me, the memories that shape me, and the cultural heritage that grounds me. This artwork represents not only where I come from but also the path I continue to walk with pride, resilience, and a strong sense of belonging in carving my story influenced by the past and present experiences of my ancestors.







Darcy Macpherson

Bar

(Nominated for SHAPE)

REFLECTION STATEMENT

For my Major Work, I constructed a bar for my family, inspired by my mum's long-time wish to have one. I wanted to create something that she, our family, and friends could enjoy together. This large project required a range of materials, tools, and processes. I used wide boards joined with biscuit joints, crafted a tambour to conceal the wine rack, and turned supports on the lathe to hold the bartop shelf.

Throughout the build, I developed new techniques, improved my problem-solving skills, and refined my craftsmanship. I am grateful to my teacher for their guidance in overcoming challenges and managing my time effectively.







HISTORY EXTENSION

Alexander Bradley

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My investigation evolved into an assessment of whether Khrushchevism actually constituted a departure from Stalinist repression, or merely a reconfiguration of his instruments of power.

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Evaluate the extent to which rhetoric and reform during the Khrushchev Thaw represented a substantive departure from Stalinist repression.

REFLECTION STATEMENT

Presented with the opportunity to pursue an historiographical investigation, the history of the Soviet Union emerged as an ideal topic, as it was substantially influenced by political manipulation and weaponisation to the extent that the past itself became a tool to legitimise ideology and consolidate power. My project developed from an initial interest in the mechanisms through which authoritarian states reconstruct the past to serve political imperatives, leading to a concentrated historiographical inquiry into the Khrushchev Thaw – considered a period of liberalisation and de-Stalinisation that epitomised the antithesis of Soviet repression. Nevertheless, my investigation evolved from the political motivations behind Khrushchevism, into an assessment of whether Khrushchev’s rhetoric and reforms actually constituted a departure from Stalinist repression, or merely a reconfiguration of his instruments of power.

My research examined each historian in relation to their context, methodological approach, and temporal distance from the events they described. Early readings on the malleability of the historical profession under Soviet rule (Pokrovsky; Dallin) established a framework for understanding history as a political tool. This was supplemented with close analysis of contrasting interpretations, particularly Rowe’s hindsight-driven scepticism, Parry’s contemporaneous caution, and Loewenstein’s postmodern focus on ‘history from below’. Engaging these perspectives in dialogue eventually shattered prevailing Thaw-era myths of Soviet liberalisation.

The major work ultimately argues that the Thaw represented only a carefully delimited deviation from repression. While Khrushchev's rhetoric dismantled aspects of Stalin's personality cult and briefly expanded cultural space, the underlying structures of despotic dominion remained intact, and certain controls became more covert and thus more insidious. My assessment of whether Khrushchevism served as an intensification of Stalinist controls hinges on a contemplation of how covert and concealed repression, albeit to a lesser extent, might be more insidious than the overt and brutal mechanisms of Stalin it ostensibly replaced.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

"We were scared – really scared. We were afraid the Thaw might unleash a flood, which we wouldn't be able to control and which could drown us."

– N. S. Khrushchev

Beneath the surface of Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinist 'Thaw' in the mid-20th century lay a calculated reconstruction of history orchestrated to consolidate power and serve political imperatives. His tenure as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from September 1953 to October 1964 emerged from a turbulent power struggle including Georgy Malenkov and Lavrentiy Beria following Stalin's death, compelling Khrushchev to solidify his authority upon an exposé of Stalin's egregious crimes and contravention of the principles of Marxist-Bolshevism. The global collective memory of Soviet history views Khrushchevism as the juncture whereby the veil of repressive censorship dissolved and the Cult of the Personality was undermined by renewed faith in the principles of Party governance, associating his rule with the cessation of Stalin brutality. In his 1993 analysis, W. J. Tompson writes that *'Khrushchev's reformist vision was conceived as an attempt to return to an unsullied Leninism by stripping the system of the accumulated layers of distortion.'*¹ Yet, closer revisionist inspection of the Khrushchev Thaw reveals a leader who engaged in silent continuation of Stalinist governance, as the historian became a political tool – 'Pravda' disseminating his major policies² – and the past malleable to his political aims. American historian of the Soviet Union Alexander Dallin reflected on the reforms in 1956, writing that *'the new leadership has been as eager as the old to rewrite*

1 Tompson, W. J. (1993). Khrushchev and Gorbachev as Reformers: A Comparison. *British Journal of Political Science*, 23(1), 77-105. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/194068>

2 Taubman, W. (2004). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. Norton.

*the past to bolster its own status.*³ This extensively influenced the historiography of the U.S.S.R., both contemporaneously and retrospectively, serving the consolidation of power and propagating ideological superiority during the Cold War. Therefore, Khrushchev's reforms must not be understood as a departure from censorship and repression, but rather a recalibration of the same mechanisms of control to align with his contemporary circumstances.

On the 25th of February, 1956, Khrushchev addressed the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences*, delivering a sweeping denunciation of Stalin and an exposé of his crimes. Historical analysis of the speech, both contemporaneous and post-Thaw, provides insightful inquiry into Khrushchev's intention and actualisation of reform. The 'secret speech' launched an agenda of de-Stalinisation that dispatched seismic shockwaves throughout a party that had come to worship Stalin as a deity. Western academic historian Donnalee Rowe, writing in 1964 – Khrushchev's final year as First Secretary – reflected on the purpose and impact of the speech in his Honors Thesis presented to the University of Richmond, 'Khrushchev's secret speech and the aftermath'⁴. Having observed the near entirety of Khrushchev's tenure, Rowe approaches the speech with the hindsight of a decade marked by geopolitical confrontation and continued repression – including the retention of the fundamental structure of the Soviet State and one-party system⁵. His thesis is thereby reflective of both a liberal-democratic suspicion of Soviet self-representation and a post-Thaw assessment of the extent of Khrushchev's departure from Stalinism. He writes, '*Although Khrushchev declared that the purpose of his speech was to show how the cult grew, he devoted more time to a criticism of Stalin.*'⁶ This immediately illuminates a key contention over Khrushchev's purpose – purportedly a didactic warning against the danger of cult-like despotism, yet one with a far greater focus on achieving the political aim of eroding respect for the former leader to allow Khrushchev to fill the resultant power vacuum. While an analysis of Stalinism may be an effective rhetorical tool to critique the general concept of a cult of personality, Khrushchev's narrow focus on Stalin specifically and his deliberate omission of ongoing repression conducted by other Soviet leaders suggests political intention; '*Instead of analyzing political, social and economic roots, Khrushchev used an un-*

3 Dallin, A. (1962b). *Russia under Khrushchev: An Anthology from Problems of Communism*. In A. Brumberg (Ed.), *Routledge eBooks* (pp. 24-43). Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003376293>. Chapter of interest: Recent Soviet Historiography.

4 Rowe, D. (1964). *Khrushchev's secret speech and the aftermath* [Honors Theses]. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1026/>

5 Taubman, W. (2004). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. Norton.

6 Rowe, D. (1964). *Khrushchev's secret speech and the aftermath* [Honors Theses]. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1026/>

*Marxist explanation in stressing the deficiencies in Stalin's character.*⁷ This view of the speech as politically motivated is further supported by Rowe as he questions Khrushchev's inclusion of Stalin's strategic military blunders⁸ – seemingly acts of incompetence, irrelevant to a critique of Stalinist repression – and professes his own prowess, asserting that he *'knew what was needed to further the war effort but was hindered by Stalin's stupidity.'*⁹ Indeed, in presenting himself as comparatively infallible, Khrushchev is effectively establishing a personality cult of his own. As such, with the benefit of hindsight, Rowe is able to identify clear indications of political self-interest embedded in the speech – signals that, at the time of its delivery, were perhaps ambiguous. It is precisely this retrospective clarity that empowers Rowe to acknowledge Khrushchevist rhetoric as disingenuous. Therefore, the extent to which the Secret Speech was representative of a departure from the Cult of Personality as a form of repression is diminished.

Presenting a contrasting perspective in 1956, the year the speech was delivered, Dr. Albert Parry, (née. Abraham Jospovich Paretsky) a Russian-born academic and historian, contends that the speech must be understood as a legitimate denunciation of certain Stalinist practices of repression, however an 'endorsement by omission' of others. Parry, who had fled Russia after the revolution and emigrated to the United States in 1921, writes, in *'hardly [expressing] any regret and revulsion at Stalin's murder of millions of non-Communists,' 'not [explaining] why he, Khrushchev, and his associates should not be on the same bench of the accused with Stalin,' 'nor... [condemning] terror as such,*¹⁰ Khrushchev appears to be selectively criticising the aspects of Stalinism he intends to suspend, while cautiously avoiding repudiation of equally egregious forms of repression that were to be continued. Parry, having escaped the censorship and oppression of the system himself, extends this notion, writing that 'what Khrushchev calls *"the tragedy of Stalin"* is actually *the tragedy of the Soviet system itself, ...begun by... Lenin, ...who first suppressed liberties [and] introduced terror as "necessary"*'.¹¹ He thereby exposes the dichotomy between denouncing Stalinism while endorsing Leninism; *'Lenin begot Stalin.'*¹² Indeed,

7 Rowe, D. (1964). *Khrushchev's secret speech and the aftermath* [Honors Theses]. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1026/>

8 Khrushchev, N. S. (1956, February 25). *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences*. Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/khrushchevs-secret-speech-cult-personality-and-its-consequences-delivered-twentieth-party>

9 Rowe, D. (1964). *Khrushchev's secret speech and the aftermath* [Honors Theses]. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1026/>

10 Parry, A. (1956). The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's "Second Funeral." *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15(4), 463-476. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3001305>

11 Parry, A. (1956). The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's "Second Funeral." *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15(4), 463-476. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3001305>

12 Parry, A. (1956). The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's "Second Funeral." *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15(4), 463-476. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3001305>

a consideration of Khrushchev's political incentives reveals his increasing reliance on certain Stalinist practices¹³. Crucially, these differing interpretations of Rowe and Parry are shaped by the time that each historian was writing: Parry, writing in 1956, responded to the immediate omissions in the speech and inferred that Khrushchev intended to selectively suspend only some elements of Stalinism; Rowe, writing in 1964 with the benefit of hindsight, had witnessed Khrushchev's failure to substantively act on the speech's rhetoric, and this temporal distance compelled him to interrogate the speech more critically and perceive in it not just selective omission, but wholesale insincerity. However, Parry's earlier analysis does dampen the extent to which the speech should be evaluated as fundamentally deceptive.

A post-modern, revisionist view of the speech by Karl E. Loewenstein (2006) examines its revelation of public opinion, thereby uncovering an historical silence concomitant with authoritarianism. Loewenstein considers the dissemination of the speech by the U.S. State Department a stimulant for societal discourse which '*marked the re-emergence of public opinion*',¹⁴ particularly considering the contents of the speech were, at least purportedly, intended to be heard exclusively by party elites. While this leak did not immediately trigger political liberalisation, its profound impact on citizens from all classes of Soviet society – including those in executive public office – seeded the notion that the Party may be open to criticism and increasingly receptive of discourse. Initially, '*Khrushchev could not accept conclusions suggested by his own speech: that the party was fallible and would benefit by listening to outside critiques*',¹⁵ however the speech marked a turning point in Soviet history, beginning a trend whereby the historically silenced voice of the people – a voice rarely expressed, let alone documented under the suppression of Lenin and Stalin – slowly found its way into literature and discourse. This historiographical silence is partially addressed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 1962 novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, published in the wake of the Thaw with Khrushchev's personal approval. His account of Stalinist labour camps from the perspective of an ordinary prisoner – drawing on his own lived experience – was an extraordinary indication of liberalisation that contradicts the state narrative. It was only within the brief ideological opening created by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin that Solzhenitsyn's voice could surface as a new type of evidence, before further repression in 1964. As such, Loewenstein purports that Khrushchevist rhetoric was

13 Rebitschek, I., & Retish, A. B. (2023). *Social Control under Stalin and Khrushchev*. University of Toronto Press. <https://utppublishing.com/doi/book/10.3138/9781487544270>

14 Loewenstein, K. E. (2006). Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58(8), 1329-1345. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20451320>

15 Loewenstein, K. E. (2006). Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58(8), 1329-1345. JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20451320>

broadly sincere to the extent that it reinvigorated ‘history from below’ – a post-modern notion. A holistic evaluation of the speech, informed by the perspectives of Rowe, Parry, and Loewenstein, would therefore view it as a mild departure from repression.

The initial representation of Khrushchev as a leader of *‘revision and improvement’*¹⁶ has been challenged by revisionist historians and archival revelations, as previously undisclosed state secrets revealed the extent to which Khrushchevism maintained, and in many cases intensified, Stalinist controls – particularly for political dissidents. Nevertheless, many Thaw-era interpretations presented Khrushchevism as a rejection of Stalinist repression and a return to traditional Leninist principles.¹⁷ Dr. William K. Medlin, writing from a liberal internationalist perspective shaped by his work with the U.S. State Department throughout the 1950s, represents a contemporaneous perspective of the reforms; his optimistic reading of the *‘rehabilitation of scores of citizens’* and *‘greater respect for individual integrity’*¹⁸ likely stemmed from both limited access to internal repression and a comparative framework that emphasised purported progress over underlying continuity. Indeed, in reforming the increasingly autocratic administration, Khrushchev demonstrated sincere intention¹⁹ to decentralise Moscow’s bureaucratic apparatus through his establishment of over one hundred *Sovnarkhozy* (Regional Economic Councils), thereby strengthening the mechanism that enabled grass-roots political representation. His social liberalisation policies included the introduction of a universal minimum wage in 1956 and the endorsement of global artistic and sports events such as the first Spartakiad Soviet sporting festival²⁰ and the International Tchaikovsky Music Competition.²¹ Alastair McAuley acknowledges these reforms as anti-repressionist, writing that *‘it was during the Khrushchev era that the living standards of ordinary Soviet families began to rise significantly,’* and importantly that *‘this break from the Stalinist past owed much to [Khrushchev’s] vision of communism.’*²² These reforms initially signalled a decisive shift in Soviet governance and ideology away from repression.

16 Medlin, W. K. (1959). Khrushchev: A Political Profile. IV. *The Russian Review*, 18(3), 173-183. <https://doi.org/10.2307/126295>

17 McCauley, M. (1987). Khrushchev and Khrushchevism, 1-29. *Springer*. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-18646-4>

18 Medlin, W. K. (1959). Khrushchev: A Political Profile. IV. *The Russian Review*, 18(3), 173-183. <https://doi.org/10.2307/126295>

19 McCauley, M. (1987). Khrushchev and Khrushchevism, 1-29. *Springer*. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-18646-4>

20 Arnaud, P., & Riordan, J. (2013). *Sport and International Politics*. Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9780203476581/sport-international-politics-pierre-arnaud-professor-jim-riordan>

21 Taubman, W. (2004). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. Norton.

22 McAuley, A. (1987). Social Policy. *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, 138-155. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-18646-4>

For the aforementioned historians with recent, lived experience of Stalin's authoritarian interpretation of communism, a reversion to the traditional Marxist-Leninist Bolshevik ideology was appealing, such that academic literature at the time frequently describes this reversion as positive reform without substantiation. In 1987, Martin McCauley recognised this political malady as one that afflicted Khrushchev himself, writing that *'he never questioned the veracity of the founding fathers'* and specifically the Bolshevik conception of *'the single ruling Party and democratic centralism.'*²³ The notion of a return to communist first-principles was viewed inherently as an efficacious way forward for Russia, poisoning the academic record with positive representations of questionably-valuable policy. Further, Mark Frankland (1966) suggests that Khrushchev's conception of Marxist-Leninist principles was shaped more by his Stalinist experiences than by traditional socialist theory. Frankland described Khrushchev and his men as *'malleable precisely because their approach to Bolshevism was not intellectual,'* that *'they had never known the free though fierce discussion of the early [Bolsheviks],'* and that the very notion that opposition could be contained within a political system was *'foreign to them.'*²⁴ It therefore follows that Khrushchev's implementation of Bolshevism was inherently repressive in nature, as the majority of revisionist historians – including McCauley – agree that *'in no fundamental way did he dismantle the monopoly of political and economic power at the centre built up by Lenin and Stalin.'* This sentiment certainly existed contemporaneously, however it was typically confined within foreign literature that presented an external assessment of Soviet governance from the perspective of liberal democracies in the west. Howard R. Swearer, assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of California, exemplifies this outlook in his article Khrushchev's Administrative 'Reforms'²⁵ (1963), referencing the proverb *'the more things change, the more they are the same!'* in analysing the fundamental deficiencies of Khrushchevist-Bolshevism. Therefore, while Khrushchev's characterisation as a 'reformer' is without doubt, his reforms must be understood as a weak attempt to restore traditional communist principles that failed to substantially alter political decision making – despite their superficial impression of progress. In constructing a historiographical assessment of Khrushchevism, it is clear that most contemporaneous representations (with the exception of some western perspectives) failed to objectively evaluate the efficacy of his reforms, while over time academic literature has increasingly adopted unfavourable assessments of Khrushchevist policy – exemplified as the Gulag system

23 McCauley, M. (1987). *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, 1-29. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-18646-4>

24 Frankland, M. (1966). *Khrushchev*. Penguin.

25 Swearer, H. R. (1963). Khrushchev's Administrative "Reforms." *Challenge*, 11(7), 18-20. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40718678>

was retained despite its reform,²⁶ and Khrushchev's centralisation of heavy industry failed to meaningfully alter economic structures.²⁷ In comprehensively evaluating these historical interpretations – including an acknowledgement of biases that impact their validity – it is clear that the reforms did not represent a substantive departure from repression.

While the academic community is generally in concurrence with the cynical perspective of Swearer that Khrushchev's reforms were unavailing, a more contentious historiographical question is whether they actually represented an intensification of Stalinist repression. Aforementioned historians such as McCauley align with the notion that *'he genuinely favoured mass participation in decision-making'*,²⁸ however failed to materialise his intention due to his unquestioning loyalty to, or a distorted understanding of, Bolshevism. McCauley approaches Khrushchev's reforms through a constructivist biographical lens, focusing on ideological motivations and personal commitment to communist principles – weighing Khrushchev's rhetoric highly and augmenting his narrative with anecdotal, often uncited evidence. The absence of scepticism compels McCauley to explain failed reforms as well-intentioned mistakes rather than deliberate authoritarianism. This view is contested by Dimitry Pospelovsky, whose article, 'Restalinization or Destalinization?'²⁹ was published in *The Russian Review* in 1968. Pospelovsky argues that Khrushchev merely reconfigured Stalinist repression to a more covert and insidious form, primarily through the deliberate erosion of local soviets that weakened collective political representation within the USSR. His critical stance towards state narratives and scepticism of a return to Bolshevik principles was likely a product of his close affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church – which had been suppressed under atheistic communist rule – and further supplemented by his experiences in Ukraine under weakened local legislatures. The incongruity between McCauley's assertion of Khrushchev's genuine preference for collective decision-making and Pospelovsky's perspective reveals a deep dichotomy in historical interpretations of reform intentions. Stalin's NKVD, composed to buttress his rule and compel obedience through terror, was repackaged by Khrushchev as the equally despotic KGB. Further, Pospelovsky posits that Khrushchev did not dismantle the "cult of personality" but rather replaced it with his own, a sentiment echoed by Thomas B. Larson in 'Dismantling the Cults of Stalin and

26 Rebitschek, I., & Retish, A. B. (2023). *Social Control under Stalin and Khrushchev*. University of Toronto Press. <https://utppublishing.com/doi/book/10.3138/9781487544270>

27 Taubman, W. (2004). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. Norton.

28 McCauley, M. (1987). *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, 1-29. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-18646-4>

29 Pospelovsky, D. (1968). Restalinization or Destalinization? *Russian Review*, 27(3), 307. <https://doi.org/10.2307/127259>

Khrushchev,³⁰ who acknowledges the Khrushchev regime as a cult of personality and draws significant parallels between Khrushchevist and Stalinist governance. These perspectives contribute to the nuanced understanding that Khrushchev reinforced underlying authoritarian structures of the Soviet system, and by increasing their concealment developed a more malignant form of repression.

Therefore, an evaluation of the extent to which Thaw-era rhetoric and reform constituted a substantive departure from repression must differentiate between intention and actualisation. With the exception of certain postmodernist interpretations, such as Loewenstein's view that Khrushchev's rhetoric reanimated public discourse and gave voice to the historically silenced, there is broad academic consensus, from both contemporaneous scholars and immediate post-Thaw analysts, that Khrushchev did not actualise his purported intention to ease repression. An assessment of whether Khrushchevism served as an intensification of Stalinist controls hinges on a contemplation of how covert and concealed repression, albeit to a lesser extent, might be more insidious than the overt and brutal mechanisms of Stalin it ostensibly replaced. This thesis is reinforced as Khrushchev himself admits they were '*afraid*' of a Thaw that they '*wouldn't be able to control*'.³¹ Thus, the Thaw emerges as a reconfiguration of authoritarian rule under the veil of reform, representing only a limited and strategically contained departure from Stalinist repression.

30 Larson, T. B. (1968). Dismantling the Cults of Stalin and Khrushchev. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 21(3), 383. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/446611>

31 Campbell, J. C., & Dowty, A. (1987). Closed Borders: The Contemporary Assault on Freedom of Movement. *Foreign Affairs*, 65(5), 1098. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20043207>

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Leo Schmid

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Critical Analysis (Portfolio of Theatre Criticism)

(Selected for OnSTAGE)

Through the theatre criticism process, a profound truth emerged: at the intersection of creative brilliance and innovation lies the transformative power of theatre to reflect a rapidly changing world.

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REFLECTION STATEMENT

The role of theatre criticism in fostering a robust discourse about the value of individual theatrical productions in Australia has never been more critical, against a backdrop of societal change. Within my publication Stagecraft, the reviews intend to critique how four productions, *August: Osage County* (Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney – December 3, 2024), *ARIA* (Ensemble Theatre, Sydney – January 31, 2025), *Henry 5* (Bell Shakespeare, Sydney Opera House – April 4, 2025), and *Happy Days* (Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf 1 Theatre – May 10, 2025) draw on creativity and innovation to reflect society. I assess the extent to which the works succeed in resonating deeply with audiences.

Sustaining an independent critical voice strategically immerses the reader while conveying evocative moments, incisive textual and character analysis, and a refined focus on style. My unique voice is shaped by mirroring the tonality of the play, such as sharp yet buoyant, direct and urgent, and darkly humorous, while utilising metaphor, personification and alliteration. Moreover, I examine the interplay between the directorial approach, performances, set, sound and costume design, to evaluate their collective impact on the production's efficacy in conveying ideas.

Across four live theatre productions, I consciously traversed distinct styles - from tragicomedy and realism to Shakespearean history and Absurdism, selected from a diverse array of arts companies. I recorded a voice memo immediately after each performance and wrote the first draft while the experience remained vivid, followed by an iterative redrafting process. Analysis of the productions was enriched by a decision to conduct one-on-one interviews with fourteen acclaimed creative professionals, including Pamela Rabe, Nick Schlieper, Tracy Mann, JK Kazzi, and Jethro Woodward.

Stagecraft

Sydney Falls Prey to Rabe's Poisonous Charms

August: Osage County

Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney

December 3, 2024



Violet loses her balance due to the effects of pills, which undermines her presence of Leviathan proportions. You sense danger as she snakes her way down to the bottom floor. An inhalation of smoke provides toxic relief for her cancer-ravaged acid tongue, which will shoot rage-filled barbs at family members. In the name of “truth-telling”. This is the wounded matriarch Violet, played by powerhouse actor Pamela Rabe, who leads the exceptional Belvoir St Theatre cast of Tracy Letts’ *August: Osage County* — the Pulitzer Prize-winning tragicomedy. Our collective journey of 3 hours and 20 minutes is a nod to the opening line, “Life is very long” by T.S. Eliot, but before you know it, you will be leaping to your feet for a standing ovation.



Image: Brett Boardman, Belvoir St Theatre website, 2024. Pictured: Johnna (Bee Cruse), Beverly (John Howard) and Violet (Pamela Rabe).

As you immerse yourself in the claustrophobic world of *August: Osage County*, directed by Eamon

Flack, it feels like a family memory you’d rather forget. Sound designer Rachael Dease provokes emotion through Tammy Wynette’s “I Don’t Wanna Play House” ricocheting against the walls, which are overdue for a repaint (set design by Bob Cousins). The deconstructed prairie house is situated in the middle of nowhere in Oklahoma, a dustbowl of dissipation since land was taken from Native Americans. Strikingly, the windows are covered in paper, symbolically blocking natural light.



Image: Brett Boardman, Belvoir St Theatre website, 2024. Pictured: Violet (Pamela Rabe).

Veteran actor John Howard’s realistic portrayal of retired poet Beverly is powerful for the uninhibited exposé of his “cruel covenant”. He drinks, and Violet takes pills. Howard characterises Beverly with a yearning for the passion that once defined him: “My last refuge, my books: simple pleasures...” Change is afoot, with Beverly hiring Native American Johnna (Bee Cruse). Violet’s introduction: “Are you an Indian?” Johnna: “Yes, ma’am”. Violet: “What kind?” — landed as an abrasive social commentary about casual racism. Beverly’s disappearance catalyses Weston family members to descend on the home, where stagnation thickens the air.

Enter a roll call of Australian theatre heavyweights, with Violet’s sister Mattie Fae (Helen Thomson, Lady Bracknell in STC’s *The*

Importance of Being Earnest), her husband Charlie (Greg Stone, starring in Belvoir's upcoming *Jacky*), Barbara (Tamsin Carroll, *The Witch* in Belvoir's *Into the Woods*), and Sheriff Deon Gilbeau (Johnny Nasser), confirming Beverly's body has been found. A poignant directorial device leaves Beverly lingering on stage after his death, tinkering on a keyboard. Your subconscious is infiltrated through Dease's hymnal, rooted in Beverly's history, in a ghostly echo of the cataclysmic family loss, which is intensified by lighting designer Morgan Moroney's choice to remove light from the walls. The rest of the gang arrives, including Little Charles (Will O'Mahony), who drops his mother's casserole with a 'sickening splat' and "Oh Jesus!" If you dare, it's time for the main course.

The funeral dinner scene dishes up issues that couldn't get heavier — suicide, incest, infidelity, addiction and racism. Flack deftly drives the deluge of dialogue through a disciplined approach. Overlapping speech at dizzying speeds is interplayed with lines drawing shrieks of audience laughter. Karen: "That's one thing about Mom and Dad. You have to tip your cap to anyone who can stay married that long". Ivy: "Karen. He killed himself." As Violet tears family members to shreds with "cold-blooded" precision, you get the sinking feeling her truth-telling mission isn't going to end well. Drawing parallels to another landmark production, *Death of a Salesman*, but here, the American dream is squandered, not shattered. Sure enough, Act Two reaches boiling point with a melodramatic physical battle for power and Barbara's guttural scream, "I'M RUNNING THINGS NOW!" Morphing into her mother before your eyes.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2024. Belvoir St Theatre website. Pictured: Violet (Pamela Rabe) and cast.

The aha moment arrives when Rabe removes Violet's metaphorical mask — her body and face transforming into her inner child as she recalls the joy of a teenage crush but ultimately, her mother's cruelty. You could feel the audience hold their breath; such was the emotional depth of Rabe's virtuoso monologue. Letts doesn't allow the moment to linger, cutting through with Barbara's dialogue, "Please don't tell me that's the end of that story". The ensuing laughter is a much-needed relief as you process this profound sadness.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2024. Belvoir St Theatre website. Pictured: Sheriff Deon Gilbeau (Johnny Nasser) and Violet (Pamela Rabe).

Flack's production is a stunning portrayal of the corrosive impact of losing your equilibrium. The reveal of a "Wild West" painting featuring bison illuminates the themes of land theft and intergenerational destruction. Given the limited venue size, with thirteen actors and a story of

epic proportions, it's a feat to be staged. Brilliant performances from Pamela Rabe and Bee Cruse, with their respective verbose and quiet existences, provide a contrasting perspective on power in the Weston household and American society. Letts' razor-sharp *August: Osage County* is a profound tale of modern times about falling prey to self-medication and the transferral of poison to the next generation. You will never forget this unmissable production as familial dysfunction stares you in the face.

Stagecraft

Innovation Fuels a Fresh Band of Brothers

Henry 5

Bell Shakespeare, Sydney Opera House

April 4, 2025



A “muse of fire” ignites Bell Shakespeare’s production of *Henry 5*, which interrogates who tells the war stories that shape our collective identity, against a backdrop of geopolitical volatility. Marion Potts, who returns to Bell after directing *Hamlet* in 2008, enacts a radically creative interpretation. Embedding a visceral intensity in the text through explosive physical movement, Potts reflects a world where young bodies are conditioned for combat, punctuated by a punching bag that transforms into a hanged

man. As Henry, NIDA graduate JK Kazzi’s galvanising presence drives the high-voltage show, with its punchy duration of 110 minutes, fortifying the ensemble and rallying the band of brothers.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. From Bell Shakespeare website. Pictured: JK Kazzi (Henry).

Graduating from the Lecoq school in Paris, Jo Turner crafts a meticulous portrayal of the Archbishop of Canterbury, an ironic contrast to the shaky logic he uses to justify England’s claim to French territory “...The Salique law was not devised for the realm of France.” Heavy on political speak and light on facts, the Archbishop’s argument is conveniently accepted by a newly minted King Henry. While you laugh uneasily at the absurdity of the conversation, it represents the first epochal crime. Tensions are stoked when the Dauphin (Jack Halabi) sends Henry a box of neon tennis balls — disruptively strewn across the muted stage, pointing to childish games, not kingly leadership. The act draws Henry’s ire: “Tell him he hath made a match with such a wrangler”. Should King Henry have gone to war? Did he *really* have a claim to France? Tennis balls linger on the stage as a stain of the fury catalysing his decision.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. From Bell Shakespeare website. Pictured: Henry 5 cast.

Potts' exegesis of the text results in inspired choices, such as evoking military trials, where the battle location is typed on a screen, as a microphone amplifies witness accounts. Unflinchingly exposing the human cost of war, Shakespeare's classic metamorphoses into an urgent piece of modern theatre. One soldier's footfall becomes two, then builds to a swelling chorus in a stirring auditory motif — a hallmark of Jethro Woodward's masterful sound design. Conjuring the epic scale of war, the multi-layered sonics remain grounded in the intimate rhythm of human sound. Rich imagery emerges from the partnership between Potts and seasoned Bell set designer Anna Tregloan. Steel structures used to train the soldiers transform into an underground war tunnel when the English besiege Harfleur.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. From Bell Shakespeare website. Pictured: Mararo Wangai (Montjoy), Ella Prince (Exeter) and JK Kazzi (Henry).

Exquisitely crafted movement sequences by Nigel Poulton, in which soldiers crawl through the tunnel, followed by gunshots and ultimately, bodies strewn across the structures, is a harrowing sight that elicits tears as the Israeli-Palestinian and Russia-Ukraine wars continue. Perspective is expanded through Potts' choice for the French to speak their native language, with surtitles.

The propagandistic legacy of *Henry V* is confronted in the St. Crispin's Day speech, where Kazzi subverts expectations of a moment traditionally steeped in patriotism. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he today that sheds his blood with me Shall be my brother", developing the narrative arc from being vulnerable and wrestling with the acceptance of death, to a leader worthy of respect.

During the climactic battle of Agincourt, the stage is saturated in mud, a device cleverly illustrating war without glorification. The King runs alongside his fellow soldiers, slips and emerges battle-weary with the lucky ones who survive, bogged down by the burden of a war he willed into being. Outstanding performances from the support cast include Ella Prince (Exeter), whose control of the text is exceptional, "And all my mother came into mine eyes And gave me up to tears". Mararo Wangai brings dignity to Montjoy, while Odile le Clézio strengthens the dynamic as Alice, French Princess Katherine's lady-in-waiting.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. From Bell Shakespeare website. Pictured: Jo Turner (*King of France*), Ava Madon (*Katherine*) and JK Kazzi (*Henry*).

The moment that falters by modern standards is when Henry courts Katherine with an uninvited kiss: “Our tongue is rough, coz, and my condition is not smooth, so that I cannot conjure up the spirit of love in her”. Harassment and romantic comedy don’t go hand in hand. Costume design (Anna Tregloan) deftly casts Katherine (Ava Madon) in a yellow dress, isolating her in a muted world, and reframing a colour associated with optimism into a symbol of gendered power, where she is reduced to a political transaction.

Ultimately, at a time when it makes fiscal sense for arts companies to play it safe, Bell Shakespeare’s production of *Henry 5* is a bold risk – and it succeeds. Expanding consciousness about perspectives of war is the goal here, not to divide. Innovation is in Potts’ heartbeat, with her incisions of the text and modern interpretation, which values raw simplicity at every turn. The cast is aligned to deliver a fresh vision, and the result is stunning. JK Kazzi’s interpretation redefines the ubiquitous character of *Henry V*, taking you on a captivating journey and crowning him as a leading actor to watch.

STAGECRAFT

Williamson Orchestrates a Symphony of Class Conflict

ARIA

Ensemble Theatre, Sydney January 31, 2025



The spotlight casts a warm glow on Monique, who looks every part the prima donna. The collective heartbeat of the audience quickens as she prepares to unleash the Queen of the Night’s aria, “Der Hölle Rache”, from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. Her hands move like a conductor willing an orchestra to execute the ornamental runs precisely. After 100 minutes of building to this moment, the tension reaches a crescendo, as legendary Australian playwright David Williamson uncorks Monique’s delusions, one note at a time.

Williamson was meant to retire three years ago, but an addiction to live theatre changed those plans. With *ARIA* at the Ensemble Theatre on Sydney’s sparkling harbour, Williamson returns to his scorching critique of the class divide. Entertaining and provocative, the black comedy lands a bullseye for relatability. Your complacency is shaken, and you are left bubbling over with contemplation as freely as the champagne flowing on the stage.



Image: Prudence Upton. From Ensemble Theatre website. Pictured: Monique (Tracy Mann) and cast.

Tracy Mann's casting as Monique is a masterstroke by director Janine Watson, with her skin-crawling portrayal of a narcissistic mother-in-law with a Jocasta complex. A promise for a "little musical offering" is met with awkward glances and a tepid round of applause for Monique at her three sons' birthday celebration in the lavish piano room.



Image: Prudence Upton. From Ensemble Theatre website. Pictured: Monique (Tracy Mann) and Charlie (Rowan Davie).

Charlie (Rowan Davie) is the youngest and most successful, and while mothers don't play favourites, "if they did, I'd have to admit you were mine". He's up to marriage number two with Midge (Tamara Lee Bailey), a straight-shooting and "very attractive" Gen Z beautician. Then there are the twins: Liam (Jack Starkey-Gill), a junior politician with plenty of time to plot his path to become Premier, but little for his

wife Chrissy (Suzannah McDonald) and their "four uncontrollable kids". And let's not forget Daniel (Sam O'Sullivan), a draftsman whose trailblazing solicitor wife Judy (Danielle King) outearns him and wants to pull their daughter out of private school for Concord High.

Tamara Lee Bailey's star is rising with her hilarious turn as Midge, who's marrying Charlie, and his money. You may have seen Bailey as Regan in Bell Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which draws parallels to *ARIA*, depicting a parental figure in an existential crisis and the contrasting response of their three children. Bailey nails what Monique calls Midge's "inventive way of expressing herself", eliciting laughter from the audience, "he's also a hands-everywhere predalingus". This is achieved by her disciplined approach to the rhythm of Williamson's dialogue, driving through to the end of each thought at speed, to ensure the comedy lands. While Charlie might have money, Williamson's language device aims at the generational divide, elevating Midge's status in the marriage. Glued to her phone, her gift of an exorbitantly priced beauty cream endears her to Monique, in a stinging commentary about the seduction of materialism, and how these women come to understand each other.



Image: Prudence Upton. From Ensemble Theatre website. Pictured: Midge (Tamara Lee Bailey).

Your worst fears about politicians are realised through Jack Starkey-Gill's incisive portrayal of Liam, "Let's be honest – it's not *if* I become Premier, it's *when*". With a baritone voice and strident gait, he embodies the privilege that Williamson implicates as the driving force behind unchecked ambition.



Image: By Prudence Upton. From Ensemble Theatre website. Pictured: Liam (Jack Starkey - Gill).

Suzannah McDonald delivers a revelatory moment when Chrissy lets rip, "it's a wonder I'm not in a bloody asylum". Vulnerability is a powerful flashpoint against a societal context that rewards self-interest. Williamson cleverly contrasts the conventional couple with Judy, who flipped the gender roles long ago and Daniel, a self-acknowledged NIMBY. Hypocrisy wears numerous costumes in Sydney society, some tailored from privilege and others from moral posturing.

Bold costume design by Rose Montgomery, which is grounded in realism, is highly effective in helping the audience identify the characters' class and generation; it looks like Monique has popped into a designer store, contrasting Daniel's well-worn casual threads and affirmation bracelets. The set design (Rose Montgomery) reflects a home of elegance where brand names matter – cream rug, occasional chair, tasteful art, and a baby grand piano complete with framed photos,

support the play's vision. Still, when there are seven actors on the small stage, it feels cluttered. Emotional intensity is amplified by the real-time structure, drawing you into an unfiltered, hyper-focused experience. On occasion, it has the effect of making transitions feel awkward, such as when characters enter and exit, to serve the voracious plot.

With the economic divide growing, David Williamson's work remains as relevant as ever – *ARIA*'s run in Sydney overlaps with the Melbourne Theatre Company's brilliant, gritty revival production of *The Removalists* – his 1971 dark satire about the worst aspects of Australian male behaviour. *Emerald City*, also dissecting the class divide in the 1980s, returns to the Ensemble Theatre in July. With comedy as his needle, Williamson punctures the inflated pretensions of Sydney society, hitting a high note with *ARIA*, which lingers long after the curtain call.

STAGECRAFT

Happy Daze Unearths Masterpiece

Happy Days

Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf 1 Theatre

May 10, 2025



“Oh this is a happy day”, declares Winnie, and so it is for audiences, as Sydney Theatre Company’s *Happy Days* delivers a mesmerising examination of a woman’s indomitable act of tenacity when confronted with oblivion. The incomparable Pamela Rabe, recently seen in Belvoir St Theatre’s *August: Osage County*, scales the psychological and physical mountain that is Winnie, joining the late Ruth Cracknell, whose 1991 performance set the standard.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. Sydney Theatre Company website. Pictured: Pamela Rabe (Winnie).

Lighting designer Nick Schlieper, nominated for a Tony Award for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is Rabe’s co-director; their collaboration realises Nobel Prize-winning playwright Samuel Beckett’s vision. His masterpiece cuts through like the ferocious sound of the production’s opening blast of wind. The theatrical intensity is sustained across 100 minutes, inflicting emotional whiplash.

Solo protagonist Winnie is embedded in a mound, ‘up to above her waist’ in Act One and her neck in Act Two, as though the earth is rising to swallow her. Schlieper’s set design is transfixing in its austerity, a craggy, barren mass that evokes an apocalyptic aftermath. Framed by a cinematic aperture — a proscenium-like window, audiences are transformed into uneasy voyeurs. Uncomfortably loud and prolonged, a bell slices ‘piercingly’ through the silence. The profound rupture by sound designer Stefan Gregory marks the start of a new day.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. From Sydney Theatre Company website. Pictured: Pamela Rabe (Winnie).

Rabe and Schlieper don’t impose an overtly modern narrative on Beckett’s canonical play, which could diminish its existential breadth; yet the undercurrent of ecological decay is palpable. Utterly isolated, save for Winnie’s incurious husband Willie (Markus Hamilton), and her black bag, offering a semblance of order, this woman’s instinct to persevere is monumental.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. Sydney Theatre Company website. Pictured: Markus Hamilton (Willie) and Pamela Rabe (Winnie).

Rabe takes command of Beckett's first female lead like an artist layering textures and hues — a master of her craft. Clowning is a tool Rabe draws on to execute Winnie's daily rituals, with determined optimism. Checking her teeth in a mirror, a physical choice for Winnie's gums to resemble a horse's, draws out bleak hilarity, "no better, no worse — no change — no pain — hardly any..." An old friend, 'Brownie', emerges and is greeted with a quick kiss. It's a revolver, and you laugh. This clown is no Pierrot, she's dark. As she cups her breasts, you sense her sex life has degraded as she muses, "And should one day the earth cover my breasts, then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one ever seen my breasts". The loss of sexual identity is deeply moving.

Her body constrained, Rabe's vocal dexterity serves as a vehicle for an extraordinary emotional range, expanding the stage beyond its physical limits. With a childlike cadence, her voice gathers urgency in unison with Beckett's prescriptive rhythm. "And now?" (Pause.) Sing. (Pause.) Sing your song, Winnie. (Pause.)" Adherence to stage directions — the pauses, creates a percussive pulse; her voice a metronome of defiance against existential threat, "Pray your prayer, Winnie."



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. Sydney Theatre Company website. Pictured: Pamela Rabe (Winnie).

The aesthetic of Act Two is entrancing, as Schlieper's lighting design suggests the night, with blue saturating the space and a spotlight on Rabe's face. Moving beyond Beckett's directive, 'Scene as before', the design disrupts visual stasis, illuminating absurdism for a modern audience. A pretty-as-a-picture camisole and headband that brought Winnie's femininity to the forefront have disappeared beneath the encroaching mound (costume design by Mel Page), with grotesque makeup reflecting her unravelled state.

Rabe and Schlieper point to repressed trauma as a reason for Winnie's psychological disintegration. As she recalls the last rubbernecks to "stray this way," you feel disgusted. "Has she anything on underneath?" The violation triggers a fragmented story which seems to unearth the past. "Suddenly a mouse ran up her little thigh...", as Winnie unleashes a guttural scream. You weep to think how it got to this. Willie's final moment, crawling in a ceremonial white jacket, is sealed by his utterance, "Win": for her, a miracle. Yet, where Lucky's passivity gives way to a tragic linguistic flood in *Waiting for Godot*, Willie offers a single syllable, as cruel as the glare of the sun after it has scorched the earth. Their unsettling symbiosis is calibrated with finesse by Rabe and Hamilton.



Image: Brett Boardman, 2025. Sydney Theatre Company website. Pictured: Markus Hamilton (Willie).

STC's *Happy Days* is distinguished by a startling accessibility while never compromising its intellectual rigour. Ultimately, the production rests on Rabe's ability to perform almost uninterrupted, navigating a punishing sequence of stage directions with seamless transitions, grounded in psychological truth. We don't expect to walk into a Beckett play and feel comfortable — that *is* the point. This production transcends preconceptions; its capacity to emotionally affect audiences is astonishing. Beckett, Rabe and Schlieper shape a world where Winnie's retreat to the "old style" is a hollow ritual — serving to amplify, rather than shield her, from the steady erosion of structure, time and certainty. The illusion of stability, sustained by rumination, only accelerates the uncertainty; what seems unchanged fractures beneath the surface. The paradox is absurd and profoundly human.



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Saint Ignatius' College Riverview acknowledges the Cammeraigal people who are the Traditional Custodians of this land upon which we are privileged to live and educate. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people who dwell on this land.

First Nations people are respectfully advised that this publication may contain the words, names and images of people who have passed away.

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