

# FRYER *Folios*



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JUNE 2011

*They slip away  
like a sheet of clear water*

# FRYER *Folios*

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3

## BRISBANE RIVER POETRY

After Queensland's disastrous summer floods, Ruth Blair discovers a rich tradition of Brisbane River poetry.



7

## ALIEN POET

UQ student from the School of English, Media Studies and Art History, Kristian Radford, writes about Antigone Kefala's book, *The alien*.



10

## THE RIVER AT BRISBANE

Poet and Fryer Library supporter Emeritus Professor Thomas Shapcott reflects on the Brisbane River in its many moods.



11

## 'POETS ARE ALWAYS WRITING ABOUT THE SEA ...'

Stephany Steggall writes about the papers of poet John Blight in Fryer Library, particularly his correspondence with Judith Wright.



14

## THE UQP ARCHIVES: POETRY AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Deborah Jordan discusses the role of UQP as a significant publisher of Australian poetry in the 1960s.



19

## IN PAPERBARK COUNTRY

UQ librarian and poet Pam Schindler contributes one of her recent poems.



20

## ART IN MINIATURE

Penny Whiteway profiles a selection of bookplates from the extensive collections held in the Fryer Library.

Cover: *Montage of Brisbane River images by Janine Nicklin with photos by David Symons, Mila Zincone, Volodymyrkrasyuk (Dreamstime.com) and OnAir2 (Dreamstime.com). Words by Pam Schindler, from 'In paperbark country', see p. 19.*



23

## WHAT'S NEW IN FRYER

We farewell Mark Cryle as Manager of Fryer Library, and welcome Laurie McNeice. We also announce the winner of the 2011 Fryer Library Award.



28

## FRIENDS OF FRYER

Read all about the recent events enjoyed by the Friends, and forthcoming activities.

## OBITUARIES: PAGE 30

Brenda Lewis and John McCulloch

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# BRISBANE RIVER POETRY

AFTER QUEENSLAND'S DISASTROUS SUMMER FLOODS, RUTH BLAIR  
 DISCOVERS A RICH TRADITION OF BRISBANE RIVER POETRY.

'The river is getting its shine back', a friend remarked some little while after the 2011 big flood. Recently I walked across the Eleanor Schonell Bridge (the 'green' pedestrian and bus bridge slung across the river between Dutton Park and The University of Queensland) reading poetry by Samuel Wagan Watson and Luke Beesley embedded in the footpath and embossed on the railing. Because the bridge is so high you have almost a bird's eye view of this reach of the river. And on this day, with the stretch of water smooth down to the bend, the shine—a velvety brown shine, 'fawn-thick', Dimitris Tsaloumas calls it—was almost dazzling. Since the January flood, I've wanted to know more about how, from the time of European settlement, the river has been celebrated and I've gone hunting, especially for poems. What follows are reflections on a trove of poems, from 1859 to today.<sup>1</sup> The river's shine is a recurring theme.

In his Foreword to the collection *Rivers* (the work of three poets: John Kinsella, Peter Porter and Sean O'Brien), Kinsella writes, 'Creation myths, the "world river", sources of life and death, diverse ecologies, connectors and "edges" of habitats, places of commerce and spiritual significance—rivers bind life together across continents'.<sup>2</sup> Poets can help us understand how the river that we criss-cross or walk beside or scoot up and down on fast ferries does things to us we may be only

remotely aware of; how this sinuous, impressive and idiosyncratic, 'this short but flash-flood river', as Peter Porter calls it, anchors whatever sense of belonging we might have to this place, and for visitors anchors impressions and experience. A Howe, in 'Evening on the Brisbane River' (1912), has a sense of the way in which the river enters the souls of those who live beside it:

The beauty of the River is like a benediction  
 To the workers passing homeward by the winding,  
 shaded Road:

...  
 For they feel the gentle influence of the River's quiet  
 teaching  
 As its beauty o'er them casts its dreamy spell;  
 With its ever-changing currents, its tender curves and  
 windings,  
 It speaks of far off fair things, and an endless story  
 tells.

Across the poems I've been reading a story unfolds, both of learning to see the river and of learning to live with it and alongside it. Early poets clearly stand apart from it, admiring, and weaving the river into a paeon to European colonisation and to 'progress', as in 'The River of Queensland' (Anon., 1859):

Hail to thee life stream of our now infant nation.  
 Thy glory shall be ours where the Bay extended,  
 And the Pacific leaves its billows on our strand,  
 Bidding us to mould this birthright of our children  
 Till poets rise to tell the wonders of Queensland.

Above: WA Clarkson, Brisbane, original lithograph printed as a supplement to *The Illustrated Sydney News*, 30 August 1888. Digitally enhanced by Francisco Roelas.

Below: *Curving roads and pathways mimic the sinuous bends of the Brisbane River.* Photo by Mila Zincone.



*I acknowledge the  
Aboriginal peoples  
who have lived  
and live along the  
Brisbane River  
from its source to  
its mouth and who  
have always known  
how to respect a  
great river.*

Peter Porter's poem, 'The role of the Brisbane River in the fortunes of my family' (2002) gives, more than a century later, a sense of the disturbing realities and costs of European fortune-seeking. The Porter clan, arriving in the nineteenth century, sees:

a river altering the lives  
of men and beasts, for all the world as if  
a feud as old as that of sun and rain  
were set off by these migrant magistrates  
hoping to make careers twelve thousand miles  
from home.

The end of this poem, mimicking the stately iambic pentameter and locutions of many of its predecessors, is a parody of early celebrations of colonisation:

The river's cowed today as must befit  
a State's proud capital, its comely banks  
well-skirted by broad drives and galleries,  
its smooth and smiling surface now outranks  
the plush riparian pleasures of the Yarra's  
saunter through Victoria's savannahs,  
and Queensland, once Louisiana, turns  
Super Texas, *primus inter pares*.

Glimpses of a developing city are common in the poems. A Howe observed (1912): 'From tall chimneys in the city smoke wreaths are lightly drifting, / shrouding shining waters with a veil of whirling grey.' Mabel Forrest, in 'Brisbane River' (1916), begins with industry at the mouth of her personified river:

She shudders by the shambles where  
The dawning brought an oily calm  
And iron roofs are bleak and bare  
Above the works at Eagle Farm.

Samuel Wagan Watson, who is our great poet of the city and its river today, relates progress, politics and communication in a richly dense poem, 'smoke signals' (2004):

I remember construction cranes like herds  
of frozen  
praying-mantis, high on the steamy Bjelke-Petersen  
plateau above  
a brown snake-coiled river. It was from this view, at  
the age of 4,  
that I learnt to read the columns of Brisbane city.

Watson's poems on the Eleanor Schonell Bridge, 'Dreaming river triptych' and 'On the transom of ghosts' fittingly move into a different register that is both encomium and elegy, drawing on ancient European and Aboriginal heritage:

Never the same this river—Archaic vein,  
snaking through the land's dreaming  
cortex—Submerging provinces; the  
past, present and future—An Aquarelle  
triptych cultural on every tide...

On this transom, the river's dawning  
skin ... Stand here ... give your breath to  
the fleeting mist ... Stand here ... in the crimson  
shadow of Cootha's  
dusk ... Stand here ... and whisper upon  
night's canvas, whirlpool eyes, the song-  
lines of Kurilpa's ghost ...

Others too have sung the river. In Mabel Forrest's 'Brisbane River' (1916), the personified river is 'a blue-eyed wanton' who 'drags her skirts beneath the bridge, / The ripple kisses on her mouth'; but industry is never far away, and there is death in this Arcady:

Sometimes within her reedy curves,  
Sometimes across her sandy bars,  
A drowned face, tired of every day,  
Awaits the judgment of the stars.

Her similarly titled 1927 poem, expresses sheer joy at the beauty of this city with its winding river, 'so full of godhead do we feel today':

Bright Prussian-blue the winding river lies;  
And here some milk-white seagulls, like a reef  
Found in warm seas beneath pale, tropic skies,  
Rest in mid-stream.

The river in this poem is blue, not the brown we see now, intensified after the flood. For George Essex Evans, in 'Adrift: a Brisbane River reverie' (1891), the 'steel-blue waters flow / With gloom and glint'. For Emily Bulcock, in 1924, the 'delphinium blue' of the sky, at the time of Oxley's coming, was mirrored in the river 'clearer than today'. A not insignificant reason for searching out these poems is to see what they can tell us about the river. Observation, though not the major driving force, is nevertheless the seed from which the poems grow. I have already mentioned the river's shine—perhaps the most commonly observed feature. The river breeze and the tidal nature of the river are frequently alluded to. An early poet (Anon., 1859), describes the river as if it flowed upstream: 'From a fringed island bay flows the glorious river / With flood to float argosies safely to our shore'. For Mabel Forrest, the bay is a lover waiting to meet the river (1916). Manfred Jurgensen writes: 'shadows lengthen. absence carries, / hours sail into the shining tide'. (1999). Associated with the tidal nature of the river are mangroves, with sinister connotations in early poems:

The fretful river rolls past mead and scar  
To the dark mangrove, fringing on the deep,  
Abreast the bar. (Evans, 1891)

[the mud]  
Vomiting forth its slime and clay  
Where the mangrove areas point the way.  
(Lucas, 1906)





But a century later, Laurie Duggan calls a collection of his poetry *Mangroves*, as if inspired, perhaps, by their multiple root systems—their one-in-many aspect—or for the associations of their dragging ‘against the current’.<sup>3</sup>

The trees and plants that grow alongside the river appear in the poems; the forests and gardens and the iconic Botanical Gardens; the bats (‘Ah, just as well / I fell in love with Jacarandas, and colonies of dark-eyed bats’ [Wollert, 1993]); and the birds: pelicans for Silvana Gardner (1987), who describes their return after disturbances by bridge-building, seagulls for Mabel Forrest (1927); for Alexander Muir, in the ‘lofty scrubs’ on the river banks, ‘birds in strange rich plumage’ (1899). A century later, for the visitor Dimitris Tsaloumas, the birds are an unknown, even for a Victorian: ‘strange birds / land speechless at my feet / and look at me like children’ (2000).

One of the notable features of the Brisbane River is its sinuosity. ‘The river winds, the river winds’, begins one of Mabel Forrest’s poems (1916). Samuel Wagan Watson describes it as a ‘brown snake-coiled river’. For Evans, too, it is a ‘sinuous snake’, a ‘tortuous river’. Its winding nature makes a mockery of ‘north side’ and ‘south side’; nevertheless, there is a strong sense of the river as a dividing line. Crossings are a common topic. The first bridge, a timber bridge opened in 1865, is the occasion for a humorous statement of the north-south divide in SG Mee’s poem, ‘Dialogue between the two Brisbanes’ (1866). The timber bridge was replaced by the iron Victoria Bridge in 1893. JH Bardwell has a vision, in 1924, of a river ‘by stately bridges spanned’ but the next bridge, the Grey Street Bridge (later William Jolly Bridge) was not completed until 1932 and the Story Bridge not till 1940. Meanwhile, there were, and still are, ferries criss-crossing the river. In 1896 a ferry, *The Pearl*, sank, the tragedy recorded in an anonymous poem in *The Worker*. Lawrence Bourke’s lovely poem, ‘Night crossing the Brisbane River’ (1985) describes a ferry crossing under the moon:

The ferryman indolently uncoils his arm  
slipping the hawser from its cleat he leans  
out and pushes the jetty gently into the dark.

Manfred Jurgensen finds a metaphor for a relationship in the ferry crossings:

you and I are crossing ferries  
to seek, to know, to feel, to praise  
the current of these fleeting days.

And there are the flood poems, which are a topic in themselves. They are represented by Thomas Shapcott’s ‘The river at Brisbane’ which is reproduced on page 10 of this issue.

I would like to be able to say that I see a clear evolution of ideas across the poems. I had expected to see a development from observation to a sense of the intertwining of human lives with the life of the river. But a sense of belonging with the river is not new. I quoted at the beginning of this essay from A Howe’s 1912 poem, ‘Evening on the Brisbane River’, where the poet is sensitive to the ‘gentle influence’ of the river on careworn workers. Mabel Forrest in her poem ‘In the gardens, Brisbane’ (1901) entwines the river and its nearby gardens with thoughts of a past love. It is clear, even in SG Mee’s humorous poem, that the river is inseparable from the fabric of the city’s life. Thomas Shapcott says:

You are surrounded. Loops and reaches, steep  
banks  
and the breeze that comes off water weave  
everywhere

Yet I do find, in later poetry, that something else is going on, a deeper sense of involvement with the river. For Laurie Duggan, who lived in Brisbane on the river at Teneriffe at the turn of the new century, the meaning of the river becomes the very process of writing:

Marks on paper, gradations on screen  
as ephemeral as the factory light oscillating  
upside down in the river: it’s there every night  
cut by the wake of ferries, resuming its shape, though  
this itself is illusion...

...  
– even in print meaning shifts,  
we are caught by different angles every time.  
(‘Louvres’, p. 49)

In ‘The river at Brisbane’ Thomas Shapcott’s memories of childhood are involved in the moods and the twists and turns of the river. Rhyll McMaster’s poem about the 1974 flood, ‘Profiles of my father’, is a personal, not a public statement. In Samuel Wagan Watson’s collection *smoke encrypted whispers*, the river is seamlessly part of the story or stories, the experiences, the feelings. Luke Beesley’s poems on the pavement of the Eleanor Schonell bridge build on stories collected as oral history in association with its construction. The more we can see such stories as connected with place, the more aware we are of belonging and of responsibility.

‘The river is a strong brown god,’ wrote TS Eliot in *Four quartets*, remembering the Mississippi of his

Above: *Vessels stranded in Brisbane’s Botanic Gardens in 1893. From an Album of Queensland Flood Views, 1893, Philp family papers, UQFL28, Album 3, Image 25a.*

Below and previous page: *A cyclist crosses the Eleanor Schonell Bridge. Photo by Mila Zincone.*





homeland. But the Brisbane, impressive river that it is, does not appear in this light. Mabel Forrest is the only poet I have found who attempts, reflecting a common interest of artists of her generation, to give it a European-style mythic status. Samuel Wagan Watson's river 'snaking through the land's dreaming cortex' is closer to the mythic mark than Forrest's Olympians. There are, too, across the poems, few in the way of conventional metaphorical invocations, associating rivers, for example, with the process of life. George Essex Evans comes to mind here as an exception, but his analogy is less with the span of human life than with the idea of progress. The poet observes sea birds near the mouth of the river:

These are the harbingers from voyaged seas:  
Who knows what seas of thought man yet may sail  
As science slowly sifts Life's mysteries—  
And lifts the veil?

Yet Evans's is also a literal river and, I would attest, the river remains doggedly so. Its 'spiritual significance' (recalling Kinsella's remark at the beginning of this essay) is not grasped through the larger available Western myths. Perhaps it is too short, 'this short but flash flood river' (Porter), too unusual to represent the grand narrative of life. And if it is about death, it is the real bodies Mabel Forrest (1916) and Robert Morison (1984) find floating in the river, or the dead from *The Pearl*. No, the Brisbane River is (paradoxically, for all its fury at flood times) 'a quiet teacher' (Howe), its mysteries a delicate and reluctant affair, spied in the gaps:

Air circulates through the latticed wharf  
as the brown river laps and bubbles underneath.  
A small goanna crosses the path  
lifting itself from the hot surface.  
Mangroves drag against the current, out  
from the tidal rocks.' ('Louvres', p. 51)

RUTH BLAIR, who grew up on the south side of the Brisbane River, is an Honorary Research Consultant with the School of English, Media Studies and Art History where she taught American literature and environmental literature. Her current research interest is in writings about the Australian environment.

NOTE: A fuller list of river poetry compiled by Ruth Blair is available with the online version of this publication at: [www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/publications/publications.html](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/publications/publications.html).

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1. This essay would not have been possible without the help of *AustLit—the Australian Literature Resource*. It would have taken half a lifetime to find these poems without this resource. Most of the material I discuss was located in the Fryer Library. Thanks to librarians there and at the John Oxley Library. I acknowledge also the helpful section on the Brisbane River in Stan Mellick's *Writers' footprints: a Queensland literary companion*.
2. Peter Porter, Sean O'Brien, John Kinsella. *Rivers*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2002, p. 9.
3. 'Louvres', p. 51. 'Louvres' is a collection of short poems with many references to the Brisbane River, within the collection *Mangroves*.

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Wollert, Mocco, 'Beside the River', in *With open arms*, Boolarong, Brisbane, 1993, p. 17.

Top: *Albert Street from Queen Street, Brisbane, during the 1893 flood. From an Album of Queensland Flood Views, 1893, Philip family papers, UQFL28, Album 3, Image 21.*

Below: *Walter Taylor Bridge, Indooroopilly. Photo by Mila Zincone.*



# ANTIGONE KEFALA

## ALIEN POET

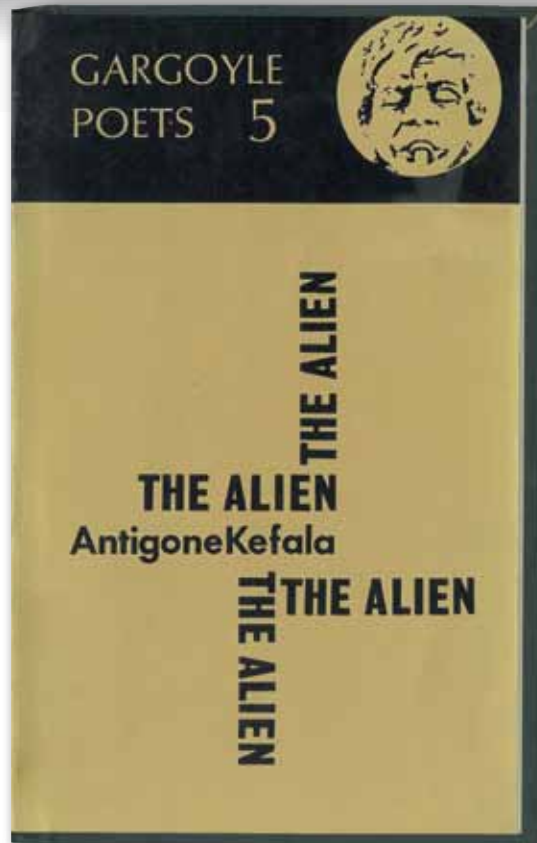
UQ STUDENT FROM THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH, MEDIA STUDIES AND ART HISTORY, KRISTIAN RADFORD, WRITES ABOUT ANTIGONE KEFALA'S BOOK, *THE ALIEN*.

Poet, novelist, and diarist Antigone Kefala has been a distinctive voice in Australian literature since her first book of poetry was published in 1973. This book, *The alien*, was published by Makar Press, an enterprise that began with a student literary magazine at The University of Queensland.

In May 1960, at the suggestion of Professor AC Cawley, head of the Department of English, the English Society of The University of Queensland published the first issue of *Makar*.<sup>1</sup> For five years, *Makar* published poems, short stories, and essays by students and staff of the University, as well as the occasional established writer.

In 1966, the second volume of *Makar* began, heralding a steadily diminishing emphasis on student writing in favour of contributions from writers from all over Australia. The magazine took on a slimmer, more professional design and published poems from and interviews with many Australian poets of continuing significance. Four issues of this new incarnation of *Makar* were produced each year, until 1972 when the yearly publication schedule changed to three magazine issues and three small books in the 'Gargoyle Poets' series. The series derived its logo from one of the grotesques in the UQ Great Court.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Gargoyle Poets' books each consisted of twenty to thirty-six pages of poetry from an individual writer, the concept being similar to that of the 'Paperback Poets' series published by University of Queensland Press (Makar Press's close neighbour). The first three books in the series were by Graham Rowlands (a previous editor of *Makar*), Alan Wearne, and Richard Packer. The second year's crop of Gargoyle Poets comprised Peter Annand (also a previous editor), Kefala, and Rae Desmond Jones.



Above: Antigone Kefala, detail from back cover of *The alien*. Background photo by Arman Zhenikeyev (Dreamstime.com)

Left: Front cover of *The alien* and portrait of the author on the back cover

Although poetic style inevitably varied between volumes of the Gargoyle series, Kefala's work was so stylistically at odds with the Australian poetic climate of the time that there was significant debate among the Makar Press editors about whether or not it should be published. Evidence of this debate can be seen in the correspondence

of Martin Duwell, long-serving *Makar* editor, found in the Fryer Library's extensive collection of records from Makar Press.

Kefala, of Greek-Romanian background and educated in New Zealand, migrated to Sydney in 1959.<sup>3</sup> Her work began to appear in a number of Australian periodicals, including *Makar*, as well as the Rodney Hall-edited anthology *Australian Poetry 1970*. In fact, in the cover letter of her submission to the Gargoyle Poets series, Kefala mentions that it was on Hall's 'insistence' that she submitted the manuscript.<sup>4</sup>

The editors at Makar Press were interested in her work but had some reservations about the lack of variety among the poems she submitted. They asked Kefala to send them more, which she found '[r]ather discouraging'<sup>5</sup> but, nonetheless, complied. From these two groups of poems, Duwell and his colleague Rodney Wissler devised a 'reconstructed' manuscript that they felt created the best balance between quality and diversity. Duwell then wrote a lengthy note to his fellow University of Queensland academics Ken Goodwin and Leon Cantrell, outlining to them why he felt the manuscript should be published.<sup>6</sup>

Cantrell had written in an earlier memo that Kefala's poetry was 'not my sort of verse at all, though I think I can see her (fairly limited) virtues. ... I suspect she makes a better impression through one or two pieces than through a collection'.<sup>7</sup> But Duwell disagreed; in defence of the manuscript, he says of Kefala's poems: 'it is of paramount importance that you but also of course the readers of the book, treat them as un-Australian'.<sup>8</sup> He acknowledges that Kefala's 'vague rhythmic gesture' may appear 'abhorrent' to Australian sensibilities, but claims that her 'obvious hang-ups' are 'stylistic not entirely thematic' and that, looking at them in this light, he 'found a surprising range in the poems'.<sup>9</sup> In conclusion, he urges his



colleagues to 'be a little receptive' and overcome what he earlier describes as the 'initial hurdle' of the poet's foreignness.<sup>10</sup>

Duwell's argument won out, and Makar Press published Kefala's first collection of poetry—*The alien*. The book is one of the shortest in the Gargoyle Poets series, with only sixteen pages of poetry. Its glossy gold cover is in keeping with the sleek style Makar and the Gargoyle Poets became known for, and the biographical note on the back cover further emphasises Kefala's non-Australian background. Next to the text, there is a small portrait photograph of Kefala, posing beside a peculiar object. The photograph was supplied by Kefala herself, and in a letter to Duwell she explains that the prop 'isn't a rope—but a cactus'.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Kefala was quite worried about how she would appear in the photograph, and organised her own photographer (James Murdoch, the music writer) 'so that the result should look human'.<sup>12</sup> Of the final result, she expresses satisfaction: 'I really don't mind the weirdness—it will probably prove adequate to the content'.<sup>13</sup>

Reviews of *The alien* were mostly complimentary, but not without reservations. The lack of variation that concerned the Makar Press editors was

also a concern for most reviewers.

A number singled out 'silence' and 'darkness' as two particularly repetitive motifs.<sup>14</sup> It could not be said that the reviewers failed to treat the poems as un-Australian—reviewers remarked upon the force with which Kefala's 'almost too flowery language expresses genuine ethnic alienation'<sup>15</sup> and the way in which she communicated 'intense depressive anxiety of the lost soul'.<sup>16</sup> But Duwell's assertion that the repetition in her poetry was a function of style more than theme was rejected by John Tranter, who found both repetitive:

'[Kefala's style] appears incapable of enough variation, emotionally or intellectually, to draw attention away from the sameness of the themes'.<sup>17</sup>

In a 1980 interview with Rudi Krausmann, Kefala talked about her 'constant feeling of being an outsider', as a migrant but also as a writer, and she claimed to see herself as not within the contemporary Australian literary scene.<sup>18</sup> Her status as an outsider was underlined when, unlike a number of other Gargoyle Poets (including Wearne, Jones, and Krausmann), she did not feature in Tranter's polemical 1979 anthology *The New Australian poetry*, also published by Makar Press. But Makar Press's eventual willingness to publish her first book meant a lot to her, evidenced by a letter she wrote to Duwell in 1975 in which she told him, 'I shall always be grateful to you for having the courage to publish *The alien*. I think it has made a lot of difference'.<sup>19</sup>

Duwell's support for Kefala's work did not end with Makar Press. In 1992, Hale & Iremonger published *Absence: new and selected poems*, Kefala's fourth collection of poetry. Among the previously published poems were all but three of the fourteen poems in *The alien*. Duwell reviewed the book for the *Weekend Australian*, and declared that Kefala's 'double perspective of being a woman and a migrant ... is much more in



keeping with the interests that readers of contemporary literature have developed over the last dozen or so years than it was when she published her first small book'.<sup>20</sup> He also mentioned her poetry's 'intensely experienced, but difficult to comprehend, psychic alienation', and that '[a]lmost all of this is foreshadowed in Kefala's first book, *The alien*'.<sup>21</sup> While acknowledging being its publisher, he declared that it 'is a book which has stood the test of time superbly', and that *Absence* 'is worth buying for its reprinting of *The alien* alone'.<sup>22</sup>

From her letters to Duwell in the Fryer Library<sup>23</sup> it is clear that Kefala read the aforementioned reviews of *The alien* in which her intensity is admired but her obsession with death found to be discomfiting. She concedes that 'death has preoccupied [her] for a very long time', and that alienation is 'another central theme' for her.<sup>24</sup> However, she argues that such preoccupations are not morbid eccentricities, but rather the results of an artistic rectitude which is uncommon in Australia among both writers and readers. In a recent interview she remarked: '[D]eath is not a subject people like writing about in Australia. Everyone here is trying to escape the issue'.<sup>25</sup> She continues:

There is a lack of intensity here. People are not fully engaged with what they are writing. ... But serious writing must have passion, must have a tenseness to it. ... I write about death—and many other things—oh, they must see me coming and think: 'Eh, her again! Oh no! What about some jolly business this time, please Antigone!'<sup>26</sup>

In an argument that shows she is very much engaged with Australian debates, she suggests that, in part, Australians balk at addressing death because of darkneses in our country's history: 'It is a very powerful landscape, a magnificent landscape, a country full of light and colour, as well as a place full of terrible things that no one wants to confess to'.<sup>27</sup>

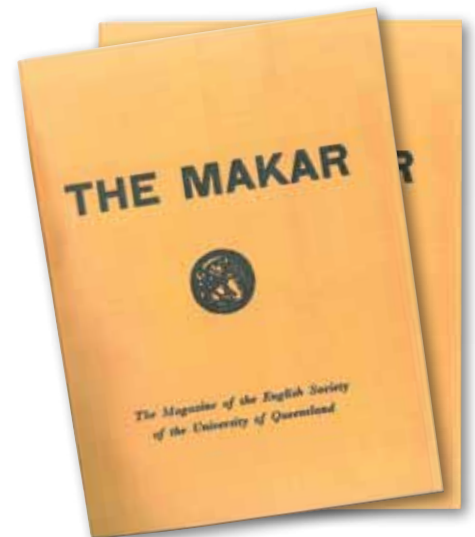
Kefala identifies simultaneously as a migrant writer and an Australian writer, and is aware of the paradoxes that come with this.<sup>28</sup> One of these is the ability to make an external observer's judgement of the national literary climate, while at the same time being situated within it. Kefala operates within a space of Australian poetry that appeared because of the way 'Australian society has changed demographically and

culturally ... maybe more rapidly and fundamentally because of the different waves of migration'.<sup>29</sup> She believes that 'our different experiences and backgrounds may provide a more open perspective from which to understand our lives and the powerful landscape in which we live',<sup>30</sup> and this is exactly the role her writing has played ever since Makar Press published *The alien*.

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Top: 'A musical hornblower'—one of the early grotesques of the UQ Great Court (tower). It inspired the logo for the Gargoyle Poets series.

Bottom: The Makar - front cover

Left: Detail of the graphic from the front cover of The Makar

THE

# RIVER AT BRISBANE

You are surrounded. Loops and reaches, steep banks and the breeze that comes off water weave everywhere and still it's possible not to have seen the river. The river is many rivers. To Oxley, discovering it as an Englishman there was the width and the evidence of massive flood-wrack high in river-gums: its source, he concluded, must be vast – some inland sea. Thirty miles upriver his boat was stumped on the gravel at Colleges Crossing.

My mother told me of swimming in parties at Indooroopilly “the water so clean you could see the bottom”. In 1946, after the war, my father bought a 30ft hulk, navy disposals and our weekends were endlessly banked scraping and painting red-lead, working it up to be river-worthy with an old Chev engine converted. After two floods when we pulled it up slimed with mud that adventure was over, though I do remember languidly the long curving trench of the river – washaways, thin leaved eucalypts, no other humans for miles and the small heart-echo of the motor. The picnics, themselves, were clumsy – once you dived in to the silted water it was either a muddy slide up the bank or the almost impossible rope over the side. In my mind then I composed variants on *The Moldau* till our tributary of the Brisbane River was a code, final as the Danube or more secretive than the Styx. White spider-lilies on the banks and the dry-blook of bottlebrush flowers dusted the surface in front of us as we cut our swathe through eternal water.

Brisbane itself swung and twisted down the course of our river and sometimes the banks spread out into low flood meadows. We pointed scornfully at the new suburbs. “The floods of ‘93” were our family lore; we were incredulous that people should build on the flats – mansions, some of them. The river saved up until 1974 then fulfilled every old prophesy. The Brisbane is many rivers. Strange, though, the city itself turns its back and strings expressways where there should be vistas and terraces. In one loop the old Botanical Gardens remember aboriginal rainforest and the warm compost of mud. Yachts, moored here, string out hand washing. At noon, the humidity closes over like a basin till you think of the Bay, just those few miles downstream where everything blends into air and tides and blue waters and you remember that thirty miles upstream the muddy water is still tidal, sharks have been seen, and in the drought year a further river persists one that is thickened with weeds and water hyacinth in large islands. These even swing out and down past the city and the new Cultural Centre – drowned Ophelias but intoning herbal songs in the cholera tides to the imported carp that have decimated the original fish life. We all shrink in the drought years, reminded of our own poisons. Loops and reaches. Past and present. You are surrounded.

BY THOMAS SHAPCOTT

POET AND FRYER LIBRARY  
SUPPORTER EMERITUS  
PROFESSOR THOMAS  
SHAPCOTT REFLECTS ON  
THE BRISBANE RIVER IN ITS  
MANY MOODS.

*The Brisbane River in flood, January 2011, by David Symons.*

*David works in Multimedia Services at UQ Library. David's photographs have been exhibited in Australia and overseas and are held in the Art Gallery of Western Australia. His recent work 'The Breath' was featured on the ABC's online arts website.*



## POETS ARE ALWAYS WRITING ABOUT THE SEA...'

This is the first line of a poem written 'For Jack Blight' by his friend and mentor, Judith Wright. She enclosed it in a letter to Blight, dated 4 March 1964, in appreciation of his third published work, *A beachcomber's diary* (1963).<sup>1</sup> Most people associate Blight's name with his poems about the sea for good reason: he published another selection of sea sonnets, *My beachcombing days*, in 1968, and yet another, *Holiday sea sonnets* in 1985. These books were the culmination of his search for a voice, a distinctive voice to be raised above the traditional lyrical or narrative forms. He chose the sonnet form for his sea poems. 'I, naturally, don't write in the sonnet form just for luck,' he explained to Wright in a letter dated 8-9 March 1966 [it was 3.30 am!]. 'I need such a form to cut myself down. It's a good discipline.'

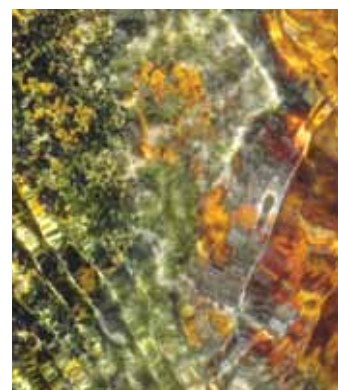
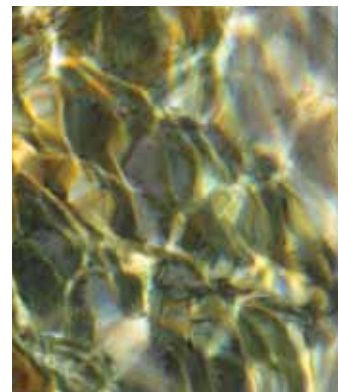
I shall always have to stand indebted to you'.<sup>2</sup> However it is clear that Blight worked very hard not only on his own craft, but also at studying the poetry of his contemporaries. He made a scrapbook in which he kept 'every serious poem published in the *Bulletin* from 1939 until well into the 1950s'.<sup>3</sup> He also clipped poems from the *Age*, the *Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* for nearly fifty years.

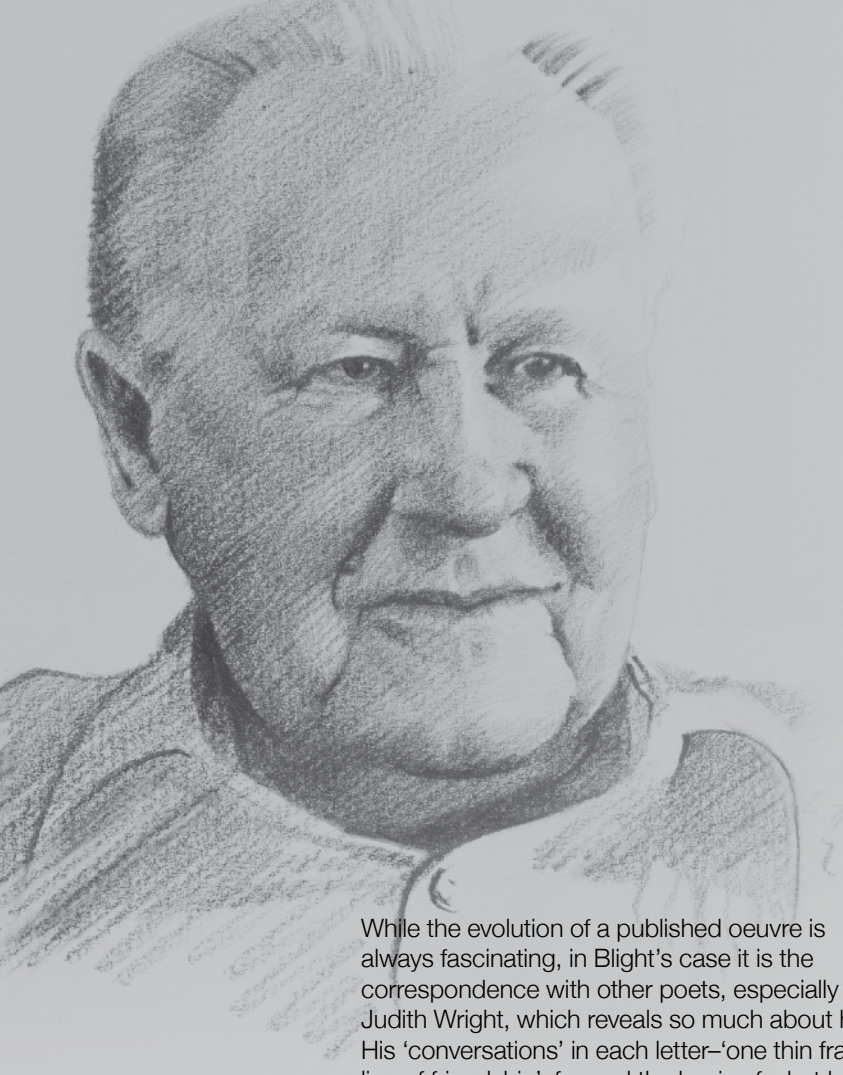
The John Blight papers in the Fryer Library (UQFL70) include drafts and typescripts of his individual poems (published and unpublished) and those that were selected for his eight books of poetry published between 1945 and 1985. Tracing his development as a poet through these papers reveals three distinct phases of work: first, 1939-1954—an era which resulted in

STEPHANY STEGGALL WRITES ABOUT THE PAPERS OF POET JOHN BLIGHT IN FRYER LIBRARY, PARTICULARLY HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH JUDITH WRIGHT.

Douglas Stewart in his position as editor at Angus & Robertson prepared the 'blurb' for *A beachcomber's diary*. He described the obsession that Blight had with the sea: 'The sea haunted him; and he haunted the sea; and the result is this curious, obsessed, dedicated, thoroughly original book full of waves, sea-urchins, Portuguese men-o'-war, sea-wasps, sea-hares, stonefish and starfish, everything from the periwinkle to the whale ...'. As editor of the *Bulletin's* Red Page from 1940 to 1960, Stewart had mentored Blight and published some of his earliest poems. When Stewart left the *Bulletin*, Blight credited the editor with showing him the way to write publishable poetry: 'If my work ever stands up to anything,

*The old pianist* (1945) and *The two suns met* (1954)—fragmentary, perhaps, and revealing a search for form; secondly, the 1960s—the sea sonnet phase when Blight found a place and subject, 'out from the beach...from the littoral', in which he could explore many 'large' questions; and thirdly, the 1970s stage, when, as Martin Duwell described it in his Introduction to *John Blight: selected poems 1939-1990*, Blight wrote from 'a more intense engagement with experience [rather] than the intense observations of the sea'. Three books were published in this era—*Hart* (1975), *Pageantry for a lost empire* (1977) and *The new city poems* (1980)—as well as a selected work in 1976.





While the evolution of a published oeuvre is always fascinating, in Blight's case it is the correspondence with other poets, especially Judith Wright, which reveals so much about him. His 'conversations' in each letter—'one thin frail line of friendship'—formed the basis of what he called 'this friendship ever happy between us'.<sup>4</sup> Their letters are a rich fund of commentaries on Australian literature mentioning many well-known writers and editors including Bruce Beaver, Beatrice Davis, Rosemary Dobson, Mary Gilmore, Rodney Hall, AD Hope, David Malouf, James McAuley, Les Murray, Tom Shapcott, Douglas Stewart and Val Vallis. Blight corresponded with many of these figures, but none was as important to him as Judith Wright.

Blight's papers contain folders of correspondence between the two poets: a creative connection that they maintained for more than forty years. Blight depended on Wright for criticism, guidance and encouragement. He often enclosed poems for her appraisal, making dismissive statements in his letters such as, 'I've put another sonnet in for you to read. Who else will ever read them any more?' However Wright was more optimistic telling him that *A beachcomber's diary* was a book that would last and would attract many readers. 'I can see myself still reading it at seventy-five,' she reassured him, 'and winking out more things from it. I don't know any book more packed with succinct meditation'.<sup>5</sup>

Blight met Judith Wright (and Val Vallis) at early meetings of the Meanjin Group in Brisbane. 'I met Jack in 1944,' Vallis recalled at the time of Blight's death. 'By then he had already been

published in the *Bulletin*. In those days that was very significant for Australian writers. There was something to really aspire to in being published in the same journal that had published the likes of [Henry] Lawson. When it was first arranged that we should meet each other in fact, the way one was to recognise the other was by standing on a particular part of Adelaide Street with a rolled up copy of the *Bulletin* under the arm.'<sup>6</sup>

Generally speaking, however, Blight was dismissive of literary groups and institutions that he collectively termed 'the literary mob'. He likened himself to 'a crusty old hermit crab', complained about 'the alienation of academics from literature' and decided that it was 'a good thing to live far removed from their literary world which is stultifying and frightening'. This may have contributed to special affection he held for Wright who told him that she had to 'spin round too much on the edge of the literary maelstrom'.<sup>8</sup>

He referred to her correspondence as 'breath of life' letters. They sustained him as a poet, as the two of them influenced each other's work and commented on trends in Australian poetry. When Wright wrote to Blight about *Preoccupations in Australian poetry*, her book of criticism in which she devoted a long and thoughtful section to her friend's work, she spoke to him about 'the difficulties of writing in Australia'. This was in the early 1960s, yet after many more years the correspondents still spoke of the same difficulties: working out an individual method and subject; refusing to court public favour; and yet still securing adequate critical attention. Wright reassured Blight that he was capably negotiating the problems. 'You've kept on your way and tackled your own job single-mindedly and in the process I think you've avoided most of the pitfalls that other writers playing to their galleries or trying to impress the overseas critics by knowing their moderns have fallen into with a plop, and developed your own personal line and way of looking at things in a way others haven't ...'.<sup>9</sup> She encouraged his adoption of the mantle he was to wear for most of his writing career: that of a loner whose poetry was in no way derivative apart from the indirect influence gained from an overall reading of contemporary Australian poetry. Blight assumed the reputation of writing independently as his defence against being ignored or misunderstood: 'Group movements and "schools" of poetry have always left me cold,' he claimed.<sup>10</sup> He did move closer to the literary community late in his career, but he always cherished the Romantic model of a poet figure separated from society. Wright continued to reassure him that his poetry possessed qualities that were not being valued. 'I venture to predict,' she wrote in 1951, 'that in twenty years' time someone will discover the works of F John Blight



Above: Pencil portrait of John Blight by Greg Rogers, used for the cover of Blight's *Selected Poems 1939-1990* (University of Queensland Press, 1992). *Papers of Gregory Rogers, UQFL494, Box 1, Series A, No. 26.*

and there will be a big boom in them. Try to count up the number of people writing here with any trace of a mind or originality of expression, and remember you've got both to a remarkable degree.' When the twenty years was almost up, though, she admitted that not many truly appreciated Blight's achievement: 'If this were a place where poems are valued as poems, how high you'd stand'.<sup>11</sup> She yoked him to herself in a mock-serious assessment in 1971: 'We, the only two poets of our own age in Queensland—arrogant, aren't I?'<sup>12</sup>

In the early years they spoke candidly of their disillusionment with the literary scene. Wright had very definite opinions about the poverty of literary criticism in post-war Australia: 'There's no doubt criticism in Australia is just about non-existent, as far as intelligence goes. Their praise is just as lacking in standards as their blame'.<sup>13</sup> It is likely that Wright's sharp views influenced Blight's own, but this is difficult to assess accurately. He increasingly voiced his own concerns about the literary scene: 'The climate of the [Adelaide] Arts Festival from a writer's point of view was most unhealthy—parochial, political, mediocre and poorly patronised by writers'.<sup>14</sup> He was angry that some people did not see a poet could be deserving of government support through writing fellowships. 'Australians don't regard writers as workers but some kind of lazy buggers and treat them accordingly,' he complained.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Blight's self-characterisation as the isolated and neglected Romantic he did receive significant recognition. *A beachcomber's diary* won the Myer Award in 1964 and the Dame Mary Gilmore Medal in 1965. In 1980 he won the FAW Christopher Brennan prize. In 1976 he won the Grace Leven Prize and the Patrick White Prize for Literature. This latter prize recognises an older Australian writer whose work had not received the critical acclaim or the financial rewards it deserved. The prize, plus a three-year writer's grant from the Commonwealth Literature Board which was extended for a further three years, enabled Blight to write full-time. In 1987 he received an AM for services to literature and education, the medal for which is also now held in the Fryer collections.

Blight and Wright rarely met in all their years of correspondence; the letter was the all-important means of expressing something more which could be lost in mere conversation or negated by personal contact. 'Beautiful natural letters. I have always known you best in your letters'.<sup>16</sup> 'You may reform me entirely, and get some worth out of me, if you continue those letters which I miserably feel are always the font of wisdom. So terrifying not to be able to pick one flaw, and yet, so reassuring'.<sup>17</sup> They met also in the pages of their



Left: Judith Wright in 1949. Papers of John Blight, UQFL70, Box 19, Folder 3.

Accompanying photos of the sea by Mila Zincone.

Mila works in Multimedia Services at the UQ Library and spends her free time with her camera on Stradbroke Island. Mila's solo exhibition 'Shadows and Reflections' featured images of Italy, Holland and Australia. Her photographs have appeared in several publications.

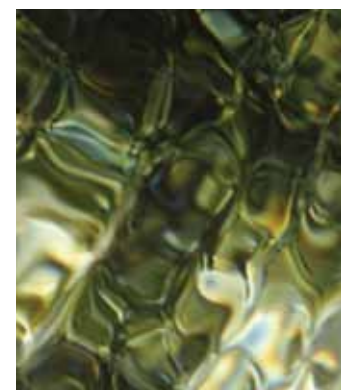
books. Wright wrote one poem 'For Jack Blight', and knew and understood 'the loneliness of the white page, the blank white page' (from Blight's poem, 'The poet's page'). Blight dedicated another poem, 'The leopard-ash tree' (1980) to Wright: 'My obligation is / to observe and not chop out what / may have seemed a dead tree, dead to / all futures ...' The obligation of the poet, Blight reminded his friend, was to remain open to new possibilities, despite the bareness of the present view.

Blight died in Brisbane in 1995. Judith Wright died in Canberra in 2000.

STEPHANY STEGGALL was awarded a Master of Philosophy at UQ in 2001 for her thesis, *John Blight and community: an Australian poet corresponding and conversing in the community of writers, the community of the natural world and the community of the public sphere*.

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# The University of Queensland Press Archives: Poetry and Material Culture

DEBORAH JORDAN DISCUSSES THE ROLE OF UQP AS A SIGNIFICANT PUBLISHER OF AUSTRALIAN POETRY IN THE 1960s.

Right: A selection of titles from UQP's Paperback Poets series

When the young American Frank Thompson was manager in the 1960s, the University of Queensland Press (UQP) became Australia's most significant poetry publishing house.<sup>1</sup> The Press published volumes of original poetry by individual poets, such as David Malouf, Vicki Viidikas and Martin Johnston; anthologies; two series of Paperback Poets; consolidated anthologies selected from the series, the first edited by Roger McDonald, and the second by Thomas Shapcott (both poets themselves); recordings of poets reading their own work with accompanying text; and cassette recordings of poets. Key Indigenous poet Kevin Gilbert's *People are legends* came out in 1978.

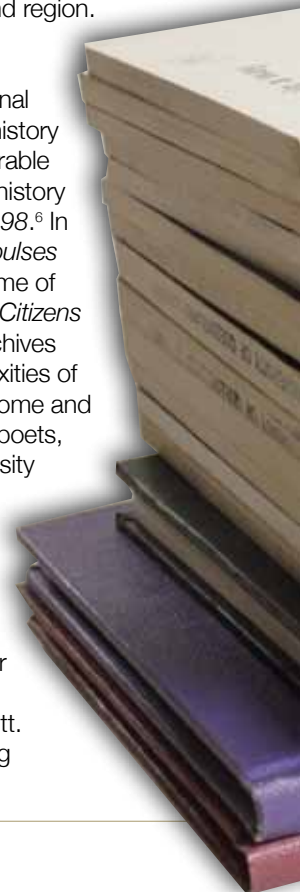
Can we put a value on the importance of poetry to a community? Poetry 'at its highest is more important than can possibly be estimated' proclaimed the cultural critic, Nettie Palmer.<sup>2</sup> Most of UQP's poetry list was contemporary, drawn from the 1968 generation and the New Poetry, and from the earlier poets with roots in the 1950s, but some anthologies included much earlier bards. There was also critical writing about poets; biographies of poets such as Judith Wright; studies of individual authors and general literary histories, and text books all within the frame of Australian literature. A plain series of traditional British poets from Shelley to Browning appeared for secondary school. The interest in poetry extended to some of the titles in the Asian and Pacific series. As Ivor Indyk has found, in fiction and scholarship as well as poetry, UQP's list formed the basis for the renaissance in Australian writing.<sup>3</sup>

The extraordinarily wide range and richness of the UQP archives stems in part from the calibre of the literary geniuses and giants—poets included—whose letters and manuscripts are boxed here. The bulk of the UQP records are held in the Fryer Library, with some important editorial correspondence still retained by the Press. Poetry editors employed at the Press were Roger McDonald, Rosie Fitzgibbons (who was also a fiction editor) and Sue Abbey, as well as commissioning editors Tom Shapcott and later Martin Duwell. Not only the correspondence from writers survives, at times anguished even tragic, at times tempestuous, but also letters from key artists of the time whose art was used on book covers.

The 'immense task of the poet of every age', believed Palmer, 'has to be to write lines of such poetic power that our own names and ways can become impregnated with poetry'. With the social revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new generation of poets was experimenting with poetry as a process in a search to fuse their aesthetics and revolt. Theirs was a generation seeking ways to build co-operative communities, not based in violence and warfare. But just as with earlier generations of poets, there were entrenched obstacles in their way of publication, given the size of the Australian reading public. '... to be a poet in Australia/is the ultimate commitment' sang Michael Dransfield.<sup>4</sup> When we ask questions about the material culture of poetry, about who reads poetry and what poetry sells, about the history of poetry books, and the cultural politics behind the publication of every book, then the UQP archive comes into its own as a very significant record of creative ferment.

Thompson had an extraordinary capacity to recognise creativity in its different guises and make a commitment to innovation and renewal. He was alive to the idea of the university press with responsibilities to the arts and region. The path ahead was uncharted. Publishing houses are strongly dependent on networks of personal relationships.<sup>5</sup> Milestones in the history of UQP began in 1968; a 'memorable year' Craig Munro called it in his history *UQP: the writer's press, 1948-1998*.<sup>6</sup> In 1968 the first anthology *New impulses in Australian poetry* and first volume of original verse Roger McDonald's *Citizens of mist* were published. In the archives we see something of the complexities of the process, the obstacles overcome and of how Thompson had to juggle poets, manuscripts, referees, the University Publications Committee, cover artists, accountants, production, the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF), sales and more to forge new relationships.

*New impulses*, a selection of over twenty poets, was put together by Rodney Hall and Tom Shapcott. Its publication offers an interesting



case study. Highly credible senior women poets were approached by the Press to referee the volume. Judith Wright, enthusiastic, wanted more explanation for the basis of selection of 'social tensions', and Rosemary Dobson, then working in London, challenged the inclusion of some poets.<sup>7</sup> While the book had been accepted by the University Publications committee in 1966, Thompson wanted the funding rules changed. Publication was thus delayed. In his negotiations with the CLF, Thompson brokered a subsidy for the publication costs so the book could be sold at a cheaper price, rather than the later payment for any losses. The CLF also had to review the book, at even greater length, and asked for revisions. The three-page report neatly typed is carefully filed in the archive. The book was reprinted 'within a remarkably short time'.<sup>8</sup> Thompson's belief that it was a highly significant book because it heralded the wider renaissance in poetry,<sup>9</sup> is confirmed by later scholars.

'Please don't fall into a dark mood of despair', Thompson wrote to Roger McDonald, UQP's very first single poetry author, on sending him the referees' stringent comments.<sup>10</sup> Judith Wright could not read McDonald's manuscript. Nor could Tom Shapcott, so he instead offered many quotable quotes in his reply. In a revealing memo to Ann [Lahey] UQP's first editor, Thompson attempts to navigate the perilous hazards to find a suitable referee sufficiently open to poetry not like his or her own.<sup>11</sup> Even this carefully chosen

referee wanted deletions and changes, such as the title from 'The Actor and Child'. A drawing by Hermia Boyd for the cover was commissioned. Somehow rumour had it that McDonald did not like the cover, but in a long letter to Thompson from Tasmania where he was working as a radio producer for the ABC, McDonald insisted that he was very pleased with it. Again Thompson wrote to the CLF for support—urgent support with a decision in time to publish for the Christmas market. The CLF responded by treating the book as a special case. Aware of the possibilities in publishing poetry, but also sure that the Publications Committee would not sanction a poetry editor, Thompson appointed McDonald as Audio Visual editor.

Every book has its own story, which can be reconstructed in the archives. The next two volumes of poetry published by Tom Shapcott and Rodney Hall survive in various stages of preparation, have reader's reports and were again





POETS WHO READ IN KING GEORGE SQUARE, SEPT. 1971  
 (4 SUBSEQUENTLY FEATURED IN "SQUARE POETS" (FAWD PUB.)  
 EDITED BY MAUREEN FREER) \*HARD \*SOFT COVER

FROM LEFT: MAUREEN FREER, JOHN MANIFOLD, KATH WALKER,  
 HELEN HAENKE, THOMAS SHAPCOTT, BRUCE DAWE,  
 MANFRED JURGENSEN (COMPERE BLAIR EDMONDS, ABC - NOT IN PICTURE)

From left: Maureen Freer, John Manifold, Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), Helen Haenke, Thomas Shapcott, Bruce Dawe, Manfred Jurgensen (comperes Blair Edmonds, not pictured). Fryer Library miscellaneous photograph collection, UQFL479, PhS 959.

channelled through the CLF. In a long important letter to Thompson, Shapcott explains why, rather than send a second poetry manuscript to UQP, he had self-published *Fingers at air* because he was 'anxious to get the work out quickly because it was experimental' and he was seeking a reaction. Such documents provide rich insight into the publishing possibilities of the time, the expectations of poet and publisher and provide the background for David Malouf's claim that the Press's next series, the Paperback Poet series, was one 'of the most brilliant publishing initiatives of the decade'.<sup>12</sup> The series was the response to Malouf's insistence that his volume *Bicycle and other poems* be published in paperback not hardback. UQP dispensed with CLF funding, and set the text in-house using funds from the sale of text-books. The risks paid off; the Paperback Poets 'sold like hot cakes' for one dollar each.<sup>13</sup>

Eighteen paperback books by different poets were published in the series; many of the poets had first appeared in *New impulses* and were also to be included in Shapcott's groundbreaking *Contemporary American & Australian poetry* (1976). Livio Dobrez provides a useful distinction about the importance of these poets of the New Poetry, or the Generation of '68; their poetry 'constitutes a quite different approach to the poem as poem, in short a new poetic'.<sup>14</sup> The first anthology edited by McDonald *The first Paperback Poets anthology* was a selection of the best, and the Press hoped to reach into the schools.

A second vital initiative by UQP was its series of Poets on Record. Associated series were the Poets on Tape, Public Issues on Tape, and Public Figures on Tape. The Poets on Record series each consisted of a 45 rpm record and booklet. Three Poets on Record were published

each year initially, then two each year until 1975. The first, *Rodney Hall reads Romulus & Remus*, had a print run of 1000, but this was increased for the next in the series, *Rosemary Dobson reads from her own work*, by 500. 'One of the aims of the series', explained McDonald, 'is to provide a readily available stock of recordings for sale to audio-visual libraries and interested individuals'.<sup>15</sup> Poets included James McAuley, Douglas Stewart, RD Fitzgerald, Bruce Dawe, Bruce Beaver, AD Hope, Judith Wright, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, Peter Porter, Randolph Stow, David Campbell and Francis Webb.

Each file, again, tells a different story. A recording session was arranged for AD Hope in Canberra, but at the time he was overseas. The BBC would not do a 'private' taping of Rosemary Dobson, who instead found a commercial recorder. Poems were selected by authors themselves (usually) and they read more than was needed so a selection could be made by the Press. Then the poets were asked to write an explanatory note. Not only was the recording being made of the authentic voice of the poets, but they were also being asked to comment on their own poems 'to make the voice a bit more mind-expanding (as they say in the comics), or as they say in the academy, it will flesh it out'.<sup>16</sup> Again in the archives, we can find the rich variety of responses in drafts of varying lengths and format. Many poets expressed reluctance but were encouraged in dialogue with McDonald. In general, there was an acceptance among these poets that at the centre of every poem there is a 'meaning which is supplied by the reader in collaboration with the poet'.<sup>17</sup> Dobson explained to an imaginary school girl how her interpretation of the poet's poem was right even though it was different from her teacher's and other members of her class; Rodney Hall wrote of the essential relationship between poetry and



## Young Australian poets recorded by Uni. Press



Mr Philip Neilson

The University of Queensland Press has started a new venture in the field of poetry publishing.

The new series *Australian Poets on Tape* consists of ten cassettes on each of which two poets read from their own works.

Like *Paperback Poets*, this series is designed to introduce the impressive new work of Australia's young poets.

Mr Philip Neilson, and Mr Roger McDonald, Editor of all U.Q.P. publications collaborated on the production of this series. Their own work is included among the readings.

Mr Neilson who published a book of poems *Poets of a String Man* with Makar Press last year is currently working on a book which he hopes to publish in the Paperback series.

He reviews poetry for *The Age* and has recently started to write short stories. He is a tutor with the English Department.

He said that the recording of a poet reading his own work in many ways re-established a personal element between the poet and his audience.

"In the early days of ballads, they were performed by the writer who thereby established direct contact with his audience."

"In modern times the poet has tended to be detached from his readers," explained Mr Neilson. "Having the poet read his own work is very often a much better means of communicating what he is trying to say, than reading the printed page."

The twenty poets in the series were recorded in their own homes rather than in an artificial - and often alienating - public situation.

"As a result," said Mr Neilson, "they were more relaxed, and this brought a greater vitality and flexibility to their readings."

He added that the amazing variety in the voices, tone and rhythm of the readings, lent a greater individuality and colour to the poetry.

"For all these reasons," he said, "the recordings are a considerable aid in the understanding, as well as an enjoyment of poetry."

Among the poets in the series are three graduates from this University: David Malouf, Judith Rodriguez and Philip Neilson.

The first release consisted of (1) Robert Adamson and John Tranter; (2) Geoffrey

The University Bookshop is selling hundreds of books at 23 1/3% below recommended retail price. This includes text, reference and recommended reading books from recent years. The sale will continue till the end of August.

Lehmann and Robert Gray; (3) Roger McDonald and Geoff Page; (4) Rhyll McMaster and Jane Zagre; (5) David Malouf and Martin Johnston.

Now released in this series are (6) Alan Gould and Kevin Hart; (7) Kim Hurrenley and Alan Afterman; (8) Shelton Lee and Robert Harris; (9) Philip Roberts and Philip Neilson and (10) Judith Rodriguez and Jennifer Mackenzie. UQP

magic with the 'non-rational responses' in the hearer;<sup>18</sup> but pertinent here are RD Fitzgerald's comments that 'a poet reading his own poem, however poorly ... will unveil more of its meaning than the printed page...'.<sup>19</sup> A recording on record could be listened to again, and through repetition, any listener's 'bewilderment' could be unknotted.

The archives of the poets in UQP in the Fryer offer rich

possibilities for ongoing exploration into this exciting era, a time when poetic power, through the material conditions of possibility through UQP, was reaching out and our ways were being impregnated with poetry. The second paperback poetry series was initially edited by Roger McDonald, then Rosie Fitzgibbons and Tom Shapcott, all superb critics and editors. In preparing an anthology from the series, Shapcott emphasised "the achievements of the second half of the vital decade of the 1970s" outlining "the presence of energy and immediacy" in making his catholic selection.<sup>20</sup> We can recognise this today, even as the books themselves are now rare, as we can listen again and again to the recordings of many key poets, because Poets On Record are available online, through the Fryer Library catalogue and eSpace.



DEBORAH JORDAN is a Research Fellow in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at UQ. She is examining the University of Queensland Press's contribution to the national literary culture and international canon from 1965 to 1995, as part of a wider national project on publishing economies in Australia.

Left: Article from University News, 2 June 1976

Top: The covers of two records from the *Poets on Record* series

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# *In Paperbark Country*

i.

the slow river draws us  
past the rusty banksia  
the paperbarks' tarnished silver

like any leaf, we spin  
tranced in the eddy  
the spell of sun

but see! his dragonfly mind  
before the eye can alight  
jerks away, weightless  
its electric turquoise

ii.

my mother hates the paperbarks  
their eerie white scribbles'  
twisted beckoning but

their flaky arms above the lake  
their long feet, wet to the ankle  
their listening, their hair shiny with sun  
their fingers full of birds

are like my mother

iii.

when he crawled from his last skin  
he could tell it was the end  
of the furtive, underwater life –  
this hull was blue, with wings –  
on a thought, he sent his new craft  
skidding into the air

no time to learn the world  
but he found  
the lake was a sky he could stand on  
insects were for his hunter's swoop  
and anywhere under the blue dome  
sex was a midair gleeful  
coupling of box-kites, catapulting  
skywards

can the world be newer than this?  
for three weeks he will drink in  
the astounding earth and sky  
his jerky blue flight  
stitching the lake shore  
teaching the eye  
suddenness



---

by PAM SCHINDLER

iv.

my mother is a lake now  
she is all depth and resonance –  
the new days cannot hold  
they slip away  
like a sheet of clear water  
skimmed from her well of eighty years

she is an island lake  
with a narrow beach  
and no shallows  
walk in past the reeds  
and you are suddenly  
in over your head in the dark sweet water

eighty years of seasons  
have washed over her  
now blue dragonflies bead  
the sedges' grey-white-green  
cupping today's sunlight  
she will hold it and let it go

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PAM SCHINDLER works as a librarian at UQ Library. Her poetry has appeared in a range of Australian literary magazines and she was a performer at the 2010 Queensland Poetry Festival. Her first book of poems, *A sky you could fall into*, was published in 2010 by Post Pressed.

*Photos by Mila Zincone*

# ART IN MINIATURE

## BOOKPLATES IN THE FRYER LIBRARY

PENNY WHITEWAY PROFILES A SELECTION OF BOOKPLATES FROM THE EXTENSIVE COLLECTIONS HELD IN THE FRYER LIBRARY.

Below: *WP Barrett bookplate, commissioned by Margaret Hope Middleton*

A bookplate, by the simplest definition, is a printed label designed to be pasted into the front of a book so as to identify the owner. With a history dating back to pharaonic times, when small enamelled tablets were affixed to papyri in the library of Pharaoh Amenophis III around 1400 BC, the paper form we are now more familiar with originated in Germany in the late 1400s.

The earliest bookplates were used as marks of ownership, but bookplates came to be objects of interest in themselves; enthusiasts commissioned

plates from their favourite artists and then exchanged plates with other collectors, both in Australia and overseas. One of Australia's earliest bookplate patrons was Percy Neville Barnett, and he advised would-be collectors to commission a high quality plate in order to increase their chance of obtaining plates in return. For many, including Barnett, this meant commissioning a plate from WP Barrett, head of the bookplate department of the prestigious London stationers Messrs John & Edward Bumpus. Hundreds of plates are attributed to New Zealand-born Barrett, but in reality he was the public face of the operation. Robert Osmond was one of a stable of behind-the-scenes artists who executed the designs for clients. Apprenticed to a London engraver on his fourteenth birthday in 1888, Osmond started designing bookplates for Bumpus around 1905.

One of Osmond's designs was for Margaret Hope Middleton, an Australian. The original engraved printing plate plus several different prints are held in the Father Leo Hayes collection. The Hayes collection contains over 1000 bookplates from Australian and international designers, including some rare examples.

Two of the Middleton prints are *remarque* copies, a *remarque* being a small symbol which appears near the artist's signature. It is usually a sign of an early print, the practice being to remove the *remarque* from the printing plate after a certain number of prints have been made. They are rarer, since only a limited number are produced.

Both the *remarque* copies of the Middleton plate are signed and dated by Barrett, as if he were the artist. This practice angered one of the artists so much that they quit the firm but Osmond didn't care who got the credit as long as he got paid, and it is estimated that 49% of the 550 plates attributed to Barrett were designed by Osmond. Osmond was also the artist behind the 'Barrett' plate of Australian collector Blanche Milligan; both the printing plate and various prints are held, including a first proof showing a partially completed design.



Bookplates are produced using several different techniques. Those outlined above are engravings, which belongs to the intaglio group of printmaking techniques. In intaglio methods, the inked portions of the print are the result of lines incised into the printing plate or block. Etching is another technique in the intaglio group. Bookplates are also produced using relief printing methods such as woodcuts. In relief methods, the inked portions of the print are the result of raised sections of the printing block.

Australia's best known bookplate artist, Adrian Feint, produced bookplates using both intaglio and relief techniques. He executed two plates for Aeneas J McDonnell, one an etching dating from 1926 and the other a woodcut dating from 1933. The etched printing plate and woodcut printing block are both in the Hayes collection, along with signed prints from each. While the plates share some features—the McDonnell family motto *toujours prest* and part of the family crest appear on both—stylistically they are quite different. The etching is a 'library interior', a very popular theme for bookplates, while the woodcut depicts a garden as viewed through a window. But the differences are not just in the subject—the different techniques result in bookplates with a completely different feel. The etching is finely detailed, relying on delicate lines and gradations in tone to depict the library interior, whereas the woodcut is more stylised, using white highlights amongst solid areas of ink to give shape and form to the garden.

Feint was an artist who worked in many media, though bookplates were his main source of income. He charged clients 10 guineas, and once they approved the design they received thirty signed prints and the printing block or plate. Between 1922 and 1944 he produced around 220 bookplates, and was well known both in Australia and internationally; his win in an international bookplate competition led to a solo exhibition at the Library of Congress in Washington DC. One hundred and fifty-one of his bookplate designs are held in the Hayes and Corrigan collections in the Fryer Library.

Bookplates aren't only commissioned by individuals; institutions, particularly libraries, have also ordered bookplates to mark special collections or donations. Institutional bookplates range from the highly decorative to the purely functional, the designs varying based on the tastes of the commissioning committee, the wishes of the donor, or the financial position of the library at the time. Often library plates have space for the call number, shelf mark or other administrative information used by the library, or space for the name of the donor. One institution may have several plates, each being used to mark a particular collection or perhaps a special donation.



Amongst the plates in the Pat Corrigan collection—which, like the Hayes collection, contains over 1000 plates from Australian and international designers—is a delightful album of plates from American university and college libraries. Two plates for the University of North Dakota library are at the functional end of the scale; both consist of the University's crest and space to add donation details surrounded by a plain border. The University of Oregon is represented by no less than ten different plates, for



Top: Woodcut bookplate by Adrian Feint for Aeneas J McDonnell

Bottom: Etching bookplate by Adrian Feint for Aeneas J McDonnell

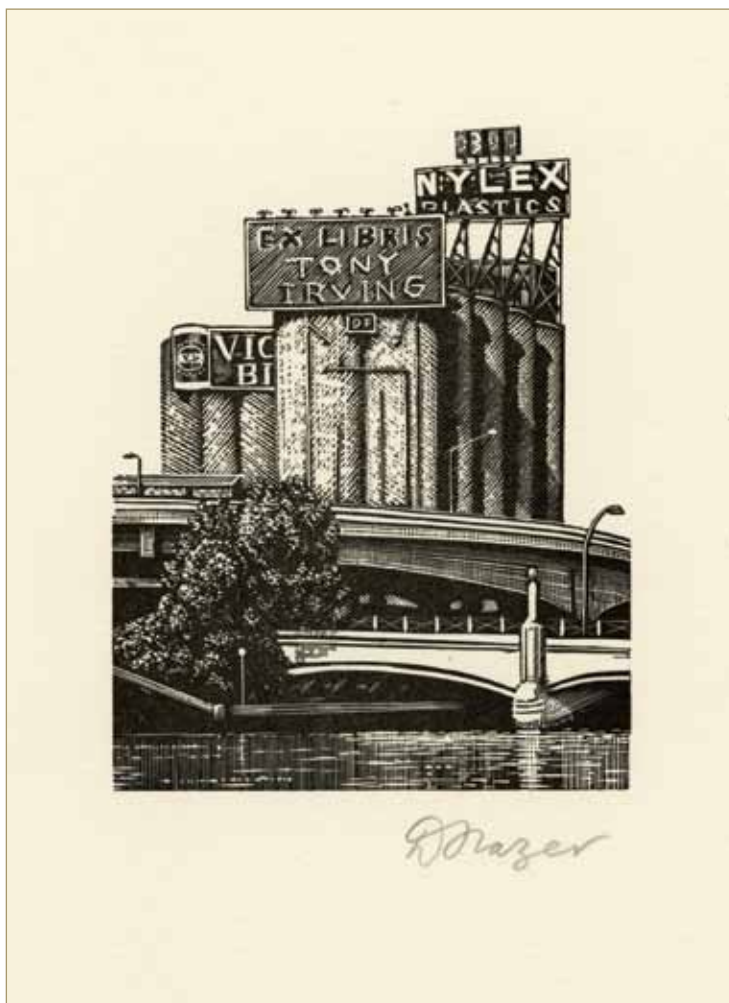
© Estate of the late Adrian Feint, used with permission

collections as diverse as the Camilla Leach collection of art books, the William M Whidden Library in the School of Architecture and Allied Arts, and a plate marking books 'from the Dr GW Overmeyer collection of books relating mainly to the Civil War'.

Of course, no mention of institutional bookplates would be complete without including the bookplates commissioned by the Fryer Library itself. While no plate was commissioned to mark books bought with the funds raised in memory of Jack Fryer, over the years other special collections have been marked. The example found most often is the simple design of a cross with the text 'from the collection of the Venerable Archdeacon Edward Leo Hayes MA, FRGSA', marking items from the Hayes donation in 1967.

Another marks items purchased with the Mary Alexis Macmillan Memorial fund. Mary was a teacher of English and History at Brisbane Girls Grammar School—her connection to Fryer Library was her engagement to Jack Fryer at the time of his death. The bookplate uses a grasstree design drawn by architect Karl Langer, whose papers are held by the Fryer Library.

*Below: David Frazer's bookplate for Tony Irving, depicting the Nylex Plastics silos by the Yarra River, Melbourne. © David Frazer, used with permission.*



While the bookplate collections in Fryer Library consist mainly of historical plates, thirty designs by artist David Frazer add a contemporary note to the collection. Initially trained as a painter, David moved into printmaking, and is versed in a number of printmaking techniques, including lithography, linocuts and etching. All of the plates in Fryer are wood engravings, another relief printing technique. Amongst the designs by David held in Fryer is one for Tony Irving, which depicts a well-known Melbourne scene—the silos beside the Yarra River, topped with the Nylex Plastics clock and thermometer, and the Punt Road Bridge and Yarra in the foreground. David has cleverly used the large billboard on the side of the silos as the space for the inscription, which simply reads 'Ex Libris Tony Irving'. David's designs also include common bookplate themes, such as gardens and bookpiles, as well as more whimsical designs.

The plates discussed above represent a tiny fraction of those held in the Fryer Library. Around 150 Australian bookplate designers are represented in the various Fryer collections. Plates date from some of the earliest known in Australia, through late nineteenth-century plates by artists prominent in other fields, on to the 'golden age' of bookplate design in Australia, which occurred between the wars, and finally to designs from the twenty-first century, such as those by David Frazer. Numerous plates by international designers, mainly historical, are also held.

Books, journals and manuscript material on the topic were added to the collection with the Hayes donation, including letters from bookplate artists and collectors, which add background to the collection of plates. The library continues to purchase relevant publications, and is a member of the New Australian Bookplate Society, which aims to continue the long tradition of artists designing bookplates for discerning collectors and bibliophiles.

Bookplates are miniature artworks, generally reflecting both the style of the artist and the tastes and interests of the owner. Those held by the Fryer Library provide an insight into a long and illustrious history.

PENNY WHITEWAY, librarian, has previously written about Fryer Library's bookplates for *Found in Fryer* and the *Newsletter* of the New Australian Bookplate Society.



# WHAT'S NEW IN FRYER LIBRARY



Since the last issue of *Fryer Folios*, the Library has farewelled Mark Cryle as the Manager of the Fryer Library and has welcomed Laurie McNeice to this position.

Mark left the Library on 8 April after thirty-three years of service at UQ—first working in University Administration and then moving to the Library in 1984. In farewelling Mark, Director of the Library's Research Information Service, Ros Follett, commended Mark's considerable and expert knowledge in resources in the humanities, his contribution to the Library's reference service and the promotion of Library services throughout the academic community.

After undertaking various senior roles in the Social Sciences and Humanities Library, Mark was appointed as Manager of the Fryer Library in 2007. Throughout this period, Fryer Library was promoted to University researchers and the community through online exhibitions, hosting Friends of Fryer and other community events and also through academic symposia. Mark also worked with the Centre for the Government of Queensland on a special project digitising key resources on the history of Queensland. The outcome of this project will be a website available

both to researchers and the community which will be launched later this year. Fryer's publication for the UQ Centenary Year, *Found in Fryer*, contained twelve stories written by Mark on significant publications and manuscripts in the collection.

All of Mark's library experience will be put to good personal use as he is commencing full-time study to complete a PhD. He is researching the rendering and interpretation of Anzac Day in Australian literature (poetry, fiction, drama and song). Although he has resigned from the Library staff, we will still see a lot of Mark as he uses the rich collection of resources in the Fryer Library.

Laurie McNeice comes to the position of Fryer Library Manager with a wealth of knowledge and experience. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master of Library Science from the University of Toronto, Canada. At the University of Toronto, Laurie worked with a number of reference and special collections—at the Robarts Library, the University's main humanities and social sciences collection; cataloguing theological works dating back to the sixteenth century at Regis College, and cataloguing subject-specialised resources at the Institute of Aerospace Studies. In the mid-1990s at Alliance Communications Corporation, then Canada's largest film production company, Laurie established and maintained a library of photographs, slides, press clippings and other materials for the use of its publicity department. Earlier when working at the Bank of Canada Archives, Laurie catalogued the bank's correspondence from the 1930s and 1940s for use by historical researchers.

Many of you will have met Laurie at Fryer Library events. She has been working in the Fryer Library since 2003, appointed first as a Librarian and then promoted to Senior Librarian in 2006. Over the past four years, Laurie also acted as Manager of the Fryer Library while Mark Cryle was seconded to special project work. During this time, Laurie was involved in a number of large undertakings including a full collection valuation for insurance purposes and ensuring that Fryer Library made a significant contribution to the University's Centenary in 2010.

Left: Ms Laurie McNeice, Manager, Fryer Library. Photo by Penny Whiteway.



## FRYER LIBRARY AWARD 2011

Right: Mr James Halford, recipient of the 2011 Fryer Library Award. Photo by Penny Whiteway.



### MR JAMES HALFORD

The recipient of the Fryer Library Award for 2011 is Mr James Halford. Mr Halford received his Masters in Creative Writing from The University of Queensland in 2010. His master's thesis included work on William Lane's Australian utopians in Paraguay in the 1890s. He travelled to Paraguay and interviewed South American descendents of William Lane's New Australia colony, leading to the publication of an article in the January 2010 issue of *Antipodes* entitled 'Reviving the radical 1890s: contemporary returns to William Lane's utopian settlements in Paraguay'. As the holder of the Fryer Award, he proposes to investigate the way Brisbane writers at the turn of the nineteenth century imagined their city in the future, how the texts of the period draw on the conventions of utopian and dystopian fiction, and how they reflect the characteristic anxieties of 1890s Queensland society.

Mr Halford won a *One Book Many Brisbanes* Award for his 2009 short story 'The revenge of Ding Xi' and the *State Library of Queensland Young Writer's Award* in 2006 for his short story 'Thoughts while night travelling'. For more information on the Fryer Library Award, including guidelines for 2012 applicants, see: [www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/awards/awards.html](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/awards/awards.html).

### MINUTE BOOKS OF PRE-FEDERATION AUSTRALIAN TRADE UNIONS INSCRIBED ON UNESCO AUSTRALIAN MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

Minute books of pre-Federation Australian trade unions held by twelve Australian institutions have been inscribed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register. These minute books record collective decision-making by Australian workers in the nineteenth century and document the early formation of the Australian industrial relations system. They provide insight into the beginnings of social welfare, the early history of communities and industries, and the details of nineteenth-century working lives. They record events and achievements as they happened, the details of local disputes that became the first steps in broader campaigns such as that for the eight-hour day and the impetus for the political representation of workers through the formation of the Australian Labor Party.

The twelve institutions who jointly submitted the nomination to the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Committee were the Noel Butlin Archives Centre (Australian National University), Broken Hill City Library, James Cook University, the National Library of Australia, the State Library of New South Wales, the State Library of South Australia, the State Library of Victoria, the State Library of Western Australia, the University of Melbourne Archives, the University of Newcastle, the University of Wollongong, and Fryer Library. Fryer Library holds in its collection of the records of the Trades and Labor Council of Queensland material from the 1891 Queensland Shearers' Strike and late nineteenth-century material from the Eight Hour Day Committee. The Committee accepted the recommendation and praised the submission as 'exemplary' and a model of its kind for a multi-institutional nomination. The Memory of the World Register is a catalogue of documentary heritage of global significance and outstanding universal value, comparable to the World Heritage List for cultural and national heritage. The register is the public face of UNESCO's Memory of the World program, which promotes access to the world's archive holdings and library collections, as well as promoting their preservation. The Memory of the World website can be found at: [www.amw.org.au](http://www.amw.org.au).







## COLLECTIONS

### ADDITIONS TO RARE BOOK HOLDINGS

At the Rare Book Auction held in conjunction with the UQ Alumni Book Fair in April, Fryer Library purchased a rare copy of William Hamilton's *Remarks on several parts of Turkey, or some account of the antient and modern state of Egypt, as obtained in the years 1801, 1802* (London, 1809), together with its accompanying atlas containing 24 large engravings. William Hamilton (1777-1859) was a British diplomat, sent to Constantinople in 1799 as an attaché to Lord Elgin's embassy. The Earl frequently entrusted Hamilton with important business, and in 1801 sent him on a diplomatic mission to Egypt following the French evacuation after the battle of Alexandria. Hamilton discovered that the French, contrary to treaty, were attempting to ship the famous trilingual Rosetta Stone back to France. With an escort of soldiers, he rowed out to the French ship and insisted on carrying off the precious monument. It was also Hamilton who collected together the Parthenon (or 'Elgin') marbles, and in 1802 shipped them back to England. His 1809 book contains the first transcript and translation of the Greek portion of the Rosetta Stone, allowing the text to be compared to the parallel text in Egyptian hieroglyphics and thus allowing Egyptian hieroglyphics to be deciphered for the first time. In 1838 Hamilton was appointed one of the trustees of the British Museum, which continues to hold the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin marbles to this day. Only one other copy of Hamilton's book is held in Australian public libraries.

In the course of preparations for this year's Alumni Book Fair, the Alumni Friends of the University of Queensland identified two other books of interest, which they generously donated to Fryer Library. The first of these consists of four volumes of rare nineteenth-century photographs of the Middle East by Frances Frith (1822-98). Frances Frith was a British photographer and businessman who travelled to Palestine and Syria and up the Nile between 1856 and 1859, taking pioneering photographs of the landscape and of monuments, often under difficult and dangerous conditions. He developed his photographs inside an unventilated tent, working in desert temperatures



*Fryer Library is very grateful to the Alumni Friends of The University of Queensland for allowing these valuable works to be added to its holdings.*

Top: A view of Cairo from William Hamilton's *Remarks on several parts of Turkey* (1809)

Middle: The colossal statue of Rameses II at Abu Simbel, photographed by Francis Frith

Bottom: A crocodile on the banks of the Nile, photographed by Francis Frith





Top left: *Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire, from the British gallery of contemporary portraits (1822)*

Top right: *Thelma Afford's costume designs for the 1947 Independent Theatre production of Awake my love*

Page 27: Top left: *An illustration from Owen Jones's The grammar of ornament (1865)*

Top right: *View of Newstead from Jordan Terrace, Bowen Hills, during the 1893 flood. From an Album of Queensland flood views, 1893, Philp family papers, UQFL28, Album 3, Image 2.*

*Owl photos by David Symons*

with collodion chemicals that were prone to boil on the glass-plate negatives. Back in England, he published his photographs in a series of successful books. In 1860 he established his own photographic company, publishing views of Britain both in postcard and folio format. His skill and technical expertise made Frith and Company, for a time, the largest photographic publisher in the world. The firm remained in business until 1971, when its archive was purchased by Rothman's, the tobacco company, to ensure its safety. It is now an independent company, marketing Frith's images worldwide.

The care taken in the execution of these photographs, and the wealth of period detail that they record, have made them an invaluable resource for historians. The State Library of New South Wales is the only other Australian library to hold three of these four volumes published by the London firm of William Mackenzie.

The second book donated by the Alumni Friends is the two-volume *British gallery of contemporary portraits, being a series of engravings of the most eminent persons now living or lately deceased in Great Britain and Ireland: from drawings accurately made from life, or from the most approved original pictures. Accompanied by short biographical notices* (1822). This work contains 150 stipple engraved portraits of British celebrities of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, accompanied by biographical text about the subjects. The engravings are of very fine quality. Again, the State Library of New South Wales is the only other Australian library to hold a copy of this book.



## WEBSITE

### TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Fryer Library continues to profile a 'treasure' from its holdings each month on its website. Context and information are provided in a short narrative and there is a selected image gallery, viewable online.

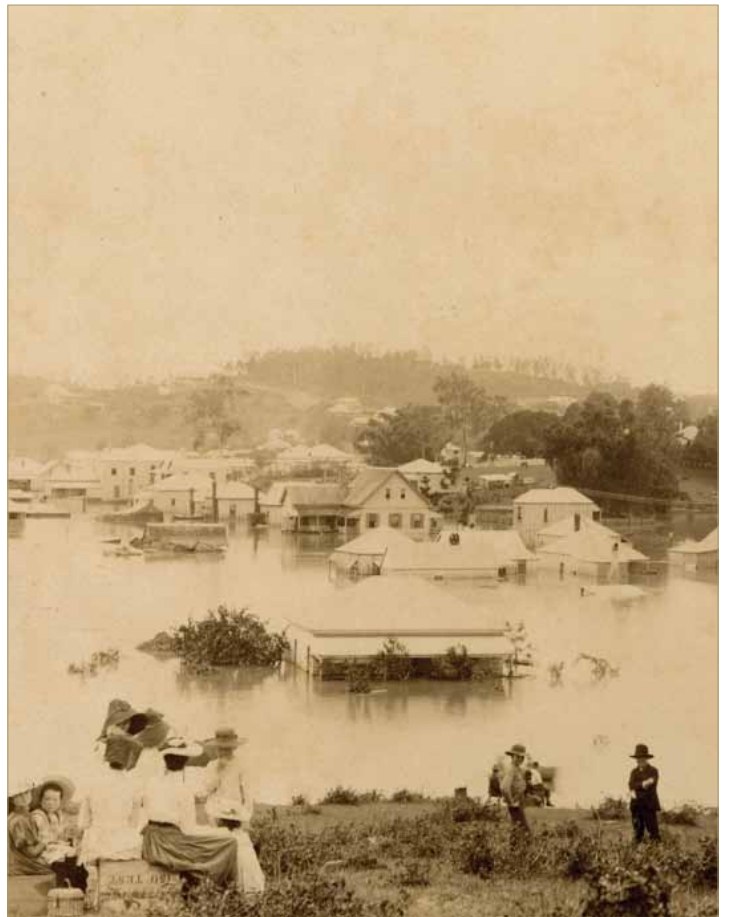
The profiled treasure for **February** was Owen Jones's *The grammar of ornament* (1865), a triumph of Victorian chromolithographic printing, still in print today.

**March's** treasure profiled rare science fiction journals from the Donald Tuck collection, with their strikingly illustrated covers.

For **April**, Mark Cryle explored the letters of Private Austin Pratt, which describe his extraordinary experiences in Gallipoli in 1915.

**May's** treasure looked at a rare album of 1893 flood views held in Fryer's Philp family collection.

The **current** treasure profiles Thelma Afford's costume design albums for numerous theatrical productions in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide from the 1930s to the 1950s.



## NEWSFLASH

### FOUND IN FRYER PROFILED IN THE AUSTRALIAN

**F**ound in Fryer: stories from the Fryer Library collection, published by the University of Queensland Library last year in celebration of the UQ Centenary, was profiled in an article by Bronwyn Watson in the Review section of the *Australian* for 9-10 July 2011. The article focused particularly on Margaret Preston material held by Fryer. A second article is scheduled to appear in the *Australian* in October, discussing a rare illustrated edition of Milton's *Paradise lost* held by Fryer.

See the back cover of this issue of *Fryer Folios* for more information on purchasing a copy of *Found in Fryer*, or go to [www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/publications/publications.html](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/publications/publications.html).



### A BIRD BRAIN?

**O**n the last day of Semester One exams, UQ library staff were startled by the appearance of a Southern Boobook owl above the cloister entrance to the Duhig Tower that houses Fryer Library. The owl perched on top of the entrance, as if it were auditioning for the role of library mascot. The species is found across Australia and this specimen was most likely displaced from its usual daytime roost.

Its appearance was held to be a good omen for those writing exams, since Greek mythology credits owls with symbolising learning, wisdom and foresight.



## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

If you would like to become a Friend of Fryer please go to the website at: [www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/friendsoffryer/](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/friendsoffryer/)

Click on **Become a Friend of Fryer now**. Complete the membership form and send the form with your \$40 (individual) or \$50 (household) payment to the address provided on the form.

Alternatively, please contact:  
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Friends of Fryer  
Fryer Library  
The University of Queensland  
Queensland 4072

Email:  
[fryerfriends@library.uq.edu.au](mailto:fryerfriends@library.uq.edu.au)  
Phone: (07) 3346 9427  
Fax: (07) 3365 6776



# FRIENDS OF FRYER

## RECENT EVENTS

### 14 MARCH: CHERYL TAYLOR 'THEA ASTLEY'S POETRY: A PREQUEL TO HER FICTION'



On Monday, March 14, members of the Friends of Fryer gathered for their first event of 2011, which featured Associate Professor Cheryl Taylor of James Cook University, 2010 Fryer Library Award Winner, speaking about her work on Fryer's Thea Astley collection in a talk entitled: 'Thea Astley's poetry: a prequel to her fiction'. Professor Taylor has been investigating the ways in which the themes and language of Thea Astley's poetry foreshadow her novels, and establishing an accurate chronology of her poems. Thea Astley's son, Mr Ed Gregson (pictured left with Cheryl Taylor), was among the audience who came to hear the talk.

### 19 MAY: SUSANNA DE VRIES 'TRAILBLAZERS: CAROLINE CHISHOLM TO QUENTIN BRYCE'



Susanna de Vries (pictured with Laurie McNeice) is an art historian and former university lecturer who now writes full time. Born in London, she studied art history, literature and history at the Sorbonne and the University of Madrid. An Australian citizen since 1975, Susanna is the author of fourteen books, including *Ethel Carrick Fox: travels and triumphs of a post-Impressionist*, *Females on the fatal shore: Australia's brave pioneers* and *Desert Queen: the many lives and loves of Daisy Bates*.

Susanna spoke to the Friends of Fryer about her latest book *Trailblazers: Caroline Chisholm to Quentin Bryce*, which examines the lives of fifteen extraordinary Australian women, all pioneers and inspiring role models of their time. Fryer Library holds original material related to two of these women: Nell Kerensky (née Tritton) and Margaret Ogg. Susanna De Vries has recently deposited her research material for *Desert Queen* with Fryer, which will complement Fryer's existing Ernestine Hill collection.

### 23 JUNE: KATE DURHAM & ELAINE SMITH 'LIVING ARCHIVES' SYMPOSIUM



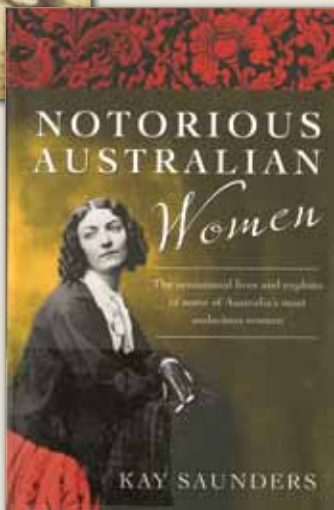
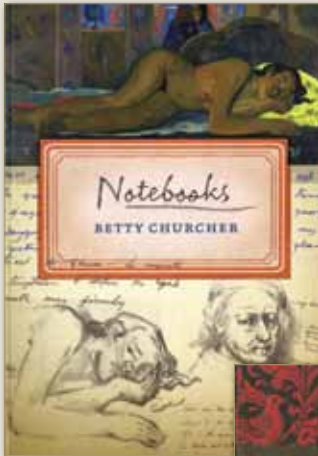
For Refugee Week 2011, Fryer Library hosted a symposium with Kate Durham and Elaine Smith discussing their roles as refugee activists and the manuscript collections they have donated to Fryer Library that reflect that activism. Kate Durham is a Melbourne-based



Bottom p. 28: Prof. Gillian Whitlock of EMSAH, Elaine Smith, Kate Durham and Carol Johnman Low

Above top: Attendees at the seminar view the related display in Fryer Library

Above bottom: Hassan Ghulam, a member of the local refugee community, presents more Nauru letters to Fryer



artist who, in 2001, founded Spare Rooms for Refugees and began exchanging letters with asylum seekers held in Nauru by the Australian Government.

In June 2002, Durham and a BBC journalist travelled to Nauru clandestinely, becoming the first independent eyewitnesses to visit the refugee detention centre and interview its occupants. Kate Durham is married to barrister and author Julian Burnside QC, a consistent public critic of the Government's refugee and anti-terrorism laws.

Elaine Smith, a member of Rural Australians for Refugees, played a major role in coordinating support for and communication with asylum seekers detained in Nauru in the years following the 2001 Tampa incident. She and her husband Geoff corresponded with hundreds of detainees and lobbied dozens of people and organisations on their behalf.

The discussion was moderated by Carol Johnman Low, an oral and community historian who has worked with the Museum of Brisbane on two award-winning exhibitions. Researchers and artists who had worked with the archival material discussed their responses to it, and members of the local refugee community presented their perspectives. A display of items from the two collections was mounted in Fryer. Fryer Library received a valuable donation of further letters from refugees on Nauru. The symposium was held in conjunction with three related art exhibitions at the UQ Art Museum, one of which included a commissioned artwork based on the material in the Elaine Smith collection.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 12 SEPTEMBER: BETTY CHURCHER, A0 'NOTEBOOKS'

The University of Queensland Library will sponsor Betty Churcher's appearance at this year's Brisbane Writers Festival in September, and on Monday, September 12, the day immediately following the Festival, she will visit UQ to speak about her most recent book *Notebooks*. More details about this event will be announced shortly. Betty Churcher was educated at Somerville House and the Royal College of Art in London, and holds an MA from the Courtauld Institute of Art. She was Director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia from 1987 to 1990 and Director of the National Gallery of Australia from 1990 to 1997. The author of several acclaimed books, including *The art of war*, *Understanding art*, *Molvig: the lost antipodean* and most recently, *Notebooks*, Betty Churcher has also been an art critic for the *Australian*. She wrote and presented several television series on art including *Take five* and *Hidden treasures*. She holds an Order of Australia and is an Officer of the Order of Australia. *Notebooks* is a collection of Betty Churcher's own drawings, which takes us on a personal tour of her most beloved art works, including masterpieces by Rembrandt, Goya, Manet, Velazquez, Courbet, Vermeer and Cézanne.

### 12 OCTOBER: KAY SAUNDERS 'NOTORIOUS AUSTRALIAN WOMEN: THE SENSATIONAL LIVES AND EXPLOITS OF SOME OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST AUDACIOUS WOMEN'

Emeritus Professor Kay Saunders will speak to the Friends of Fryer about her most recent book, which celebrates the lives of some of Australia's most fearless, brash and scandalous women. From bushrangers, courtesans and cross-dressers to writers, designers and a radical or two, what these splendid rebels had in common was a determination to take their destinies into their own hands.



Left: Brenda Lewis. Photo used with permission of WILPF (Qld).

Below: Detail from photograph of Brenda Lewis's mural for the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union of Australia, Queensland Branch, 1985



## Brenda Lewis

30 March 1924–31 August 2010

Much of Brenda Lewis's life was spent working for peace and justice, something which no doubt was partly influenced by her tough upbringing on a small farm in Wynnum during the Depression years. As an artist and writer, Brenda created posters and banners promoting non-violence, human rights and environmental sustainability. Her creations in the name of justice were used by numerous organisations in marches and rallies. One of those rallies took place in New York in 2000 during the World March of Women, which focused on ending women's poverty and violence against women. The Australian women who took part in that march proudly carried a banner created by Brenda.

Her work was held in such high regard she was commissioned by the Miscellaneous Workers Union to paint a huge mural for their rooms at Spring Hill, in inner Brisbane. The mural, which highlights peaceful relationships and social interaction, depicts all trades and professions. A photograph of this mural, given to Fryer Library by Brenda, hangs in the Fryer Library Reading Room.

Brenda used her talents to help many other trade unions over the years, specialising in banners that have been used in a host of May Day processions. Her distinctive work was also used to illustrate numerous publications, while exhibitions of her pieces are held in some public galleries. Art was always a strong and motivating force in her life. She completed her early studies in art at the prestigious Slade School in London and later

graduated with an arts degree from The University of Queensland, where she had enrolled as a mature age student. But her talents were not restricted to canvas. She was also a well-regarded poet and in recent years produced two volumes of peace poems, which she illustrated herself, of course. She also wrote letters and essays on topics including war, peace and human rights, many of which were published. Others were recited or read at meetings and rallies and for many years, Brenda was on the editorial board of the popular critical journal *Social Alternatives*.

One of her longstanding commitments was to the Queensland branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which she joined in the 1960s. In recognition of her exceptional service to the organisation, she was made a life member in the early 1990s. She was also nominated for an award in the inaugural WILPF Peace Women Awards early in 2010. She was instrumental in arranging for the organisation's archives to be housed in the Fryer Library.

As a campaigner for a nuclear-free world, she was involved with WILPF and the Campaign Against Nuclear Power in the 1970s and 1980s to fight for nuclear-free zones. As a promoter of education for peace, she was involved in organising the 'Disarmament: A Human Right' poster and publication display at Fryer Library in 1980 which was staged to mark World Disarmament Week.

Remembered by her friends and fellow activists and artists as a generous and courageous person, she tried to inspire others not just through her art and words but through humour and faith in positive outcomes. WILPF members noted in the obituary that appeared in a recent issue of their newsletter: 'All those who knew Brenda will miss the sparkle of warmth, wit and wisdom that she gave to our lives. Brenda will long be remembered for the work she did for the peace movement. She will remain an inspiration to us all'.

Brenda Lewis is survived by her two sons, Richard and Robert, and four grandchildren.

*This obituary is reproduced from the Courier-Mail by permission of its author, Brendan O'Malley, with additional information supplied by WILPF members and Fryer Library staff.*



Left: *Dr John McCulloch. Photo courtesy of Mr Gary Portley.*

## Dr John Edward Seymour McCulloch OAM

19 October 1938–24 October 2010

John McCulloch was born in London but was evacuated from that city to Scotland as a child during World War II. In 1950 his parents migrated to Australia and John, an only child, finished his senior education at night school while working as a shop assistant during the day at Bayards. He went on to study ancient history at The University of Queensland, and became a tutor in the Classics and Ancient History Department, before joining the Queensland Parliamentary Library in 1984 as a senior parliamentary research officer.

During his 10 years at the Queensland Parliamentary Library, John began documenting the achievements of Queensland’s suffragettes and female politicians. In 1994, he wrote a research background paper entitled ‘Women members of the Queensland Parliament 1929–1994.’ This led to a two-volume work on both the early suffragettes and Queensland women legislators in state and federal parliaments, published in 2005 by Central Queensland University Press. John explained the inspiration behind his work in the afterword to Volume One:

I wrote this book from the perspective of a person who believes passionately in equal opportunity for all, and that the best possible legislation cannot be enacted until all our parliaments consist of approximately equal numbers of males and females.... Recorded Queensland

history had focused almost exclusively on the actions of men with fairly scant regard for the contributions of women, particularly prior to women’s enfranchisement in 1905. These circumstances highlighted the need for a book that would open the window on the struggle for women’s suffrage in Queensland and its aftermath.

In the course of his work on the book, John discovered the paucity of source material about women’s suffrage in Queensland and set about remedying this deficiency. He persuaded the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Queensland to donate their valuable archive to the Fryer Library and he later embarked on a PhD exploring the life and career of Elizabeth Brentnall, one of the founders of the WCTU and an early suffragette. He also ensured that the oral history interviews he held with Queensland women legislators for both of his research publications were donated to Fryer Library to make them permanently available to researchers. Senator Clare Moore, paying tribute to John McCulloch in a speech in the Australian Senate on 23 November 2010, said: ‘I say about my friend John McCulloch that he is the only man who I think could deserve the term “feminist”, because his passion, knowledge and desire to achieve equity were unsurpassed’.

John McCulloch served as secretary of the Indooroopilly branch of the ALP for many years during which time he became a big supporter of former Labor Member for Ryan, Leonie Short. He also worked extensively with the Queensland Youth Hostels Association, the St Vincent de Paul Society, and the Homelessness Taskforce 99. In January 2000, John was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his services to youth. Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said on his death: ‘The word “progressive” is bandied about constantly in political circles and its definition is widely argued, but to my mind John McCulloch was a true political progressive. He was a deep thinker, an activist and a doer’. Senator Clare Moore noted that he put down a challenge to all women in Queensland politics—‘that we had something to which we must aspire, that we had a right to be in politics and that we had a right to do it well’.

John McCulloch is survived by his partner Gary Portley and a wide circle of friends.

# OBITUARIES



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PAPERS



THOMAS SHAPCOTT  
AWARDS



ERNESTINE HILL  
PAPERS



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