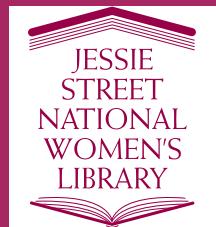


# NEWSLETTER

*To keep women's words, women's works, alive and powerful — Ursula Le Guin*



## Nganana tjamunya, kaminya kulira wanalpai: ngura nganampa tjuta, Tjukurpa tjutatjara. Kulilkatipaila walytja piti, ngura, Tjukurpa winki. Kuruntula uwankara kulilpai

'We listen to our grandfathers and grandmothers and we follow their teachings: of all our lands and the stories and law that they hold. We can feel our families, our country, our culture in everything we do. We hear everything in our hearts. We hear it all with our heart, mind, body and soul as one.'

Rene Kulitja, 2018 Heart Listening: Uluru Statement Exhibition, Artsite Gallery

In 2017, delegates from all over Australia gathered at Uluru for the First Nations National Constitutional Convention to discuss a unified path towards justice and constitutional recognition. Three key themes were identified as a framework: truth-telling, treaty and a voice to Parliament and the Uluru Statement from the Heart was adopted.

Rachel Perkins, delegate and critically acclaimed film maker, inspired the idea for a painting, suggesting it would bind the written statement to traditional culture and Indigenous knowledge. The painting incorporates the signatures of more than 250 delegates who came to a consensus in this historic moment.

Rene Kulitja, a senior Anangu representative at the Convention, directed the painting of the Statement. The daughter of Maruku founders Walter Pukutiwara and Topsy Tjulyata, she is most recognised for her painting in the year 2000, the first of a series of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paintings on Qantas planes. Prolific in many fields: as punu-maker, painter, tjanpi-weaver, land manager, mother, grandmother and aunty, she is respected as a senior community representative and cultural custodian.

Maruku Arts developed a concept exhibition inspired by the Uluru Statement. Based at Mutitjulu, in Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park, Maruku Arts represents up to 800 Anangu artists across 22 communities and three states (APY and NPY lands) and is one of the oldest independent not-for-profit arts organisations in the region. A group

of Anangu women set up a bush camp immersion to workshop ideas for their exhibition, which came to be known as Kunturu Kulini: Heart Listening. For a week the artists camped in the sand dunes near Uluru, hauling firewood and water, organising the camp kitchen, mixing



paint, cutting canvas, resolving dramas, telling stories, singing, dancing, fighting, crying and praying. It is from here that the exhibition evolved, producing a powerful body of work to coincide with the 'we support the statement' campaign spearheaded by Thomas Mayor, the former Uluru Statement working group co-chair.

Held at Artsite Gallery in Sydney, the exhibition was opened by Rachel Perkins and Thomas Mayor, on 3 November 2018. In celebration of this special occasion, a crowd-funding Heart Listening concert was organised to raise funds to acquire a work from the show, Kulpitjata Walpa 2018 by young artist Lucinda James, to be donated to the Jessie Street National Women's Library. Senior elder and Maruku founding member Nelly Patterson, alongside traditional owners

Yuka Trigger and Rene Kultija (Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir) led the evening in their language, Pitjantjatjara. Special guest contributors Ginger and the Ghost, Blak Douglas, Indigo Sparke, Nancy Denis, Georgia Frew, Clare Ainsworth Herschell, Clive Scollay and Declan Kelly were invited to perform at the concert in response to the theme. With the support of Kinetic Energy Theatre Company, the experience of heart listening resonated throughout the beautiful acoustic space at St Luke's Church in Enmore.

Lucinda James is a young Anangu woman who grew up in Mutitjulu. The granddaughter of Maruku founders, Walter Pukutiwara and Topsy Tjulyata, and niece of Rene Kulitja, she grew up with strong carving and painting practices from the elders around her. This was her first opportunity to paint seriously for an exhibition. Kulpitjata Walpa 2018 tells the story of Lucinda's relationship with her ancestral connection to Kulpitjata and Walpa; her family are culturally responsible for these specific homelands. Creating her work at the bush-camp immersion, Lucinda interpreted the theme through entering a state of introspection about listening, being heard, family, responsibility and reconnection. A coming together: Tjungu, joining. Maruku were thrilled to have enabled these incredible partnerships as well as deeply grateful and touched to have partnered with Jessie Street National Women's Library in this way.

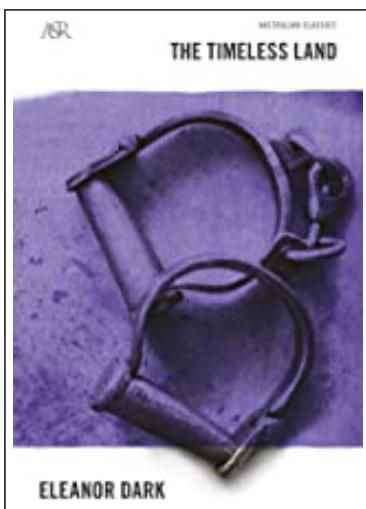
**Saha Jones**

Next Generation Development Manager at the Art Gallery of NSW

# Book Club Update

Our regular meetings to discuss *The Timeless Land* by Eleanor Dark and *The Choke* by Sofie Laguna became another COVID-19 casualty, with everyone encouraged to remain in their homes until further notice. The risk of serious complications for those in our age group who were exposed to this virus meant Book Club meetings were cancelled until further notice. This did not prevent us from reading our chosen books during the extra time suddenly available!

A ‘long read’ at over 600 pages, we had plenty of time in ‘lockdown’ to enjoy Eleanor Dark’s classic novel *The Timeless Land*



(1941). It proved to be a most inspired choice and one we felt this book club was meant to read, and at this time too. When published, it attracted a wide readership around the world including eminent thinkers and historians. Manning Clark, for one, was quoted in the 2013 edition to have said of Dark:

*In her novels and other works, she made a major contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of all Australians. She helped us understand who we are. She taught us we could stand alone.*

*The Choke* by Sofie Laguna (2017) is a tough read about family violence and trauma. The story explores the way trauma haunts families through generations. It is an intense and disturbing story that examines both happiness and heartbreak. The setting of the novel, the Murray River, is wrought as a character and its presence permeates the story. The fragility and remoteness of regional communities is a strong theme throughout. Laguna’s honest writing has been selected for many awards. *The Choke* is her second novel for adults. Her first, *The Eye of the Sheep* won the 2015 Miles Franklin Award. Laguna says of her own writing, ‘It’s great fun being immersed in a character, I like to be someone different – plot depends entirely on character.’ We see Justine

Lee’s world through the eyes of a child and we were moved by the authenticity of Laguna’s writing.

The reading of both of these books adds to the sum total of our understanding of our patriarchal culture. The colonial violence depicted in Dark’s story echoes through the centuries and haunts us in our media every time a domestic murder is reported.

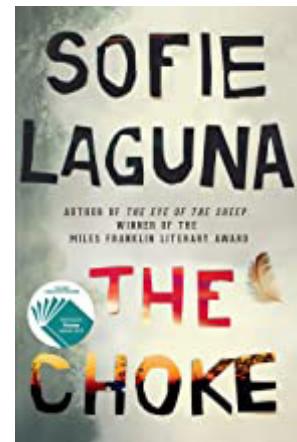
*For it is the simple act of reading where the living and the dead, the real and the imagined, meet.*

*It is the simple act of reading where we exercise those two most sacred of human vocations: compassion and creativity. For as we know, without either of these primes there is no possibility for a humanity present or past worth talking about.*

-Junot Diaz

The quotation above is from the *Simple Act of Reading: Essays by Australian writers* edited by Debra Adelaide, Vintage Books 2015.

I would commend this book to any reader; see Suzanne Marks’ review on page 6.



The Book Group is awaiting resolution of the COVID-19 crisis, and most especially the reopening of public libraries before proceeding with further readings.

Barbara Henery

## General donations since May

Linda BurneyDale Dengate

Christine Jennett Valerie Levy

Bronwyn Marks Louise Marsden

Jan O'Reilly Alice Paul

Pippa Preston Susan Steggall

Susan Wishart Valerie Weekes

## Donations of material

Penny Beran Penelope North

Jane Pollard Rosalind Strong

Women Lawyers Association of NSW

## Patrons

Quentin Bryce AD CVO; Elizabeth Evatt AC; Clover Moore Lord Mayor of Sydney; Professor Emerita Elizabeth Anne Webby AM

## Board of Management

Jozefa Sobski AM, Chair; Suzanne Marks,Vice Chair; Jean Burns, Treasurer; Sherri Hilario, Secretary; Wendy Chester, Michele Ginswick, Robyn Harriott, Barbara Henery, Beverley Kingston, Susan Price, Janet Ramsay, Beverley Sodbinow

## Editorial Team

Kris Clarke, Jessica Stewart Editors; tinderspark, Graphic Design

## Jessie Street National Women's Library

Australia's National Women's Library is a specialist library, its focus being the collection and preservation of the literary and cultural heritage of women from all ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

### Aims

To heighten awareness of women's issues  
To preserve records of women's lives and activities  
To support the field of women's history  
To highlight women's contribution to this country's development

# Letter to our members and supporters

Dear Friends,

While our public events and activities have been cancelled, the Board has endorsed the Annual Luncheon Committee's recommendation to hold the Annual Raffle. This is our modest effort to raise funds to cover some of our operational costs for the year. The raffle tickets are enclosed in this newsletter and we ask for your support.

The prizes have been donated by some of our generous supporters. Our leading prize is a stunning brooch, designed, made and donated by Connie Dimas Jewellery. We have gift cards and sparkling high tea on offer as well as our dozen wines from Kurri Kurri TAFE.

*The raffle will be drawn at our Board meeting via Zoom on 13 October, 2020. It will be supervised by our Honorary Auditor, Jann Skinner. Winners will be advised within the week following the draw.*

We all continue to adjust to the new etiquette governing our lives. An increased understanding of how rapidly COVID 19 can spread has meant these adjustments may need to endure far beyond our original expectations.

The Library is housed in the Ultimo Community Centre and the Centre's reopening is being carefully staged. A handful of our volunteers have maintained the Library's operations and service, fielding phone and email inquiries and responding appropriately. Our Facebook posts have continued as has the production of this newsletter. We have also extended our support, offering placements to two students for coursework assignments. We have been offered collections of books and archival material. We have developed a COVID Safety Plan to guide future activity in the Library. There will be signage for all spaces.

We extend our thanks to all of you for your continuing support. Please stay engaged with us and we will do our best to maintain the flow of information about what we are doing at this time. When the Centre re-opens, we will resume all our services and welcome back volunteers. My thanks on behalf of all our Board members and regular supporters.

*Jozefa Sobski AM Board Chair*

## Raffle prizes

**1st prize: Sterling silver brooch, semi-precious stones. Value \$450 donated by Connie Dimas**

**2nd prize: EFTPOS gift card. Value \$350 donated in memory of Marie Muir**

**3rd prize: High Tea for two, Strangers Dining Room, NSW Parliament House. Value \$112 donated by NSW Parliamentary Catering**

**4th prize: Gift voucher, NSW Art Gallery Shop. Value \$100 donated by Gail Hewison**

**5th prize: 12 bottles of wine from Kurri Kurri TAFE, donated by NSW Teachers Federation.**

## Connie Dimas brooch

Connie usually turns for inspiration to her Greek heritage. This year she chose to draw on her Australian heritage and memories of family picnics when she collected little gumnuts and wondered how she could use them. Hence her choice of a gum twig set in sterling silver with three gumnuts set with semi-precious stones in the distinct suffragette colours: purple, amethyst for loyalty/dignity; green, chrysoprase for happiness/enterprise; white, moonstone for new beginnings.

Connie donated this piece in honour of the Library, and for all women past, present and future who advocate for the rights of women, and all humanity. She especially thanks the Library for providing the challenge of creating a new design for our annual fundraiser.



## High Tea raffle prize

NSW Parliamentary Catering has generously donated a Sparkling High Tea Voucher for 2 valued at \$112 at the Strangers' Dining Room. Enjoy a magnificent selection of sweet and savoury treats served on traditional parliamentary crested Wedgwood plates, with specialty tea, coffee, and sparkling wine.



## Lunch Hour Talk

**19 November: Suzanne Leal**

**Writing about the Holocaust**

Inspired by a true wartime betrayal, Suzanne Leal's new novel, *The Deceptions*, is the story of a woman kept captive in the Jewish ghetto of Theresienstadt and the Czech soldier who becomes her prison guard. Suzanne will discuss the challenges of creating fiction based on truth and the moral issues that arise when writing about the Holocaust.

*Please check the Library's website before booking.*



# A win for steely women

The Sydney Film Festival this year featured the documentary by Robynne Murphy, *Women of Steel*. It examines the 14 years

struggle for women's rights to employment at BHP's Port Kembla Steelworks. In 1980 when Robynne applied for a job at the steelworks her name was added to a list of 1200 other women and left to gather dust. They were told that there were no jobs for women. Men questioned why women wanted to work in dirty, grimy, noisy jobs.

Some women had been employed at the steelworks during the 1970s. It was very sex segregated – they were given jobs in the tin mill and in the canteens preparing huge meals for the men. The mainly migrant women of Wollongong preferred a steelworks job to the poorly paid clothing industry or unemployment. Robynne and others formed the *Jobs for Women* campaign in 1980, handing out leaflets in half a dozen different languages and gathering petitions. A tent was set up outside the employment office, and the word spread quickly.

The women lodged complaints under the Wran Government's anti-discrimination legislation, which had not yet had a public enquiry or court case. This was the last thing BHP wanted, so 100 women were given jobs early in 1981. Robynne had a job as a second class welder in the machine shop; not a difficult job, but Robynne remembers the sulphurous smell from the foundry next door. She studied oxyacetylene welding at Technical College, and enjoyed working with the men speaking their numerous languages, smoking and chatting with them.

But with the recession of the early 80s the steelworks began retrenching, and under the 'last on, first off' principle the women were laid off. The *Jobs for Women* campaign began again. The women argued that if they had been given jobs when they first applied they would have avoided the sackings. After five attempts they obtained legal aid, and so began the biggest anti-discrimination case in Australian history. It eventually went to the High Court, where in 1994 compensation was awarded to 709 women.

Robynne praises the 'sisterly camaraderie' of the women. After the case she went back as trade assistant in various positions. She warmly remembers the Crib Room card games, coffee, meals and shared multicultural food. The Company was careful about sexual harassment as they feared being taken to court again.

The film shows working class and migrant women fighting to work at the steelworks where 20,000 men were employed. Winning the case set precedents for the employment of women across the country, especially in traditionally male dominated industries. The film has been entirely funded by donations, including from the Australian Workers Union with whom Robynne battled in 1980. In the process of fundraising for the film, Robynne visited the Library to gain support while making a promotional video.

If you are interested in reading further, Library resources include *Women of Steel* by Carla Gorton and Pat Brewer, *Refractory Girl 47/48* (1994), and *Girls' own: Sydney feminist newspaper No 1* (1981). The badge from 1980 is also in the Library's collection.

Kris Clarke

The top image shows the front cover of the book 'WOMEN OF STEEL: GENDER, JOBS & JUSTICE AT BHP' by Carla Gorton & Pat Brewer. The cover features a stylized illustration of a woman wearing a hard hat and safety glasses, with the title 'WOMEN OF STEEL' prominently displayed. Below the title, it says 'GENDER, JOBS & JUSTICE AT BHP' and 'CARLA GORTON & PAT BREWER'. The bottom image shows a movie poster for 'THE WOMEN WHO WERE NEVER THERE'. The poster features a woman in a denim jacket and a white cap, looking determined. The title 'THE WOMEN WHO WERE NEVER THERE' is written in large, bold letters. Below the title, it says 'FORGET GLASS CEILINGS - THEY SMASHED FACTORY GATES'. The poster also includes information about the Sydney premiere on Friday June 3, 2005, at the NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre, 37 Reservoir St, Surry Hills. It mentions that entry is \$10 regular, \$5 concession, \$20 supporter, and that all funds go toward making the Jobs For Women feature film. The website www.jobsforwomenvfilm.com is also mentioned.

# Introducing Board member Janet Ramsay

My professional life included two careers, both about the lives and needs of women.

From 1969 to 1984 I taught modern history at Macquarie University. In 1975 I was given the opportunity to launch the first course at that university, and possibly any Australian university, specifically on the history of women. I taught that course until I left Macquarie.

My second career was as a public servant working on policy and programs for women. In 1986 I joined the (then) Office on the Status of Women (OSW). My responsibilities included being the liaison person on Australia's engagement with international women's affairs. That included being a member of delegations in 1988 to deliver the first Australian Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Other jobs at OSW included a National Program of Community Education on Domestic Violence, leading to the award of a Public Service Medal.

After leaving the public sector in 1994 I worked as a contractor in various locations, working on research, policy advice and evaluation on women's issues and programs. During that time I also undertook a PHD thesis on The Making of Domestic Violence Policy between 1970 and 1985: An Analytical Narrative of Feminist Policy Activism. I was awarded the degree in 2005.

I have long been passionate, as a lifelong historian and feminist, about the preservation of women's records and writing in libraries and archives particularly accessible to women. I was for a time part of the group that kept alive the Canberra Women's Archive, now held by our Library. I am delighted to have joined the community of the Jessie Street National Women's Library this year.

*Janet Ramsay*



## Our volunteers at work

'Dearest Reader,

Firstly, while this letter now rests in your hands, it also hangs adjacent to the shelves on which we rest the books that we have read and are reading. It is for you, but also for those reading you – the viewers of Making Art Public: Fifty Years of Kaldor Public Art Projects at the Art Gallery of New South Wales from 7 September 2019 to 16 February 2020.'

And so we, Hanne Marks and Sherri Hilario, were launched into a durational performance as #Saturday-Reader and #SundayReader respectively, occupying the exhibition space and reading to ourselves. A performative, improvisational conversation spiralling through time and space. All Readers were required to begin with *Lion's Honey*, by David Grossman, before continuing along our individual trajectories. Our chosen books were paid for and our daily labour was remunerated, clocking on and off via Instagram posts.

The project lives on on Instagram, and in an online publication, <http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/blog/lions-honey-a-reader>, which includes a complete list of all books read.

Following are some of Hanne's impressions.

Being involved with Agatha Gothe-Snape and her commissioned work, **Lion's Honey** was one of the highlights of my life. I was one of seven permanent, and several 'floating', readers, all required to occupy a green chair with a yellow lambskin rug wheresoever we wanted to be in the exhibition space from 11 am to 4 pm, simply reading the books of our choice and conversing or not with anyone who wanted to find out what it was all about.



I mostly chose to be near our shelves in the corner under the steps. As long as I could stick my legs up a wall I was happy. Consequently I followed my instincts, Books? They come in all sizes and languages.

So, from a huge publication, leather covered, marbled inner pages, with wondrous photographs of HRH King Christian X of Denmark from babyhood to old age, in Danish, of no interest to any of my descendants, to Marjorie Pizer's *Poems*, with a couple of titles suggested during a delightful conversation along the way. My bookshelf was a beautiful sight to behold.

We both enjoyed the experience immensely.

*Sherri Hilario and Hanne Marks*

## Membership Fee increase 1 January 2021

At the meeting of the Library Board on 14 July 2020 approval was given to increase the Library membership fees with effect from 1 January 2021. The membership fees for 2021 are as follows:

Full Member: \$70.00

Life Member: \$1,000.00 (no change)

Concession Member: \$35.00

Organisation Member: \$140.00

Student Member: \$25.00

The last increase in membership fees was in 2011. It is hoped that members understand the need for this increase and continue to support the library as membership fees are a significant source of funds needed to maintain library operations.

## A warm welcome to our new members:

Suzanne Curr

Amy Denmeade

Anne Sgro

Susan Wishart

E Joan Wright

# Debra Adelaide (ed) *The Simple Act of Reading* (2015); Antonia Fraser (ed) *The Pleasure of Reading* (2015)

These two collections give richly personal insights into how books and reading are critical to a strong and resilient culture.

To borrow Giulia Giuffrè's metaphor for libraries and bookshops, entering the pages of these anthologies is like 'entering ... a box of chocolates that draws one further and further in to test and taste'. Adelaide and Fraser have brought together acclaimed writers from Australia and the UK to reflect on their relationship with books: how they have expanded their worlds and shaped their lives and what keeps them reading.

Both editions are veritable feasts of new worlds discovered and times remembered; of books' importance in the growth and development of the authors, who tell of childhood memories of reading under the blankets by torchlight well after lights out, driven by their passion and engagement with the characters and their stories; a passion that has never left them. And of how reading, especially fiction, helped them grow into more tolerant and compassionate people than they might otherwise have been.

For *The Simple Act of Reading* the brief itself was simple: 'To write about any aspect of the reading life that is meaningful to you, and will be to those interested in what makes writers tick.' As the aim was to support young readers and writers through the philanthropically funded Sydney Story Factory, authors were asked to 'concentrate on what and how they read in childhood or as young adults'.

Fraser's brief to her contributors was also simple: 'To describe their early reading, what did (or did not) influence them, and what they enjoy reading today.' The first edition of *The Pleasure of Reading* (1992) included Margaret Atwood, JG Ballard, Melvyn Bragg, AS Byatt, Catherine Cookson, Germaine Greer, Tom Stoppard and Doris Lessing. The 2015 edition adds five new writers born in the 1970s and 80s. The authors' birth dates range over 76 years and they were raised in countries as diverse as Canada and China, Ireland and India, Syria and Germany.

Fraser finds common themes, including, as with the writers in Adelaide's collection, the critical role of reading in childhood. Secondly, and to the relief of parents fearing their children are drawn only to 'rubbish', what children read is less important than reading itself. At age seven Doris Lessing learnt to read from cigarette packets while Simon Gray's reading passion was sparked by war comics in wartime Canada. Hermione Lee's 'highbrow' parents forbade her to read Enid Blyton, which of course she devoured even more passionately in secret by borrowing from friends with more tolerant parents.

Adelaide's anthology also demonstrates that some authors and books take on a universality. Scoring high are Enid Blyton, CS Lewis, Lewis Carroll and Mary Grant Bruce. Contributors mention both the 'lowbrow' (*The DaVinci Code* and *The Godfather*) and the 'highbrow' like Jane Austin, James Joyce and Herman Melville.

At 11 Rosie Scott read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, describing its effect as 'electric', as she too kept a diary. In adolescence, Tegan Bennett Daylight ('A Phone Call to Helen Garner') found the key to reading not just for story but '... for words. I could see the work. I could see the writing' which altered the way she saw the world and which has served her ever since.

Ruth Rendell attributes the scary fairy stories she read as a child to engendering her ability to frighten her readers, while *The Water Babies* started her on a life-long fascination with natural history. Tom Stoppard was eight when he realised what 'gripping stuff' books could be and he devoured them in sets: Captain WE Johns (Biggles), Arthur Ransome (the Swallows and Amazons series) and Richmal Crompton (the William books).

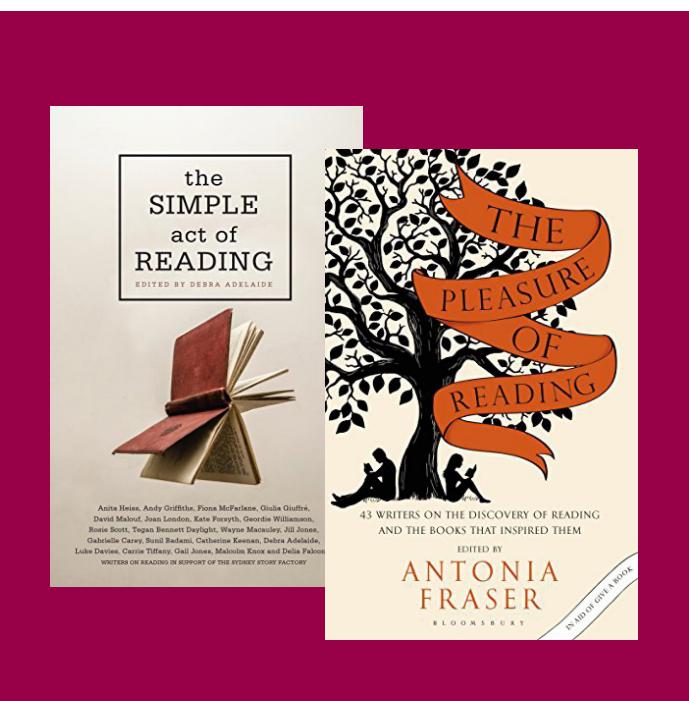
For Germane Greer the catalyst for her becoming 'an addicted reader' was being born into a family with whom she had little in common. From a very young age reading was the only alternative 'to a boredom so heavy and slow that it squashed my soul'.

Kamila Shamsie, raised in Karachi within the protected milieu of her middle-class Pakistani family, with restricted access to only one state-run television station, entered the magic world of her imagination through Winnie the Pooh, Peter Pan and Narnia. By walking through the wardrobe to the land of Narnia and flying to Neverland with Peter and his shadow, she 'learnt that novels reach further than their own writers' imagination'.

From the warmth and generosity of spirit exhibited by these writers in sharing their deeply personal and richly evolved insights, we learn more about why books and reading are critical to the continuation of a strong and resilient culture. We also come to appreciate the part they can play in our individual growth and development into effective human beings with the courage and willingness to seek meaning and understanding from within our own hearts and minds and from the wider world we inhabit and share with others.

*First published in the Newtown Review of Books*

*Reviewed by Suzanne Marks*





Jessie Street National Women's Library  
GPO Box 2656 Sydney NSW 2001

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Registered Charity No. CFN10255

**Note: Please advise the Library if your contact details have changed.**

**Visit us:**

523–525 Harris Street (cnr William Henry Street), Ultimo  
Enter through the Ultimo Community Centre, Bulwara Rd  
Please use the intercom for admittance

**Opening times:**

The Library is open to the public Monday to Friday 10 am to 3 pm

**Borrowing policy:**

The public can access items using the interlibrary loan system. The public cannot borrow items but may use them in their library of choice. A loan collection is available to financial members

**How to reach the Library:**

The Library is a 20 minute walk from Town Hall Station through Darling Harbour or from Central Station via the Goods Line walk or via Harris Street

- Bus 501 (Railway Square to Ryde/West Ryde) at Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre stop
- Bus 389 (Maritime Museum to North Bondi) at Harris and Allan Streets stop
- Light rail from Central Station or Dulwich Hill to Exhibition stop
- There is limited two hour street meter parking available

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