



VCE Literature Text List 2026

The following texts proposed by the Literature Text Advisory Panel are approved by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) as suitable for study in Units 3 and 4 in 2026. Texts were selected in accordance with the following criteria and guidelines.

Criteria for text selection

Each text selected for the VCE Literature text list will:

- have literary merit
- be an excellent example of form and genre
- sustain intensive study, raising interesting issues and providing challenging ideas
- reflect current community standards and expectations in the context of senior secondary study of texts.

The text list will:

- be suitable for a diverse student cohort from a range of backgrounds and contexts, including students for whom English is an additional language
- reflect the cultural diversity of the Victorian community
- include texts by Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- include a balance of new and established works*, including a Shakespearean text
- include texts that display affirming perspectives
- reflect engagement with global perspectives.

* Established works include texts that are recognised as having enduring, artistic value.

Guidelines for text selection

The text list for VCE Literature must adhere to the following guidelines:

- The text list will contain 30 texts.
- The text list must represent a range of texts in the following approximate proportions:
 - 9 novels
 - 9 plays
 - 3 collections of short stories
 - 3 other works of literature
 - 6 collections of poetry.
- One-third of texts on the text list must be by Australian authors.
- Approximately 75% of texts on the text list would be expected to be familiar* to most VCE Literature teachers.
- The text list must contain titles that are different from those on the VCE English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Text List.
- The text list will be reviewed annually, with approximately 25% of the texts being changed. No text will appear for more than four consecutive years or fewer than two years.
- Texts will be accompanied by full bibliographic details, where necessary.

*Familiar texts can include canonical texts, texts that have been publicly acknowledged as significant through mechanisms like awards or accolades, texts of literary merit that have been adapted into film or other forms, and texts of literary merit that have been reviewed across national and international publications.

Information for schools

Teachers must consider the text list in conjunction with the relevant text selection information published in the *VCE Literature Study Design 2023–2027* for Units 3 and 4.

The selection must include:

- one novel
- one collection of poetry
- one play
- two further texts selected from novels, plays, collections of poetry, collections of short stories or other literature.

At least one of the texts selected must be Australian.

Students must study a sixth text for Unit 3 Area of Study 1. The text used for Unit 3 Area of Study 1 must be an adaptation of one of the five required texts selected from the text list published by the VCAA. The text may take the form of, but is not limited to, a:

- live performance by a professional theatre company
- film or screenplay
- television miniseries
- play script.

A student adaptation cannot be used as the adaptation text for Unit 3 Area of Study 1.

The supplementary reading studied for Unit 3 Area of Study 2 is not prescribed.

No text or part of a text studied in Units 1 and 2 may be studied again in Units 3 and 4.

The selection of texts should ensure that students experience a range of literature from early to contemporary works, dealing with a diversity of cultural experiences and a range of viewpoints.

Students are encouraged to read widely in both Units 3 and 4 to support the achievement of all outcomes.

While the VCAA considers all the texts on the text list suitable for study, teachers should be aware that some texts may contain sensitivities in relation to certain issues. In selecting texts for study, teachers should make themselves aware of these issues before introducing the text to students.

The VCAA does not prescribe editions; any complete edition may be used. However, it should be noted that the editions nominated in the text list are those from which the passages for the examination will be selected. For collections of poetry, poems are prescribed; students must study the poems listed in the text list.

The bibliographic information in this document is provided to assist teachers to obtain texts and is correct, as far as possible, at the time of publication. Publishing details may change from time to time and teachers should consult the *VCAA Bulletin* regularly for any amendments or alterations to the text list.

Key to codes

The text list is presented alphabetically by author according to text type. Abbreviations in brackets after the titles signify the following:

- '(A)' – this text meets the Australian requirement

- '(#)' – bracketed numbers indicate the number of years that a text has appeared on the VCE Literature Text List, for example, '(1)' indicates that 2024 is the first year that a text has appeared on the text list.

Text list

Novels

Astley, Thea, *Drylands* (A) (3)

Atwood, Margaret, *Alias Grace* (4)

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1)

Drewe, Robert, *Our Sunshine* (A) (2)

Miéville, China, *The City and The City* (1)

Murnane, Gerald, *The Plains* (A) (3)

Waugh, Evelyn, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1)

Wharton, Edith, *The Age of Innocence* (2)

Winch, Tara June, *The Yield* (A) (4)

Plays

Aeschylus, *The Persians* (3)

Hansberry, Lorraine, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1)

Harmon, Joshua, *Admissions* (3)

Kirkwood, Lucy, *Chimerica* (4)

Murray-Smith, Joanna, *Berlin* (A) (4)

Rostand, Edmond, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (3)

Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It* (3)

Shakespeare, William, *The Tragedy of King Lear* (1)

Shaw, George Bernard, *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1)

Short stories

Chiang, Ted, *Stories of Your Life and Others* (4)

Stories for study: 'Tower of Babylon', 'Understand', 'Story of Your Life', 'Seventy-Two Letters', 'Liking What You See: A Documentary'

Strout, Elizabeth, *Olive Kitteridge* (2)

Stories for study: 'Pharmacy', 'The Piano Player', 'A Little Burst', 'Starving', 'A Different Road', 'Winter Concert', 'Tulips', 'Basket of Trips', 'Ship in a Bottle', 'Security', 'Criminal', 'River'

Tan, Elizabeth, *Smart Ovens for Lonely People* (A) (4)

Stories for study: 'Night of the Fish', 'Our Sleeping Lungs Opened to the Cold', 'A Girl is Sitting on a

Unicorn in the Middle of a Shopping Centre', 'Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle (Sing Your Heart Out)', '.pptx', 'Ron Swanson's Stencilled 'Stache', 'Washing Day', 'Yes! Yes! Yes You Are! Yes You Are!', 'Would You Rather', 'Excision in F-Sharp Minor', 'Disobeying', 'This is not a Treehouse', 'Shirt Dresses that Look a Little too Much Like Shirts so that it Looks Like you Forgot to put on Pants (Love Will Save the Day)', 'The Meal Channel', 'Lola Metronome and Calliope St Laurent Having a Picnic at the End of Civilisation as We Know it'

Other literature

Holden, Kate, *The Winter Road* (A) (2)

Orwell, George, *Shooting an Elephant and other essays* (1)

Essays for study: 'Why I Write', 'The Spike', 'A Hanging', 'Shooting an Elephant', 'Charles Dickens', 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', 'The Sporting Spirit', 'Nonsense Poetry', 'The Prevention of Literature', 'Books v. Cigarettes', 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad', 'How the Poor Die', 'Reflections on Gandhi', and 'Politics and the English Language'

Seacole, Mary, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (4)

Poetry

Each poem listed must be studied. In the case of longer poems, extracts from the poem may be used in the examination.

Bishop, Elizabeth, *Poems* (2)

Poems for study: 'The Imaginary Iceberg', 'The Fish', 'Anaphora', 'View of the Capitol from The Library of Congress', 'The Prodigal', 'Four Poems: IV/O Breath', 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore', 'The Shampoo', 'Questions of Travel', 'The Armadillo', 'Sestina', 'Filling Station', '12 O'Clock News', 'One Art', 'Five Flights Up'

Duffy, Carol Ann, *The World's Wife* (4)

Poems for study: 'Little Red-Cap', 'Queen Herod', 'Mrs Midas', 'Mrs Aesop', 'Mrs Darwin', 'Mrs Sisyphus', 'Mrs Faust', 'Anne Hathaway', 'Medusa', 'Circe', 'Mrs Lazarus', 'Mrs Icarus', 'Eurydice', 'The Kray Sisters', 'Elvis's Twin Sister', 'Pope Joan', 'Penelope', 'Demeter'

Gao, Gavin Yuan, *At the Altar of Touch* (A) (2)

Poems for study: 'Self-Portrait as the Last Wounded Stag', 'Coup de grâce', 'The Afterlife', 'Skein Song', 'Edifice', 'For the Man on the Bus Who Told Me to Go Back to Where I Came From', 'One Time, My Father, Crying, Drove into the Dusk', 'Ode to My Uvula', 'Self-Portrait as the Winter Sea', '... or Memory as Water Language', 'Queer Physics: First Principle', 'At the Altar of Touch', 'Requiem with a Singing Kimono', 'Can Dyslexics Read? Can You Prove it', 'COVID', 'Requiem Ending with the Night Sky'

Holland-Batt, Sarah, *The Hazards* (A) (3)

Poems for study: 'Medusa', 'The Orchid House', 'A Scrap of Lace', 'This Landscape Before Me', 'An Illustrated History of Settlement', 'Approaching Paradise', 'Essay on the Toucan', 'Orange-Bellied Parrot', 'Possum', 'Muttonbird', 'Beauty is a Ticket of Admission to All Spectacles', 'Primavera: The Graces', 'Interbellum', 'The Flowers on his Bedside Speak of Eternity', 'Insurgency', 'Night Sonnet', 'The Atlantic', 'The Hazards'

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1)

Poems for study: 'The Mask of Anarchy', 'Mutability', 'To Wordsworth', 'Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte', 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', 'Mont Blanc', 'Ozymandias', 'Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples', 'Song to the Men of England', 'A New National Anthem', 'Sonnet: England in 1819', 'Ode to the

West Wind', The Indian Serenade', 'On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery', 'Love's Philosophy', 'To a Skylark', 'Ode to Liberty', 'To Night', 'The Question', and 'The Flower that Smiles To-day'.

van Neerven, Ellen, *Throat* (A) (4)

Poems for study: '18Cs', 'logonliveon', 'Chermy', 'Bold & Beautiful', 'The Only Blak Queer in the World', 'A ship-shaped hole in the forest', 'Expert', 'Women are still not being heard', 'TREATY', 'Queens', 'All that is loved (can be saved)', 'this deadly love', 'I used to have a name (for this)', 'Terra Nova', 'I grieve in sleep', 'Paper ships'

Annotations

These annotations are provided to assist teachers with text selection. The comments are not intended to represent the only possible interpretation or a favoured reading of a text. The list is arranged alphabetically by author according to text type.

Novels

Astley, Thea, *Drylands*, Text Classics, 2018, ISBN 9781925603576 (A) (3)

Thea Astley's final novel, published on the cusp of the 21st century, explores – with no punches pulled – the culture and stories of the insular rural Australian community of Drylands over several decades. Using the trope of a narrator who is an outsider to the town – Janet Deakin – Astley provides a window (and, potentially, a mirror) to a series of individual but interwoven events that expose power dynamics, racism, violence and a determined resistance to change that the community experiences and/or perpetrates. Deakin, the local newsagent/bookseller who clings to a sense of the wider world and a broader culture, fills the stories with injustice, rage, fear and, finally, the dread of a fatal decline faced by the residents of Drylands. Indeed, leaving the town is one of the few victories in the novel.

Drylands is billed as 'a book for the world's last reader', which speaks of the sense of diminishing returns for culture, art and civil discourse that we see in the text. And while this novel is confronting in its depiction of the town of Drylands (and perhaps its vision of rural Australia more generally), it is also beautifully written, a counterpoint surely to the bleak vista it describes. Astley won the 1999 Miles Franklin Award for this work.

Atwood, Margaret, *Alias Grace*, Virago Press, 2019, ISBN 9780349013077 (4)

Margaret Atwood based her novel *Alias Grace* on the basic events of a famous murder in 1843 in Canada, in which two young servants – Grace Marks and James McDermott – were alleged to have killed their employer, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery. When we first meet Grace, she has been incarcerated for many years. Her many supporters believe her to be innocent and, in their attempts to have her released, organise for an assessment by a psychiatrist to determine her sanity.

From here, Grace's story unfolds – from her early years in Ireland to her experiences in domestic servitude in Canada. Along the way, information emerges about the murders and Grace's role in the events.

The novel, while set around the murders, explores the experiences of young women in a society that subjugates them through class structures, ethnic prejudices and patriarchal assumptions. Atwood's heroine, Grace, finds a voice to express the rage of having few choices and limited agency, and of being subjected to

unending exploitation. The light touch of the psychiatrist, who himself appears to exhibit signs of hysteria, offers deeper insights into control and manipulation.

There is a six-episode miniseries based on the novel, written by Sarah Polley and directed by Mary Harron (2017).

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, *Lady Audley's Secret*, Penguin Classics, 1998, ISBN 9780140435849 (1)

Lady Audley's Secret, first published in 1862, is a sensation novel by Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Set in Victorian England, Braddon's novel subverts Victorian expectations by presenting a seemingly ideal woman, Lady Audley, who conceals a dark and criminal past.

The novel's ideas of deception, class mobility, gender inequality and madness are framed within the social and cultural anxieties of the time, particularly regarding women's roles in the assumed-as-safe, domestic spaces. Lady Audley's duplicity is slowly revealed, and it was this eventual revelation of her secret challenge to the Victorian ideal of female purity and submission that caused many of Braddon's contemporary critics to condemn not only the novel, but the subgenre as a whole. The text uses suspense and melodrama to explore the tensions between appearance and reality, wealth and morality, raising questions about social justice and identity.

Teachers should be mindful of the treatment of mental illness in the text, which is portrayed in a way that reflects Victorian-era stigmas.

Lady Audley's Secret has been adapted for film, television and stage under various titles. One notable adaptation is the 2000 TV movie *Lady Audley's Secret*, which offers a modern reimagining of the novel's themes.

Drewe, Robert, *Our Sunshine*, Penguin, 2010, ISBN 9780143204763 (A) (2)

Robert Drewe's 1991 novel, *Our Sunshine*, addresses one of colonial Australia's most enduring myths: the short life, crimes and spectacular downfall of Ned Kelly – as Drewe puts it, 'a man whose story outgrew his life.' With a brevity and intensity suitable to its subject matter, the story is told through a non-linear series of vignettes and fragmented, jumbled flashbacks as the Kelly Gang await their fate at the Glenrowan Inn. The narration combines third person and first person, portraying incidents, settings and characters known to those familiar with the Kelly legend. These include his imprisonment in Beechworth Gaol, the Fitzpatrick incident, Stringybark Creek, the Euroa and Jerilderie hold-ups, all leading inexorably to the siege at Glenrowan. As might be expected, the narrative has much to say about injustice, poverty, police incompetence, betrayal, sexuality, mateship, familial relations, and, of course, horses.

Drewe's prose features a vivid and tangible sense of place, with lyrical evocations of rural Victoria and an abundance of sensory detail. The narrative voice, reflecting the extraordinary charisma of the iconic bushranger, is energetic, performative and compelling. The humour is often ribald and at times macabre; there is a sense of fun and the carnivalesque, of Kelly being in some respects a clown entertaining the masses. The narration has a pervasive dreamlike quality with frequent reference to sleep and dreams, as well as the bizarre and unsettling presence of a lion at the siege, inviting reflections on the dehumanisation of Kelly in the media presentations of the day.

Gregor Jordan's 2003 adaptation of *Our Sunshine* was renamed *Ned Kelly*, with Heath Ledger in the title role.

Miéville, China, *The City and The City*, Macmillan, 2011, ISBN 9780330534192 (1)

The City and The City is a seemingly archetypal crime noir novel where the protagonist seeks to override the evils of the world. What unfolds is a skilful play on genre, liminality and dualities, all written with a Lovecraftian and Orwellian air of otherworldliness that is uncomfortably combined with the familiar. It is the coming together of speculative fiction and a detective novel in the most captivating and unsettling way possible.

Through rich character development, and beautiful, arresting description, this novel draws you into the world of Inspector Tyador Borlu of the Extreme Case Squad. He is beginning to investigate the murder of a university student when it becomes apparent that while the body was found in Beszel, the murder occurred in Ul Qoma. The cities of Beszel and Ul Qoma are two halves of the one city, they share the same geographical space but are separated through space and time. The citizens of each city cannot cross from one to the other, interact with each other, and must never acknowledge the existence of the other.

It is in this place where places overlap, where people see, hear and think what they are told to, in this uncanny and bizarre meshing of worlds, real and imagined, and told through the first person perspective of Inspector Borlu, that the murder mystery is unravelled.

The City and The City was adapted into a miniseries in 2018 and directed by Tom Shankland.

Murnane, Gerald, *The Plains*, Text Classics, 2012, ISBN 9781921922275 (A) (3)

The Plains is Gerald Murnane's third novel, published in 1982. Narrated in the first person by an unnamed filmmaker, the novel charts the filmmaker's quest to make a film about the inhabitants of 'the Plains' – a place that both is and is not Australia. The 'Plainsmen' he meets are divided into opposing camps, each espousing a different philosophy of art and a rival set of concerns for the representation of their plains. Their explication of their understanding of the Plains is at the heart of this short novel, through which the 'flat landscape' is shaped into 'the substance of myth'.

This is a strange and beguiling text that invites reflection on the nature of reality, belonging and the relationships that exist between people and place. But it is also inwardly directed, raising questions about the self and its possibilities. Richly descriptive, and reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, Murnane's prose has long been admired, and this novel has the status of a cult classic.

Waugh, Evelyn, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder*, Penguin Classics, 2020, ISBN 9780241472736 (1)

Evelyn Waugh wrote his most famous novel, known by its shortened title *Brideshead Revisited*, while convalescing from military service during the Second World War. This context explains why 'the book is infused with a kind of gluttony, for food and wine, for the splendours of the recent past', according to Waugh's 1959 preface. Framed by a prologue and an epilogue, both set during World War II and narrated by a jaded Charles Ryder, the story proper begins with Charles' wistful account of his early days at Oxford University and his introduction to the flamboyant and hedonistic Lord Sebastian Flyte. Over the course of the years between the two wars, the narrative follows the decline of Sebastian and his doomed aristocratic Anglo-Catholic family, as well as Charles' infatuation with Sebastian and, later, Sebastian's glamorous sister Julia.

The aftermath of the Great War haunts the novel, as does a pervasive sense of an England that is passing. The narrative and most of the central characters are preoccupied with concepts of class, entitlement, indulgence, sin, guilt and faith – the Flyte family members are largely defined by the English Catholicism enforced on them by the pious matriarch, Lady Marchmain. Along with Charles' compelling narrative voice, the deft characterisation and witty dialogue, *Brideshead Revisited* is notable for the elegance of Waugh's prose. In addition to the eloquent and nostalgic portrayals of Oxford and the ancestral country seat of the Flyte family, settings are vividly evoked in key passages that take place in London, Venice, Morocco, and a memorably rough trans-Atlantic boat crossing from New York.

Brideshead Revisited has been adapted for both film and television, with some notable adaptations being the 2008 film adaptation with Ben Whishaw as Sebastian and Emma Thompson as Lady Marchmain, as well as an acclaimed 1982 television series that brought Jeremy Irons to prominence as Charles.

Wharton, Edith, *The Age of Innocence*, Vintage, 2008, ISBN 9780099511281 (2)

Edith Wharton's 1920 novel is a Pulitzer Prize-winning exploration of gender, sex, society and propriety. Wharton explores the vacuous society of the Gilded Age of the 1870s through a meticulous portrayal of the lavish lives of New York's pseudo-aristocracy.

Narrated exclusively through the eyes of Newland Archer, *The Age of Innocence* follows the period of his engagement and eventual marriage to the beautiful, and highly eligible, May Welland. However, the arrival of May's eccentric cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, causes tension as Archer finds himself falling in love with her. In the ensuing drama, Archer and Countess Olenska find they cannot repress their love, while May strives to hold her position of adoring wife to her husband's success. Wharton uses the self-centred Archer as a way of exploring both the oppression of women and the way in which society diminishes and stunts his own life. Archer slowly comes to understand that he is trapped in the vapid society of New York, and this realisation contrasts his frustration at May's willing participation in the mores of such a constricting society. The novel presents a struggle to reconcile the old with the new in a time of contrast, where divorce was available to women but still socially unacceptable.

Martin Scorsese's star-studded 1993 film adaptation of the same name is a faithful rendering of Wharton's classic.

Winch, Tara June, *The Yield*, Penguin, 2021, ISBN 9781760899462 (A) (4)

The second novel by Wiradjuri author Tara June Winch offers three distinct voices and stories. In one story, August Goondiwindi returns home for her grandfather's funeral to discover her family's lands are under threat from a mining company. In another story, Albert Goondiwindi constructs a dictionary of the Wiradjuri language, beginning with the letter Y, and in doing so tells the story of his land and family. In the third story, missionary Ferdinand Greenleaf recounts his experiences in colonial Australia. These three stories interweave throughout the novel in a powerful exploration of language, place, identity and community, and a call to end dispossession and exploitation and to reclaim that which has been stolen and removed.

Set on the evocatively named Prosperous Mission and Massacre Plains, *The Yield* is redolent with grief and rage, but also with compassion and understanding. It won the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 2020, with the judges noting that it 'celebrates and amplifies the contemporary resurgence and relevance of the Wiradjuri language ... [and] is a novel where the past is the present is the future'.

Plays

Aeschylus, *The Persians in Prometheus Bound and Other Plays* (Philip Vellacott, trans.), Penguin Classics, 2001, ISBN 9780140441123 (3)

Written by Aeschylus, the 'father of Greek tragedy', *The Persians* is notable for being based on history rather than retelling tales from the mythological past. The subject of the play is the defeat of the Persians, led by King Xerxes, at the naval Battle of Salamis, which occurred in 480 BCE. When it was first performed in Athens at the Dionysia festival, only eight years had passed since the actual event and some of those in attendance were veterans of the longstanding conflict (Aeschylus had fought at the Battle of Marathon and it is assumed he was also present at Salamis).

Rather than portraying the scene of the battle, Aeschylus sets the play in the Persian royal court. Although unaware of the final outcome of the battle or the fate of King Xerxes, the audience is confronted with images of death and failure of leadership at the very opening of the play. As the chorus' and the Queen's concerns mount, they learn from a messenger of the complete destruction of the Persian fleet and they summon the ghost of King Darius (the father of Xerxes) to join them. The play concludes with the arrival of King Xerxes, who joins a lament with the chorus about the defeat of Persia.

Aeschylus celebrates Athenian dominance and characterises the Persians as weak and arrogant. At the same time, the playwright provides moments of great sympathy for the Persians and uses this particular battle to offer more universal lessons about the horrors of war.

Hansberry, Lorraine, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Samuel French, 1988, ISBN 9780573614637 (1)

Lorraine Hansberry, renowned playwright and the first African-American woman to have a play performed on Broadway, is best known for her play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Inspired in part by the Langston Hughes poem 'Harlem', the title comes from the line 'What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?' The play centres around the promise of 'The American Dream' and the challenges faced by African Americans in 1950s Chicago under racial segregation in attaining this dream.

The play tells the story of a family, who, after the tragic death of the father, are set to receive a life-changing amount of money. Led by a desire to improve their circumstances, the money is used to purchase a house in a white neighbourhood, to pursue further education, while the rest is invested and lost. The Younger family's experiences provide the platform through which social issues such as housing discrimination, racism, identity, pride and assimilation are explored. In spite of the obstacles and hardships the family faces, they are resolute in their hope for a better future.

A Raisin in the Sun has been performed extensively in theatres and has been adapted for film, most notably in 1961 featuring the original Broadway cast and directed by Daniel Petrie, and in 1989 as a TV film directed by Bill Duke.

Harmon, Joshua, *Admissions*, Samuel French, 2019, ISBN 9780573707483 (3)

Sherri is the admissions officer at Hillcrest, a prestigious preparatory school in New England (USA) where the student population has reached, due to her dogged persistence, a diversity quota of nearly 20 per cent. As Sherri negotiates with a colleague over images in the school's marketing material, questions of equity and access crack open the play's examination of the tension between aspirations and principles.

First performed in 2018, Harmon's play examines ideas of privilege, power and representation. The progressive values of white, upper-middle class parents, Sherri and her husband Bill, clash with the staunch idealism of their son Charlie. Faced with Charlie's apparently unsuccessful application to Yale, the family is forced to examine the authenticity of their convictions, as they grapple with the ensuing moral dilemma.

The hypocrisy of a society dominated by white privilege is underscored by Harmon's examination of the motivation of those who benefit from the system. Nevertheless, Harmon writes that he sought to create a play in which what is right and what is wrong is less certain, inviting sympathy for his characters and reflecting on the complexity of their motives. As the play progresses, Harmon's satire shifts tone, seeking to provoke audiences to ask just what is needed to enact real societal change.

Advice to schools: Teachers should note that the play contains coarse language, adult themes and instances of religious and racially sensitive commentary.

Kirkwood, Lucy, *Chimerica*, Nick Hern Books, 2013, ISBN 9781848423503 (4)

Through this fast-paced drama, Lucy Kirkwood examines the power of an image to reveal unexpected truths and asks what becomes of those who are discarded and left behind in the race to tell the story. Shifting rapidly between locations and times, from 1989 to 2012, *Chimerica* explores the role of the journalist and the nature of exploitation in the struggle for the truth. The ethics of storytelling and the complexity of the political relations between China and the United States provide the backdrop for a provocative exploration of the tensions between censorship, freedom and consumerism.

Photojournalist Joe Schofield is driven to locate the anonymous figure at the centre of his most famous photograph: an image depicting one man standing defiantly before an army tank in Tiananmen Square during the pro-democracy protests of 1989. Upon the revelation of a clue in a newspaper advertisement, Joe believes 'Tank Man' is still alive and seeks the assistance of Zhang Lin, his contact in Beijing, to discover what happened to the unknown hero. Joe's idealism is tested as his obsession to uncover the truth destroys his career and his personal relationships, while Zhang Lin, though haunted by the past, remains unafraid to challenge the status quo.

Chimerica was first staged in 2013 in London, and in 2017 it was performed by the Sydney Theatre Company. A four-part television adaptation (also written by Kirkwood) aired in 2019 on the United Kingdom's Channel 4 and is available on DVD and through streaming services.

Murray-Smith, Joanna, *Berlin*, Currency Press, 2022, ISBN 9781760628024 (A) (4)

Joanna Murray-Smith is one of Australia's most internationally acclaimed playwrights. Her plays include *Switzerland*; *Pennsylvania Avenue*; *Fury*; *True Minds*; *Day One, a Hotel, Evening*; *The Gift*; *Rockabye*; *Ninety*; *Bombshells*; *Honour*; *Redemption*; and *Love Child*. *Berlin* is set in the titular European city among hipster bars, war memorials and tourist hedonists.

Murray-Smith's two characters, – Tom, an Australian law-school dropout, and Charlotte, a poet who runs a trendy underground bar – play a game of seduction over one night. The playwright activates the conventions of a psychological thriller when we learn their meeting was not accidental. Furthermore, Murray-Smith's lighting decisions involve the use of darkness, which facilitates hide-and-seek aspects of motivation. The play is rich in symbolism and characters engage in a range of literary discourse, including dialogue about the Ramones, philosophical argument and musing on the poetry of Rilke and Emily Dickinson.

The play raises significant philosophical questions about the conflict between individual freedom and respect for the legacy of war guilt. Murray-Smith raises the dramatic stakes as we learn of characters' psychological burdens, with Charlotte feeling responsibility for the accidental death of her brother and Tom as a

descendant of Holocaust victims. The central issue in the play – to what extent can individual choices be free of the burden of the past – is made palpable by the drama. It should resonate with Australian students with our history of colonialism and contested ownership.

Advice to schools: Teachers are advised that *Berlin* contains frequent use of the f-word and a sexual scene.

Rostand, Edmond, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Anthony Burgess, trans.), Nick Hern Books, 1991, ISBN 9781854591173 (3)

The real sense of joy within the pages of Edmond Rostand's 1897 play *Cyrano de Bergerac* can provide much amusement to any audience, including a Literature classroom. The titular character's grand appearance alone, disrupting a mediocre actor's performance from the theatre stalls, is memorable in its own right. He might have a deformed long nose, 'a peninsular' as he refers to it, but he has personality, a deep love of the Arts and a talent for love, and he is able to outwit any of his adversaries. The first emphasis of the play praises the power of words, especially in the face of any form of physical adversity.

Cyrano is in love with the elusive, intelligent, sensitive and beautiful Roxane. Rostand layers this story with the irony that the young lady is attracted to the handsome young Baron Christian de Neuville, who is deprived of any wit and unable to express his love for her. Therein lies the central paradox of the play, in which Roxane has two opposite admirers: one with wit but deprived of beauty and the other, the reverse. In this tale of unrequited love, Cyrano magnanimously provides Neuville with the words required to seduce Roxane, but with many moral consequences.

Edmond Rostand's comical masterpiece asks his audiences to question the value one places on beauty as opposed to wit. The adaptation and translation by Anthony Burgess conveys the dynamism of the original French rhyming text. There are many film adaptations, notably a lighthearted Hollywood modern remake *Roxanne*, starring Steve Martin, but more importantly, the 1990 Jean-Paul Rappeneau version, with an unforgettable performance by Gérard Depardieu.

Shakespeare, William, *As You Like It*, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press, 2021, ISBN 9781108969192 (3)

Young lovers Rosalind and Orlando must flee from dangerous situations. Rosalind, disguised as a young man named Ganymede, leaves the hostile court of her uncle for the Forest of Arden, accompanied by her cousin Celia and the court fool. Orlando, kept in poverty by his brother Oliver since his father's death and now threatened with his own death, also escapes into the forest. Yearning in exile, Orlando leaves love lyrics for Rosalind in the forest. Disguised, she meets him and suggests he prove the strength of his love by wooing Ganymede as if he were Rosalind. Oliver, who is sent into the forest to hunt down Orlando, has his life saved by his brother, becomes filled with remorse for his past behaviour and falls in love with Celia. Frustrated by the pain of his love for Rosalind, Orlando is unable to continue wooing Ganymede, so Ganymede promises he will conjure up the real Rosalind and that all the lovers will finally be wed.

As You Like It, along with three other plays of the period, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*, has challenging female leading parts that can make for rich discussions and exploration. The lyrical poetry – including the memorable 'All the world's a stage' speech – and passages of tender dialogue provide scope for close study. Ideas of love, loyalty, gender roles, nature and politics are as enduring in our time as they were in Shakespeare's. These ideas are invigorated in a play that reflects on how bewildering yet utterly pleasurable life can be.

The listed edition includes a useful introduction that canvasses a range of ideas and concerns in the play and contains detailed footnotes and references. Available adaptations include the Melbourne Theatre Company's 2021 production directed by Simon Phillips and the 2006 Kenneth Branagh film.

Shakespeare, William, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press, 2020, ISBN 9781316646977 (1)

The first recorded performance of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Lear* took place in 1606. Shakespeare was writing soon after the death of Queen Elizabeth I, early in the reign of James I. Thus, the anxiety about the role of a ruler that pervaded England in the early 17th century pervades the play. Lear, an ageing king of ancient Britain, decides to divide his kingdom between his three daughters, foolishly assuming he can retain the privileges of kingship while relinquishing its responsibilities, and equally foolishly thinking that love can be quantified.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare transcends the merely political, as he explores ideas about self-knowledge, family, gender, nature, and the healing power of love through Lear's slow apprehension of what it is to be human – 'a poor, bare forked animal as thou art'. Shakespeare's language is powerful and elemental as he investigates the nature of evil and the possibility of redemption. The sub-plot of Gloucester and his sons echoes the relationship between Lear and his daughters. There are violent scenes that strip away any veneer of civilisation, but in the ultimate scenes with Cordelia and her father, Shakespeare has us discover 'the thing itself'.

Adaptations of this play are myriad; notable among them are: 2018 National Theatre Live with Ian McKellen, directed by Jonathon Munby, 1985 *Ran* (Japan) directed by Akira Kurosawa, 1983 with Lawrence Olivier, directed by Michael Elliott, and 1971 directed by Grigori Kozintsev (Russia).

Shaw, George Bernard, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, 1894, With The Author's Apology, 1902, accessed via [Project Gutenberg](#) (1)

Mrs Warren's Profession is a provocative play that delves into the complex social issues of women's rights, economics and class. Written in 1893 and initially censored for controversial content, the play reflects Shaw's fearless interest in taboo subjects, pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable in the theatre at the time. The plot follows Vivie Warren, an educated and independent young woman, as she discovers the truth about her mother's profession as a brothel owner. Shaw's use of naturalistic dialogue and realistic settings bring a heightened sense of authenticity to the characters and their struggles. At the heart of the play lies a personal and ideological clash between Vivie and her mother, Mrs Warren. The recognisable intergenerational conflict represents a great departure from the melodramatic style popular at the time the play was written. Shaw's sharp, witty dialogue is filled with irony and satire, exposing the hypocrisies of Victorian society and challenging conventional morality. This blend of humour with serious social critique makes the play both entertaining and thought-provoking. The play is known for its ambiguous ending, leaving the relationship between Vivie and her mother unresolved. This underscores Shaw's critique of economic and social structures that compromise individuals morally and emotionally while also raising questions about the cost of holding uncompromising principles. The play offers students opportunities for multiple interpretations that engage with examinations of societal norms and personal ethics.

This text continues to transcend time and place due to the timelessness of the issues it explored. It has been performed and adapted extensively, including the 1960s film adaptation directed by Akos Rathonyi and various theatre adaptations available online.

A copy of this text can be downloaded [here](#).

Short stories

Chiang, Ted, *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Picador, 2020, ISBN 9781529039436 (4)

In this collection of short stories and novellas, Ted Chiang invests in the extraordinary to consider existential concerns and queries that have haunted humanity for millennia. In the first story set for study, 'Tower of Babylon', Chiang unpacks the biblical tale of the Tower of Babel, presenting his readers with the logistical challenges of building a tower that reaches to heaven, the chill of a profound disconnection to Earth and, finally, an inversion of what we might believe about time and space. In 'Understand', medical breakthroughs unleash unanticipated consequences for the protagonist, who must then battle a problem of identity and selfhood. The central story of the collection, 'Story of Your Life', explores the power and limits of communication in both human and alien forms.

Chiang's work plays with language, physics and our assumptions about the nexus between the ordinary and the extraordinary. His work is often predicated on loss or grief but engages with these experiences in surprising and unexpected ways. Much awarded, Chiang is considered one of the most exciting contemporary science fiction writers.

In 2016, the film adaptation of 'Story of Your Life' was released as *Arrival*.

Strout, Elizabeth, *Olive Kitteridge*, Scribner, 2016, ISBN 9781849831550 (2)

Pulitzer Prize-winning *Olive Kitteridge* is centred in a small town, Crosby, in coastal Maine. Against a backdrop of a natural beauty that often seems incidental to human concerns, Elizabeth Strout traces the cycles of human life. The intertwined relationships and shifting movements within and between the characters create a delicately constructed examination of how human beings can attain, often with great difficulty, an understanding of themselves and others.

The title character, Olive, large, socially inept and uncompromising, finds loving others a challenge. To Olive, life seems a continual attack on her, perhaps explaining her prickliness as she defends herself against it.

Strout constructs a social web of small-town characters, subject to the inexorable changes brought by time, struggling to transcend the limits, history and tragedies of their families. The milestones of existence such as work, marriage, parenthood, divorce and retirement are somehow similar yet intensely different for Strout's characters. The common thread through all these stories is Olive, at times only a peripheral presence, at others painfully front and centre.

Ultimately, Strout leaves us with a reassuring sense that the world experienced by Olive and many other characters as 'close and frightening' can also be a place '[s]he did not want to leave yet.'

There is an HBO four-part miniseries, also titled *Olive Kitteridge*, starring Frances McDormand, Richard Jenkins and Bill Murray.

Advice to schools: Teachers should note that the story 'A Different Road' contains gun violence and a hostage situation, and 'Starving' contains references to disordered eating.

Tan, Elizabeth, *Smart Ovens for Lonely People*, Brio Books, 2020, ISBN 9781922267191 (A) (4)

Elizabeth Tan's quirky collection of short stories received much praise upon release, as evidenced by its selection for the Stella Prize longlist in 2021 and its award of the 2020 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction.

There is much to savour in the often surreal universe Tan constructs, transforming ordinary mundane actions into mystifying and marvellous opportunities for self-reflection. From these unpredictable, enchanting situations emerge profound observations on contemporary human fallibilities and idiosyncrasies. The titles are evocative and tell a story in themselves: 'A Girl Is Sitting on a Unicorn in the Middle of a Shopping Centre', 'Eighteen Bells Karaoke Castle (Sing Your Heart Out)' or 'Shirt Dresses that Look a Little Too Much Like Shirts so that It Looks Like You Forgot to Put on Pants (Love Will Save the Day)'. If these are not enough to capture students' imaginations, the vibrant characters and settings will certainly lure them into a world in which the mind expands and imagination takes over.

Tan's playfulness with language offers many opportunities to explore narratives from alternative viewpoints, engaging her readers, thanks to her panache. While refreshing, vibrant and full of humour, with an upbeat style and unique voice, *Smart Ovens for Lonely People* provides us with incisive commentaries that enable us to ponder the most profound, and at times esoteric, aspects of our daily existence.

Other literature

Holden, Kate, *The Winter Road*, Black Inc, 2023, ISBN 9781760644567 (A) (2)

Holden's multi-award-winning piece of narrative non-fiction echoes the complexities of true crime texts such as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Chloe Hooper's *The Tall Man*. As the subtitle *A Story of Legacy, Land and a Killing at Croppa Creek* suggests, the author's venture into this genre is much more than a whodunnit or whydunnit. Holden immerses the reader in the complex web of the origins of colonialist attitudes towards possession amidst the pioneer hardships of the past and the challenges faced by 21st-century agriculturalists.

The prologue of the multi-linear narrative sets the scene of the brutal murder of environmental officer Glen Turner at the hands of landowner Ian Turnbull in country New South Wales in 2014. Turner's attempts at enforcing complex environmental land laws designed to promote the regeneration of indigenous flora on Turnbull's land are compromised by the landowner and the powerlessness of the courts. It is Turner's determination in the face of Turnbull's desperation that result in the ultimate consequence for both men.

The Winter Road incorporates a range of literary elements, such as poetic descriptions of the Australian landscape alongside clinical courtroom transcripts. The narrative complexity of the text will challenge students to consider the ramifications of both sides of the debate by taking a humanist approach to analysing the question of how far someone will go to protect their emotional, physical and moral investment.

Orwell, George, *Shooting an Elephant and other essays*, Penguin Classics, 2009, ISBN 9780141187396 (1)

Opening with a vibrant introduction by Jeremy Paxman, this edition curates Orwell's most widely recognised essays and reasserts his position as an astute social and political critic as well as a wonderful writer of lucid prose.

Spanning 18 years of writing (1931-1949), the essays are arranged chronologically apart from the opening 'Why I Write' (1946) and the closing 'Politics and the English Language' (1946). This structure provides a window into Orwell's fascinating life from his time as a police officer in Burma, his observations and experiences of homelessness in London and Paris, as well as time spent fighting during the Spanish Civil War. Explicit links can be drawn between these experiences with his first full-length biographical work: *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and his first novel *Burmese Days* (1934).

The bookending of the first essay will support the students to gain an insight into his origins as a writer and the four motives he decrees shape all writers' journeys. As with 'Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War' and 'Nonsense Poetry', 'Why I Write' also includes snapshots of his own foray into the poetic form. The final essay offers a scathing criticism of the impact that political writing has had on the quality of written expression in Orwell's renowned expressive style. His now infamous "6 Rules for Writing" also find their origins in this essay.

This collection of essays ranges from the personal and political to the pastoral and prophetic. All the while (as noted in the blurb), remaining 'opinionated, uncompromising, provocative and hugely entertaining'.

While there are no direct adaptations of the work, a 12-minute film of 'Shooting an Elephant' was released in 2016.

Seacole, Mary, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, Penguin Classics, 2005, ISBN 9780140439021 (4)

A rollicking tale of action and movement, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* is a text of both adventure and activism. The voice we hear in this autobiography challenges much of what we might know and think about who tells stories and who has agency. That Mary Seacole was both a woman and a person of colour could have been enough in the 19th century (the original text was published in 1857) to condemn her to silence but the existence of the text is a testimony to her sense of self and story. She claims her narrative as one of triumph and achievement, which might run counter to an assumption that this work will be an exploration of victimhood and exploitation. She is certainly clear that she suffered discrimination; she was initially denied work as a nurse when war broke out in Crimea. But undeterred, she made her own way into the war zone and opened the 'British Hotel' to nurse, feed and support sick and wounded officers.

A bestseller when first published, Mary Seacole's autobiography fell out of favour in the 20th century but has recently garnered renewed interest. Seacole has been reclaimed as a heroine of the Crimean War and a trailblazer. There are two films with links to her autobiography. The first is *Mary Seacole: The Real Angel of the Crimea* (2005) and the second is *Seacole* (2022).

Poetry

Bishop, Elizabeth, *Poems*, Chatto & Windus, 2011, ISBN 9780701186289 (2)

Reflecting her somewhat peripatetic existence from childhood, Elizabeth Bishop's poetry ushers the reader across continents, revealing moments of stillness and surrealism in an economy of lines. Though closely acquainted with many of the key poets of her time, Bishop disliked the confessional poetry of her peers, preferring instead to maintain a minimalist approach to her subjects, and favouring a discretion that incorporates very little of her personal life. This reticence to share such detail offers Bishop's readers greater freedom to take pleasure in the reading and interpretation of her poetry, as it remains largely encumbered by the minutiae of autobiography.

Publishing only 101 poems in her lifetime and, at times, spending a year creating and refining one poem, Bishop preferred free verse to traditional poetic forms, but nevertheless experimented with villanelles, sonnets and sestinas. Her poems reflect on the value of the ordinary, a connection with the natural world, the invisibility of women, and the pull of separation across time and place. Bishop draws her readers to linger on the quotidian moments of life, prompting early reviews to liken her poetry to the slow gaze of the painter, and yet there is often also a playfulness to Bishop's tone, as she gently exposes the meandering patter of her speaker's ruminations.

As one of the most highly regarded American poets of the 20th century, Bishop captivated researchers and reviewers alike; there is a wealth of writing available that examines her work.

Duffy, Carol Ann, *The World's Wife*, Picador, 2017, ISBN 9781509852666 (4)

First published in 1999, this compelling collection reimagines myth and reconsiders history, offering readers sharp social commentary in the form of engaging, witty and thought-provoking poetry that students will enjoy.

A former British poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy is a profoundly skilled writer, manipulating form and style to invest old stories with new life and to challenge old assumptions with new possibilities. The poems in the collection vary significantly; some are lyrical, others meditative and yet others conversational and intimate. All are interesting and all are paced so that readers are drawn through the narratives by vivid characters in sometimes familiar and sometimes unfamiliar circumstances. Some of the selected poems grapple with sexuality and desire, and some explore vengeance and betrayal, but Duffy's treatment of such challenging material is sensitive and nuanced, inviting wide-ranging classroom discussion and complex student responses.

Although some research will be necessary to orient students to the source material of poems from the collection, *The World's Wife* is accessible, returning readers often to the stories of childhood and allowing us to wonder about the narratives concealed by normative discourse. Duffy's irreverence is appealing to read, her satire is crisp without being bitter and her insights cast new light on tired conventions and accepted traditions.

Duffy's work is often taught in secondary school classrooms in the United Kingdom, so there are many online resources available to support a study of this collection, including readings and lectures by the author. *The World's Wife* also inspired a 2017 opera of the same name by Tom Green, extracts of which are available on YouTube.

Gao, Gavin Yuan, *At the Altar of Touch*, University of Queensland Press, 2022, ISBN 9780702263347 (A) (2)

Gavin Yuan Gao is a queer bilingual poet who grew up in Beijing and Brisbane, whose moving, accomplished debut collection *At the Altar of Touch* presents readers with a unique lyrical voice and a subtle, elegant grace in the conjuring of its images and the shaping – and reshaping – of its language. Drawing at times on Chinese characters, this collection has won multiple literary awards and offers students an opportunity to engage with a contemporary poetic voice that is both broad in its scope of ideas and precise in its execution.

At times elegiac, anguished and mournful, at others subversive and confronting, this collection is pervaded by a sense of intimate reflection, tender vulnerability and a sharpness of clarity in its unique exploration of love, loss, place, home, memory, protest, violence and familial hardship and suffering. Opening with a poetic self-portrait in 'Self-Portrait as the Last Wounded Stag' (one of two 'Self-Portrait' poems in the collection with more than a nod to artist Frida Kahlo's 'The Wounded Deer') and ending with the solemn 'Requiem Ending with the Night Sky' (one of two 'Requiem' poems in this text), Gao also explores the struggle with self and identity and the sense of anxiety that can underlie the act of writing and creating. It is also worth noting that the collection is dedicated to Gao's deceased mother, Liping Yuan, whose presence and keenly felt physical absence reverberates through the bulk of the poems in the collection, notably in 'The Afterlife' and 'Requiem with a Singing Kimono'.

At the Altar of Touch is replete with artistic, cultural, literary and some historical allusions, and the images conjured within the poems seem to dissolve into each other, giving the collection a unified, fluid and almost dreamlike, echoing feel. Students are likely to engage with and appreciate Gao's 'laying bare' of the personal and their meticulous attention to craft, which offers much scope for close study.

Advice to schools: Teachers should note that some poems contain mild sexual references and some refer to domestic violence. As a non-binary poet, Gao uses the pronouns they/their.

Holland-Batt, Sarah, *The Hazards*, University of Queensland Press, 2015, ISBN 9780702253591 (A) (3)

Sarah Holland-Batt is an accomplished Australian poet, critic and academic. *The Hazards* is her second volume of poetry. It was shortlisted for several prestigious awards and won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry in 2016.

The Hazards has been described as 'careful, finely-structured poetry', and Holland-Batt writes in a way that is richly textured, disturbing and chilling in its depiction of the unexpected perils encountered in life. The collection is divided into four parts, traversing multiple geographic and metaphysical landscapes, from an Australia scarred with the violent legacies of colonialism to the precarious existence of creatures in the animal kingdom, and from meditations upon art and nature to intimate elegies centred on relationships. Many poems are also set against Central and South American, European and North American backdrops.

The poems in this collection pulse with a metaphoric and musical energy, with a sensuous rendering of its subjects and an undercutting sense of menace. The poems are often centred upon birds, animals, plants, artworks and objects or places evoking rich and, at times, sorrowful echoes of memory. Through this, *The Hazards* explores universal experiences of pain, loss and suffering, and encounters with the harsh, sharp edges of the world. Holland-Batt writes of the interplay between the internal and external world, the inevitability of death and decay, the fragile (and sometimes deceptive) nature of beauty, and the transient solace found in love, sensory pleasures and calm contemplation. Students will find these poems to be both accessible and challenging, as rich in poetic soundscape as they are in evocative imagery and metaphor.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Thomas Hutchinson, ed.), Oxford, 1914 (accessed via [Project Gutenberg](#))

At the vanguard of the second wave of the Romantic movement, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) is known as much for the colourful complications of his personal life and connections as his poetry and prose. Expelled from Oxford due to the publication of his pamphlet 'The Necessity of Atheism', Shelley came to embrace a nomadic life, pursuing romance and idealism in equal turns.

Shelley's work rails against the loss of idealism and liberty. Stirred by the politics of the early 19th Century, his poetry advocates protest in the face of tyranny and injustice, eschews violence and reflects on the impermanence of life. Shelley viewed the creative impulse as providing access to the sublime, and believed this offered the poet a power that could provoke moral change and understanding. He championed the emancipation of women, advocated Irish freedom and gave voice to the suffering of the working classes.

Exploring themes of grief, ambition and the passage of time, Shelley wrote lyric and long-form verse and sonnets, incorporating terza rima rhyme. His poems call on the beauty of the natural world to at times illustrate a melancholic despair, but also to give voice to a longing for hope and love. Students will likely be stirred by the radicalism of Shelley's work and fascinated by his influence on political figures across the decades and well beyond his brief time.

A copy of this text can be downloaded [here](#).

van Neerven, Ellen, *Throat*, University of Queensland Press, 2020, ISBN 9780702262913 (A) (4)

With a perspective incorporating a Dutch and Mununjali Yugambah (South-East Queensland) heritage, Ellen van Neerven's writing has won prestigious literary awards in Australia, and their short stories have been published in Australian and international literary journals. (Note: The poet prefers the use of gender-neutral personal pronouns in discussions of their writing.) They write about 'Settler-Colonial continuity', revealing the ongoing suffering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. 'The Only Blak Queer in the World' speaks of the alienation felt by those with a young, queer, Aboriginal identity. The speaker remembers the anxiety they felt 'before [they] started to think of gender as a colonial construct'. Gender bias against any woman is denounced in poems such as 'Women are still not being heard'.

Many poems explore issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity: once it was a connection to the land, but those issues now revolve around the transformation and disintegration of this identity in a post-colonial society. In 'Terra Nova', the speaker mourns the loss of Country, which 'turned into what themfellas imagined'. Yet van Neerven also finds cause for optimism. In 'this deadly love', the speaker is joyful about 'fallin in big-one love with a deado Ballardong Noongar tidda ...' Poems like 'Bold & Beautiful' and 'Queens' celebrate the strength of women's loving family and tribal relationships.

Van Neerven's distinctive poetic voice is highly engaging; their vocabulary is invigorated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander words and plain, often blunt, language, while technological terminology evokes the complex, global community we now inhabit. Their bold experiments with form, in 'poems' that look and sound like prose, like a legal document or almost like a sonnet, challenge poetic tradition with thought-provoking poems that will strongly resonate with many young readers.

Advice to schools: Teachers should note that some poems make reference to sexual abuse and domestic violence. As a non-binary poet, van Neerven uses the pronouns they/their.