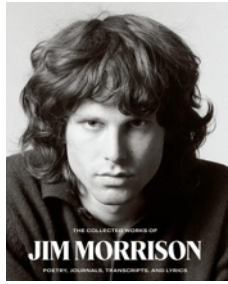


BOOKS



READ THIS

The Collected Works of Jim Morrison includes previously unpublished songs, lyrics, poetry, a film treatment and the Paris notebook kept just before he died 50 years ago.

Jim Morrison: Harper Design \$69.99

Her brilliant career

The life of a fearless Adelaide writer is explored in a book coedited by her sister

PENELOPE DEBELLE

Hazel Rowley, biographer of the formidable French intellectuals Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, and US presidential couple Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, is nowhere near well enough known as a writer from Adelaide.

A new book about her work, *Life as Art*, which includes speeches and essays, is a reminder of where it began for Rowley, whose father was an Adelaide University immunologist. The former student at Presbyterian Girls' College (now Seymour), enjoyed international success before dying shockingly and unexpectedly in New York in 2011 at the age of 59.

"From the age of 9 or so, I wanted to be a writer," Rowley wrote in a 2007 essay about biography. "One summer in Adelaide, I wrote a novel with a girlfriend. We sat at a folding table beside her family's swimming pool. One wrote while the other read or swam."

It was never published but she studied English, French and German at the University of Adelaide, then in Germany and France where she completed a PhD on the writers Simone de Beauvoir and Violette Leduc.

"She used to write me weekly comic books, story books, with ongoing stories," says sister Della Rowley, who coedited *Life as Art*, and lives in Adelaide. "She would put pictures in and illustrate it and they were fascinating stories because we were always on an adventure, she had a wild imagination, so it was a surprise that she ended up writing biographies instead of novels."

Rowley, a feminist during the birth of Women's Liberation in the 1970s, was heavily influenced by de Beauvoir's ideas and sought an interview with her in Paris while writing her PhD. She wanted to understand more about Beauvoir's daring pact with Sartre to be his lover, intellectual equal and life partner.

The meeting was a terrible let-down, with de Beauvoir giving terse and unilluminating answers. But Rowley's commitment to what she stood for did not falter.

"I think she modelled her life on Simone de Beauvoir and she would have loved a partner along the lines of Jean-Paul Sartre, but that never happened," Della says.



"She wanted a partner who would encourage her to make daring decisions and live a daring life, and that is a bit of a hard thing to do from an Adelaide, Presbyterian Girl's College background."

But she was fearless and radical: in her choice at the age of 19 to take steps so she could never have children; and in her subjects, first the Australian novelist Christina Stead and then the American novelist Richard Wright, an Afro-American who wrote about racial inequality.

"I really doubt if she could have done it now," Della says. "With the heating up of race relations, I don't think she would have got away with it."

The publication of the de Beauvoir-Sartre biography, *Tête-a-Tête*, which delved into the couple's partnership, at first brought favourable attention and Rowley, above, was grilled on French television about it. It was, she wrote, the most nerve-racking 40 minutes of her life.

But it also brought attention to the book and in France defamation laws are so unforgiving that publication can be stopped just on the basis of someone's displeasure, even when the material has appeared elsewhere. Her publisher was sued by a journalist, a former lover of de Beauvoir, because he did not like the passages about him, and Rowley's book was quietly withdrawn and pulped. While it remains an authoritative work on the couple elsewhere, that is not the case in France.

Rowley's other great and difficult work was her study of the marriage of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt in which she sought to ask how it was possible that a man paralysed by polio at 39 could be a great American president, with the influential Eleanor (more or less) at his side.

Life as Art: The Biographical Writing of Hazel Rowley. Edited by Della Rowley & Lynn Buchanan: The Miegunyah Press \$34.99

Reviews

Fiction

BEFORE YOU KNEW MY NAME
Jacqueline Bublitz: Allen & Unwin
\$29.99

This is one of a few books that you pick up and know they will stay with you long after you've finished. Alice Lee is a young girl fleeing a less than ideal home situation in small-town America and following the bright lights to New York.

But it is not long before her young life is taken and her story unfolds through another woman who was drawn to New York to escape her past. It offers a unique look at violence against women and how we can often ignore the warning bells ringing in the back of our head. If you're a fan of *Three Women* by Lisa Taddeo or *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, you won't be able to put this one down.

PAULA THOMPSON ★★★★★



Memoir

FURY
Kathryn Heyman: Allen & Unwin;
\$29.99

A fat girl from a broken and abusive family, Heyman understands that she is an underdog: she trips up, falls, drinks, makes a fool of herself. But she is also a reader, so devoted to books that she carries a dangerous pile of them in her backpack and eventually absorbs their message of re-creation. When she is raped by a taxi driver and ridiculed by the police and in the courts, she goes to sea, the only woman on a prawning trawler full of hard and sometimes devious men. The experience is physically and mentally challenging and eventually redemptive. Heyman's prose is precise: incandescent with outrage and hurt but also with a growing, self-accepting strength, and an ability to come back, face and strip herself of the past that is truly inspiring.

KATHARINE ENGLAND ★★★★★

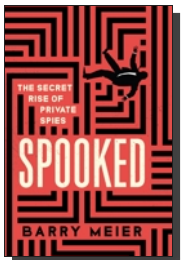


Reportage

SPOOKED
Barry Meier: Hachette **\$32.99**

Parallel with the decline of journalism in the 21st century has been the rise of private investigators. Big businesses with something to hide, law firms and political parties have employed former spies and journalists to dig up dirt on opponents. Journalist Barry Meier takes us through an incredibly complex web of operators and spies for hire, focusing on the "Steele dossier", an explosive set of claims about Donald Trump by a former MI6 operative. That much of it was discredited deflected attention from the president's real failings. *Spooked* is not an easy read, but Meier's careful and measured tracking of these operators and their motives is important to expose if our institutions are to remain fair and accountable.

ROBYN DOUGLASS ★★★★★



Illustrated fiction

WE WERE WOLVES
Jason Cockcroft: Andersen Press
\$26.99

A boy lives off the grid in Ireland in a caravan, waiting for the return of his father, John, who is in prison. His loving Mam wants him home, particularly after she sees through the boy's lies that his Dad will be home very soon. Then he does return, promising one last job that will bring in enough to move them to Scotland. Only John will never have peace: he is an Afghanistan vet with self-destructive PTSD and the boy understands this and wants only to love and stay loyal. The wonderful illustrations, of night-time wolves that terrorise dreams and the marvellous stag with its 12-tiered candelabra antlers, make the story all the more moving. The tension builds then falls away but the sense of love and menace never leaves.

PENELOPE DEBELLE ★★★★★

