

LINES TO THE HORIZON

SALLY BREEN, EMILY BRUGMAN, SAM CARMODY,
MADELAINE DICKIE, JAKE SANDTNER & MARK SMITH
FOREWORD BY JOCK SERONG

ABOUT THE BOOK

From Gold Coast surf culture to the life and death relationships of humans to the sea; from surf travel in Mexico to Taj Burrow's final campaign in Fiji, this collection features six authors writing about surf, and the ocean, in six very different ways. Their stories are reverential, energetic and mystical and between them cover thousands of kilometres of coastline, at home and away.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sally Breen lives on Queensland's Gold Coast. She is a writer and senior lecturer in Writing and Publishing at Griffith University.

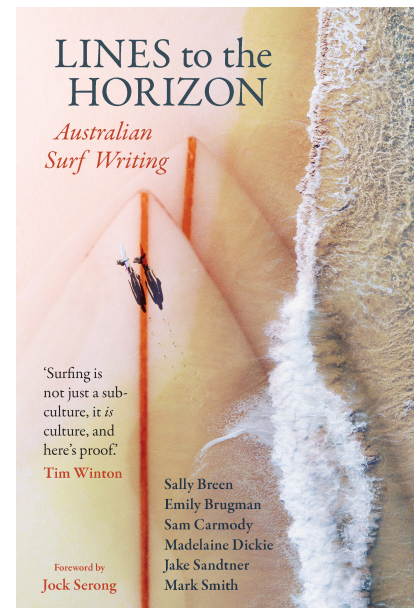
Emily Brugman lives in Mullumbimby. She wrote a regular column in *Tracks* magazine between 2016 – 2019, and is now working on her first novel.

Sam Carmody is based in Albany, Western Australia. His first novel, *The Windy Season*, won the 2017 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction.

Madelaine Dickie is loosely anchored to Exmouth, Western Australia, and is author of *Troppo* and *Red Can Origami*.

Jake Sandtner is currently completing a PhD at Griffith University on the Gold Coast.

Mark Smith is the author of YA novels *The Road to Winter*, *Wilder Country* and *Land of Fences* and lives on Victoria's west coast.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which is your favourite piece and why?
2. What do you think Jock Serong means when he says in his foreword *it is the immersion and the articulation that is important, not the perfection* (p. 9). Why does he use the metaphor of the wave pool to make his point?
3. *Writing about surfing is more important for Australians than it ever was.* (p.10). What is the importance of recording those things that we pay attention to in the world around us? (p. 10)
4. What do the birds symbolise in Madelaine Dickie's piece?
5. Madelaine writes, *But this swinging, this facing, this resolving, casts new shadows, at different angles, and it's impossible for art to exist without them.* (p. 24) What shadows does this piece of surf travel writing cast?
6. How does the culture of a place manifest in the ocean in many of these pieces?
7. Mark Smith writes of three creators whose lives have been affected by the ocean. Can you see parallels between their outlooks and those of the writers who appear in this volume?
8. What is it about the sea that affects the way people express themselves creatively?
9. Why do you think that Smith contextualises each life with such careful geographical description?
10. What layers of complexity does Sally Breen set out to explore in her essay 'Don't You Know You've Got Legs'? Why is it that *one cannot be read without some understanding of the other?* (p. 85)
11. How does the title of Breen's piece play into its meaning?
12. In what way do these different strands that she explores represent a concentration of Australian culture?
13. Emily Brugman quotes Tim Winton when she writes *I love the sea but it does not love me* (p.118) What draws human beings to immerse themselves in such an indifferent and potentially lethal space as the sea?
14. Did you identify with any of the swimmers, the sailor or the surfers in this piece in particular?
15. Why do you think human beings are drawn to return to the place where they nearly lost their lives? Do you identify with the swimmer Christine's sentiment: *If we get done, we get done* (p. 125)?

16. Jake Sandtner's piece 'A Man Above the Reef' focuses closely on the final surf competition of a famous Australian surfer. This narrative non-fiction piece is written as if it is in Taj Burrow's voice, though this is a stylised device chosen by Sandtner. How does this chosen mode to give us insight into this particular experience when compared, say, with a straight-up interview?
17. What kinds of 'typical' Australian machismo are on display in this Sandtner's piece?
18. What is it that Burrows has *to be grateful for*? (p.203)
19. In what ways is Sandtner's piece an expression of a certain kind of Australian masculinity in relation to the sea? What connections does this have to the 'blokey' kind of masculinity seen elsewhere in Australian culture?
20. Do you see any relationship between the masculinity represented and explored in the pieces by Sandtner and Carmody?
21. In what ways does Carmody use ocean as a metaphor for depression?
22. What is the connection between surfing, purpose and meaning in this particular writer's life?

AUTHOR INTERVIEWS AND THEIR READING RECOMMENDATIONS

We asked each contributor to respond to a question of their choosing and to recommend some further surf writing that they love.

Sally Breen: What is the relationship between the ocean and your own writing?

Having lived at the sea's edge for nearly a decade, I've come to realise it's had a profound effect on my life and writing. It happens in two ways – firstly the sensorial effects amp up in my writing – quality of light, atmosphere, textures and colours – what marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols refers to as 'blue mind' and the interface between the human and animal worlds particularly birds. Secondly, I've found the sense of expansiveness I experience near or in the sea has a symbolic or metaphorical effect on my writing – the ocean is a great teacher in that way – it reminds me of interconnectivity between the micro and macro worlds and I'm very conscious of that interplay between the small and the large, the personal and the universal when I write.

Sally recommends: Wallace J. Nichols, *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science That Shows How Being Near, In, On, or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do*, Back Bay Books, 2015. (non-fiction; self-help)

Emily Brugman: What is the relationship between the ocean and your own writing?

While I am not always writing about surfing, or even the coast, I think the ocean as a theme intersects with my writing in many, subtle ways. I am drawn to writing about wild, unknowable landscapes, and the ordinary people who inhabit them. Perhaps people go to the bush for the same reasons they go to sea? So, whether I am writing about mining in Mt Isa, crayfishing in WA or surfing on the south coast of NSW, the questions and ideas at the heart of the piece – passion, desire, fear, loss, community, the search for home and belonging – are often interchangeable. And I think my interest in these themes is almost certainly borne out of my upbringing, and the experiences I've had growing up in and around the sea.

Emily recommends: Favel Parrett, *Past the Shallows*, Hachette, 2013. A wonderfully wild and woolly tale of abalone diving in Tasmania (with a bit of surfing on the side) told from the perspective of two young brothers (fiction). She also recommends: William Finnegan, *Barbarian Days* Corsair, 2015. Memoir of the writer's surfing life, and an exploration of the act of surfing, its appeal and its possibilities, told in the most non-clichéd fashion (memoir).

Sam Carmody: Who are the writers who have most changed the way that you see the world and why?

The most influential writer for me would be Randolph Stow. Stow grew up in Geraldton, Western Australia, as did I, and his influence, I think, lives on in Australian writing about the sea. In Stow's work, there is a 'psychology of water', as literary scholar Bruce Bennett once put it. The sea is never just the sea, but instead in a novel like *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* it becomes the unknown depths of a character. Similarly, a shark is never just a shark, but instead what shadows the water in a story is everything a character is yet to fully grasp in their life, or too fearful to encounter. One can find that complex poeticism – the ocean as a stand-in for the subconscious – in so many Australian writers that came after Stow, from Robert Drewe to Winton (Winton's story 'Family' is a classic example), and I can see the same influence of Stow in my work.

Sam recommends: Tim Winton, 'Family' in his collection, *The Turning*, Scribner, University of California, 2005 (short story).

Madelaine Dickie: Do surfing and writing have similar or different functions in your life?

Surfing is a relentless addiction. It's the adrenaline. It's bullied where I've travelled (nowhere I can't get a fix), coarsened me into an arsehole (burn me again and I'll cut your fucken anchor rope), damaged my eyes (love, do you think that's a pterygium?), and stunted my art (surfing's easier than writing). I don't think I'm a better person for being a surfer. I don't think I'm a better writer. As winter approaches, I swear I'll only surf when it's pumping. I swear that on the flat days, or the small days, or the windy days, my loyalty will lie with the words, not the waves, with mindfulness, not mindlessness, with the vast horizon of my own imagination, not that trembling horizon of maybe-swells. It never works. And so, for me, the two – surfing and writing – are generally in competition, in tension. However, there is perhaps an uneasy truce in 'Following the Birds'. Between the lines, it's my hope that I've created a space where art and surfing augment each other, a space where surfing offers something more than mindlessness – perhaps a prism through which we can consider culture and travel and place. And addiction. Also, adrenaline ...

Madelaine recommends: Sam de Brito, *The Lost Boys*, Picador, 2008 (out of print and really hard to find, but this novel is an Aussie classic); Pat Grant, *Blue*, Top Shelf Productions, 2012 (graphic novel); Kem Nunn, *The Dogs of Winter*, Oldcastle Books, 1998 (novel); and Tim Winton, *Breath*, Penguin, 2018 (novel).

Jake Sandtner: Who are the writers who have most changed the way that you see the world and why?

I appreciate the work of writers who take on radical or abstract ideas. Things that expose the intricacies of the mundane. Writers who defy convention. Julio Cortázar. Italo Calvino. Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Nigel Krauth. Steven Erikson. Chuck Palahniuk. They've taught me to experiment with life, to be true. Writers like Favel Parrett, Kirsty Eagar and Sophie Hardcastle's work have also taught me a lot about myself, details I'll leave ambiguous. While writers like Tim Winton, Brandon Sanderson and Robert Jordan will always have an important place in my heart for their messages of value, morality and the importance of maintaining one's own beliefs.

Jake recommends: Aaron James, *Surfing with Sartre: An Aquatic Inquiry to a Life of Meaning*, Penguin Random House, 2018 (philosophy).

Mark Smith: What is the relationship between the ocean and your own writing?

Place is central to my writing process as, unlike most writers, I begin with setting. I believe if I find the setting I'll find the character—and their story. Before becoming a novelist, I wrote short stories, some of which were set in exotic places I had travelled to, but I always found them harder to write if I didn't have an intimate knowledge of the setting. Conversely, when I set my stories—and eventually three novels—around the ocean, I found the words flowed more easily because these were my stories to tell. Setting comes alive for the reader when the writer conveys not just the description but the feeling of being in that place. To do that, you need an intimate knowledge of the setting. Having lived and surfed on the west coast of Victoria for forty years, I know it intimately – and that connection will inevitably show through in my writing.

Mark recommends: *The Rip Curl Story* by Tim Baker, Ebury Press, 2019. This is much more than just the charting of Rip Curl's rise to become the premier surf company in the world. Tim Baker imbues the rags-to-riches story with a cast of weird and wonderful characters, epic adventures, an insider's look at the Bells contest from its infancy and Rip Curl's famous philosophy of the Search.