The Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) from 1938 to 1980
and its role in the cultural life of Perth.

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ABSTRACT

The Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA) from 1938 to 1980 and its role in the cultural life of Perth.

By the mid-1930s, a group of distinctly Western Australian writers was emerging, dedicated to their own writing careers and the promotion of Australian literature. In 1938, they founded the Western Australian Section of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. This first detailed study of the activities of the Fellowship in Western Australia explores its contribution to the development of Australian literature in this State between 1938 and 1980. In particular, this analysis identifies the degree to which the Fellowship supported and encouraged individual writers, promoted and celebrated Australian writers and their works, through publications, readings, talks and other activities, and assesses the success of its advocacy for writers’ professional interests.

Information came from the organisation’s archives for this period; the personal papers, biographies, autobiographies and writings of writers involved; general histories of Australian literature and cultural life; and interviews with current members of the Fellowship in Western Australia. These sources showed the early writers utilising the networks they developed within a small, isolated society to build a creative community, which welcomed artists and musicians as well as writers. The Fellowship lobbied for a wide raft of conditions that concerned writers, including free children’s libraries, better rates of payment and the establishment of the Australian Society of Authors. It organised Children’s Book Weeks, and began the Children’s Book Council in Perth. It formed branches in five country towns, arranged Writers’ Weeks in early Perth Festivals, and conducted writers’ tours to country schools. By 1980, the Fellowship had prepared five anthologies of Western Australian writing and initiated two national literary competitions.

As the story of the Fellowship in these years is also the story of Perth’s cultural life, in a time of extensive change, this account of Western Australia’s writers is set within the framework of the State’s growing artistic world.

Patricia Kotai-Ewers, BA MPhil, W.Aust.
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Throughout this work I have been aware of a tension between the benefit of my lifelong connection with the Fellowship through my father, and the need to maintain sufficient distance from the material given my current involvement in the organisation.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

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1 M. Skinner to N. Bartlett, 15 September 1937. Bartlett papers NLA 6884/1.
2 P. Hasluck to H. Drake-Brockman, 30 June 1941. Drake-Brockman papers NLA 1634/9.
5 P. Buddee to FAW(NSW), 20 August 1949. FAWWA papers BL 214/1438A/26.
7 F. James to D. Irwin, 2 May 1963. James papers ML 5877/4. Florence James was reporting Mary Durack’s feelings to a mutual friend.
SECTION ONE

The Foundation

1930 to 1938

Chapters One and Two

Being from WA was always seen as a terrible disadvantage, but in retrospect I think it was a gift. It hardens us, like drought-resistant coastal plants, and you have the great opportunity to make yourself up as you go along.

Tim Winton.
Cited in Author Profiles, Published by writingWA, 2011.