

Which books refused to loosen their grip on the cultural imagination in 2025?

Australia's longest-running review publication asked thirty-eight writers and commentators

In its December issue, *ABR's* annual Books of the Year feature includes nominations from **Amanda Lohrey**, **Clare Wright**, **Esther Anatolitis**, **Mark McKenna**, **Yves Rees**, **Stephen Romei**, **Clinton Fernandes**, **John Kinsella**, **Felicity Plunkett**, **Michael Williams**, **Julie Janson**, **Jason Steger**, and **Geordie Williamson**.

In a year marked by global upheaval, environmental crises, and persistent moral reckonings, *ABR's* Books of the Year remains a **cultural barometer**, tracking the stories that resonate most powerfully.

Many contributors were drawn to books highlighting the plight of Gazans and the Palestinian struggle. **Omar El Akkad's** *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* received several nominations; Ben Brooker commended its 'novelistic artfulness and its conscience-rattling fury', while Yves Rees praised its 'devastating precision'.

Helen Garner's collected diaries, *How to End a Story*, drew repeated acclaim for its unrivalled ability to 'sift through the muck of existence and transform it into poetry'. **Tony Birch's** *Pictures of You* was also widely celebrated, Julie Janson saluting the 'volatile but compassionate' stories for their brutal, tender portrayal of Indigenous family life.

In an extended essay, **Nadia Wheatley**, author of *The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift*, takes us on a dizzying biographical journey as she uncovers the profound secret that **Charmian Clift's** mother bore – one that had a devastating, cascading effect on her daughter's life.

In his eye-opening review of *The Red House* by Kate Wild, the ABC's former Editor Indigenous Radio and now Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries at Sydney University, **Daniel Browning**, examines the **Kumanjayi Walker** case, a moment when 'the fleshy, malignant knot in the corpus of the settler-colonial nation state becomes utterly, obscenely visible'.

Elsewhere, investigative journalist **Stephen Long** offers a sobering analysis of Australia's resources sector in his dual review of *Woodside vs The Planet* and *Extractive Capitalism*: 'Only in a world that fails to prevent global warming of 2.6 degrees, or higher, can [Australia] maintain anything near our current export rate' of LNG. Can we overlook an economic model 'based on climate catastrophe'?

ABR's inaugural Science Fellow, astrophysicist **Sara Webb**, revels in the strange delights of quantum physics in its centenary year. As scientists learn to 'harness the power of uncertainties', Webb foresees 'a future where the weirdness of the quantum world becomes the foundation of human progress'.



In *ABR Arts*, **Julie Ewington** writes from London, where Tate Modern's 'grand survey' of Australian Indigenous artist **Emily Kam Kngwarray** clearly illuminates 'the intelligence, purpose, and driving energy that sustained Kngwarray's project as an artist'.

In fiction, **James Ley** argues that **Trent Dalton's** *Gravity Let Me Go* is the novelist 'merely spoonfeeding the culture its own reheated slop' and that the ending is 'Scooby-Doo nonsense', **Julie Janson** commends the 'slow simmer' and powerful 'emotional resonance' of **William J. Byrne's** *The Warrumbar*, and **Geordie Williamson** reviews **Salman Rushdie's** *The Eleventh Hour*, a late collection by the writer 'in the alembic of his art'.

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