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*Phoenix Journal: The “Pilot-Ship”
of Australian Modernism*



Figure 1. The cover of Phoenix Issue 1. Published by the Adelaide University Union, printed by the Hassall Press, 1935. Reproduced with permission by the Adelaide University Student Association (formally the Adelaide University Union). Cover design by John Dowie. Orphan work. Every effort has been made to trace other copyright holders.

Modernism from the Margins: Phoenix (1935–1939)

The phoenix renews her youth
only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down
to hot and flocculent ash.

— D. H. Lawrence, “Phoenix” (1932)¹

No need for apologies. It is time for a change.

— “Editorial,” *Phoenix* (1935)²

Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker’s *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines* (2009–2013) brought little magazines into the heart of modernist studies. Such a development would have appeared belated to Ezra Pound, who in 1930 had already noted that the radical history of “contemporary letters” is written in little magazines.³ Following the first volume’s coverage of Britain and Ireland, Thacker and Brooker’s second and third volumes expanded the scope of their history to include America and Europe, mapping the “vast hinterland” of magazines they acknowledge remains unexplored.⁴ Aware of the northern-hemisphere bias to this revival, I, along with Andrew Van der Vlies and Benjamin Madden in December of 2023, convened a workshop at the University of Adelaide titled “Modernist Print Cultures of the South,” aimed at beginning to redress this imbalance. *Phoenix*—a virtually unknown precursor to both the dominant literary movements responsible for the revival of Australian letters in the 1940s, founded at the very institution hosting our workshop—became emblematic of these oversights.⁵ If there has already been a widespread

¹ D. H. Lawrence, *The Poems*, ed. Christopher Pollnitz, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1:642.

² “Editorial,” *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 1.

³ Ezra Pound, “Small Magazines,” *English Journal* 19, no. 9 (1930): 702, <https://doi.org/10.2307/803043>.

⁴ Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, “General Introduction,” in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, volume 1, *Britain and Ireland 1880–1955*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

⁵ The extant critical work on *Phoenix* is limited to a page and a half by Geoffrey Dutton in *Snow on the Saltbush: The Australian Literary Experience* (Viking Press, 1984), 126–27, and a 2013 History Festival Exhibit by former research librarian Cheryl Hoskin: ““A

predisposition to overlook the impetus of little magazines in literary studies, then *Phoenix* was doubly disadvantaged: already placed upon the putative edge of modernity in the Antipodes, its marginality was further compounded by its location in Adelaide, a provincial centre in comparison to the dominant metropolises of Sydney and Melbourne. In this respect, *Phoenix* presents itself as a case study for the study of modernism on the margins, both in little magazines and on the geographical edge of modernity.

The only widespread survey of Australian modernist-era magazines remains John Tregenza's *Australian Little Magazines 1923–1954* (1964). The book's oversights include the omission of *Phoenix*, despite Tregenza noting it as the precursor to *Angry Penguins* in his bibliographic entry.⁶ While several histories of modernism in Australia have been written, a literary focus remains occluded.⁷ Within the study of Australian print cultures, David Carter has long been close to a lone hand in the study of Australian little magazines, including important precursors of *Phoenix* such as the Sydney-based *Vision* (1923–1924), Melbourne-based *Stream* (1930–1934), and Adelaide-based *Desiderata* (1929–1939).⁸ Carter has overcome the tired old arguments about modernism's belated arrival in Australia, by moving away from strictly studying modernism and instead showing the “contemporaneity” of a range of magazines, moving towards a model of networks

Genius about the Place’: The *Phoenix* Magazine and Australian Modernism” (University of Adelaide, 2013), <http://hdl.handle.net/2440/129739>. Cheryl was present at the workshop, and I am greatly indebted to her foundational work. By her own admission much work remains to be done.

⁶ John Tregenza, *Australian Little Magazines 1923–1954: Their Role in Forming and Reflecting Literary Trends* (Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964), 95. Although we must be thankful for Tregenza's book, the fact that it, originally a master's thesis submitted in the 1950s, remains such a key work says something about the state of the field. That Tregenza was from Adelaide further suggests the outsized local cultural impact of little magazines.

⁷ These include, Humphrey McQueen's *The Black Swan of Trespass: The Emergence of Modernist Painting in Australia to 1944* (Alternative Publishing Cooperative Limited, 1979); Anne Stephen, Philip Goad, and Andrew McNamara, *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917–1967* (Miegunyah, 2006); and *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia* (Miegunyah, 2008).

⁸ In many ways the culmination of this work is David Carter, *Always Almost Modern: Australian Print Cultures and Modernity* (Australian Scholarly, 2013).

rather than of import and export.⁹ Victoria Kuttainen, Susan Liebich, and Sarah Galletly's *The Transported Imagination* (2018) extended this approach to Australian pictorial magazines in the interwar years, establishing their "near simultaneity" with literary, artistic, and intellectual issues in London, Europe, and America.¹⁰ However, many Australian little magazines remain undigitised and virtually unstudied. This paper returns to *Phoenix* to show that the radical history of Australian literary modernism—its initial impulse, or what Ezra Pound refers to as the "germ"¹¹—lies in the largely-unread pages of these magazines.

Although *Phoenix* was born at a university, this paper argues that it must be read, like its successor *Angry Penguins*, as a little magazine.¹² As defined by Pound, a little magazine must announce a "program," though this need not be complex, and, indeed, Pound adds that "One idea and its environment is probably enough for one magazine."¹³ As Brooker and Thacker argue, for Pound "the magazine itself functions as a form of manifesto."¹⁴ With the launch of student-union newspaper *On Dit* in 1932, the old *Adelaide University Magazine* had died; *Phoenix*—"modern, literary and artistic"—would be birthed from its ashes in 1935.¹⁵ It featured a bold new name, artistic cover, and a manifesto-style editorial declaring the necessity to make "things new," distancing itself from the "limp, anaemic" university magazine tradition, while announcing itself as a place for "significant writings."¹⁶

⁹ Carter, *Always Almost Modern*, xi.

¹⁰ Victoria Kuttainen, Susann Liebich, and Sarah Galletly, *The Transported Imagination: Australian Interwar Magazines and the Geographical Imaginaries of Colonial Modernity* (Cambria, 2018), 17.

¹¹ Pound, "Small Magazines," 702.

¹² A number of the most radical literary magazines to erupt at this time began as student publications, including *Angry Penguins* and *Barjai*. Indeed, in a remarkable quirk of history Adelaide's *Phoenix* has an Antipodean partner in the *Phoenix* (1932–1933), published by the Literary Club of the Auckland University College, which also proved pivotal to New Zealand literature.

¹³ Pound, "Small Magazines," 705.

¹⁴ Brooker and Thacker, "General Introduction," 1:2.

¹⁵ Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 126.

¹⁶ "Editorial," *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 1.

Phoenix would take several years to reach its fiery apotheosis, but its pinnacle—the 1939 issue, published on the cusp of global war and edited by future Angry Penguins D. B. Kerr and Molly Swan—would be dazzling. However, a noted characteristic of little magazines is the constant threat they faced from “censorship” and “philistinism,” and *Phoenix*’s ascendance would stimulate a counter reaction by conservative forces that brought about its demise.¹⁷ John Miles, poet and biographer of Kerr and another Angry Penguin, P. G. Pfeiffer, describes *Phoenix* as the “pilot ship” of the early *Angry Penguins* (1940–1942).¹⁸ Given that both the Angry Penguins, an avant-garde internationalist force, and the Jindyworobaks, a radical localist and nativist force, emerged from *Phoenix*, it is the contention of this paper that *Phoenix* was the “pilot-ship” not merely of the Penguins, but of a distinctively Australian modernism.¹⁹ The very name of the journal, *Phoenix*, is emblematic of the ephemeral nature of this modernism, marked by numerous fiery rebirths and many little deaths. I present the first in-depth scholarly study of *Phoenix*, by first examining the situatedness which enabled the journal’s emergence. I then analyse *Phoenix*’s material development across the five issues of its initial print run from 1935 to 1939,²⁰ to better

¹⁷ Brooker and Thacker, “General Introduction,” 1:1.

¹⁸ Miles also argues there was a seminal decade between 1935 and 1945, rather than one beginning with *Angry Penguins* in 1941: “the literary, particularly poetic, upsurge that [modernism] brought began in Adelaide in 1935, centred around that city’s university. It was a phenomenon that progressed to full scale artistic revolt by 1940.” John Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins: D. B. Kerr & P. G. Pfeiffer: A Path to the Wind* (Crawford House Publishing, 2000), 12–13.

¹⁹ Although there were other efflorescences of modernism in Australia prior to *Angry Penguins*—notably in Melbourne’s short-lived little magazine *Stream* in 1931 and Adrian Lawlor in 1937, while, in the harbour city, the Sydney University journal *Hermes* went modern under James McAuley’s editorship (oh the irony) in 1937—the journal rightly remains central to any understanding of Australian modernism.

Meanwhile, it has been increasingly argued that the Jindys were modernist. Although this essay likely complements such a reading, I do not read them as strictly modernist, but rather as part of the “germ” essential for the later development of a distinctive Australian modernism. For the Jindys as modernist, see Peter Kirkpatrick, “Jindy Modernist: The Jindyworobaks as Avant Garde,” in *Republics of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia*, ed. Robert Dixon and Peter Kirkpatrick (Sydney University Press, 2012), 99–112.

²⁰ *Phoenix* was revived after the war (1946–1950), but it was published in a different postwar moment by different people. For this reason, I consider this later publication, for the purposes of this essay, a different magazine.

understand the magazine as agent, its audience, and its implied reader.²¹ Finally, building on this analysis, I examine the key contributors and their work across the first four issues, before turning to the defining issue of *Phoenix*, published in 1939.

London, Paris... Adelaide: A "New World"

I remember lying in bed awake at night with the words swirling round [...]

It was a new world.

— Clement Semmler, *Pictures on the Margins* (1991)²²

Former Angry Penguin Geoffrey Dutton has noted that, while Jack Lindsay could write a memoir about Sydney titled *The Roaring Twenties*, “Adelaide in the 1920s made a noise like a dull groan.”²³ And yet, Max Harris could accurately state that by “the early 1940s,” a mere decade later, “Adelaide was the literary capital of Australia. No big deal.”²⁴ The Jindyworobaks and the Angry Penguins had dramatically shaken the arts out of their comfortable stasis to usher in a renaissance in Australian letters that briefly placed Adelaide at the centre of Australian culture. It was an anomalous position the city never held again. A number of contrary forces led to this unusual flourishing of modernism in a peripheral city, and *Phoenix* was at the heart of understanding this transformation. As noted, for Pound the essential ingredients of a magazine include not only its “idea,” but also its “environment,” so we first turn to the local specificities which contributed to *Phoenix*’s fiery emergence.

At the beginning of the 1930s, Adelaide was (unlike today) Australia’s third largest city, having attained an urban mass of 300,000 people. Yet it was also, compared to Sydney and Melbourne, regional. The city had direct links to the

²¹ I am informed here by the methodology which Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman offer, bringing the legacy of Pound’s work into contemporary periodical and modernist studies, in *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (Yale University Press, 2010).

²² Clement Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin: Memoirs* (University of Queensland Press, 1991), 46.

²³ Jack Lindsay, *The Roaring Twenties: Literary Life in Sydney, New South Wales in the Years 1921–6* (London: Bodley Head, 1960); Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 181.

²⁴ Max Harris, introduction to *The Poems of Ern Malley: Comprising the Complete Poems*, by Ern Malley, ed. Max Harris and Joanna Murray-Smith (Allen & Unwin, 1988), 18.

outback and Central Australia, and yet, thanks to its free-settler-state heritage, it was also the most aspirationally British Australian city. Nonetheless, in the hub of “conservative Anglophile Adelaide” that existed as a local pole of the wider “philistine Establishment forces of the country,” youthful radical forces, who saw



Figure 2. King William Street, Adelaide, bustling with trams and automobiles, 26 January 1935. Preece's Bookshop is in the striped Beehive building on the left. Colin Thiele recalls that by the early 1940s both Rex Ingamells and Max Harris were leading literary movements that had offices in the city. See History Trust of South Australia, <https://collections.history.sa.gov.au/nodes/view/36598>.

themselves as immersed in European modernism and the convulsive political upheavals of the thirties, burst forth.²⁵ Little magazines and their programs were, like the café and the backroom press, among the “institutions that sustained and promoted modernism.”²⁶ *Phoenix*'s emergence was enabled by a bookshop, a

²⁵ Max Harris, quoted in Margot Osborne, “Overview 1939–49: Young Modernists and the Adelaide Art Scene,” in *The Adelaide Art Scene: Becoming Contemporary 1939–2000*, ed. Margot Osborne and Catherine Speck (Wakefield, 2023), 27.

²⁶ Brooker and Thacker, “General Introduction,” 1:2.

local periodical culture, a university, and a collection of remarkable individuals. Together these forces enabled Adelaide's formative print culture to be connected to and imagine itself as contemporaneous with London and Paris.

Even in large European cities, the role of a single bookshop in fostering modernism could be impactful. In the smaller urban centres of Australia, they were vital. At the beating heart of modernism in Melbourne was Leonardo's Art Shop; Adelaide had Preece's Bookshop located in the now iconic Beehive Corner building on the corner of King William and Rundle Street.²⁷ Founded in 1907 by F. W. Preece, Preece's continued in the hands of his two sons, Edgar, a consummate bookseller, and John, a dilettante whose concerns were more artistic and cultural. In the late 1930s, Preece's was a "literary haven" where young poets and firebrands would meet, and it was often used by students as a sort of free reading room.²⁸ Whether it was selling Baudelaire and Rimbaud, the Faber & Faber poets, or, at the end of the decade, the New Apocalypse poets, Preece's provided direct connection to the moderns. As Dutton recalls, Edgar "had all the advance notices of new books airmailed to him from London [...] while despite a six-week sea voyage, he had the latest novel or book of poems very close to the date of their publication in London."²⁹ Thanks to Preece's Bookshop, the cultural belatedness between London and Adelaide was then, at most, six weeks.

By launching its own magazine in 1929, titled *Desiderata: A Guide for Good Books*, Preece's would stimulate the beginnings of a local literary periodical culture. Although staple-bound, *Desiderata* presents in typesetting and layout as a quality publication. It was an "elegant" and "intelligent" magazine that across its ten-year print run "achieved a rare synthesis between literature overseas and at

²⁷ Preece's housed an art gallery upstairs that would hold a number of influential exhibitions, including one by Norman Lindsay in 1924, after Lindsay had been censored from other venues. The exhibition was labelled an early victory for artistic freedom against the "wowers and philistines" (Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 183). At some point in the 1930s the upstairs art gallery gave way to a French department run by an expert in French Literature. See Geoffrey Dutton, *Out in the Open: An Autobiography* (University of Queensland Press, 1994), 79.

²⁸ Colin Thiele, quoted in Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, x. See, also, Stephany Evans Steggall, *Can I Call You Colin?: The Authorised Biography of Colin Thiele* (New Holland, 2004), 59.

²⁹ Dutton, *Out in the Open*, 79.

home.”³⁰ As Carter puts it, *Desiderata* was interested in the “contemporary—that is, modern—arts and letters.”³¹ Although the Preece brothers were not strictly modernists, they were alive to its importance: introducing an article by C. R. Jury on T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), John proclaimed it “undoubtedly the most important [poem] of our generation.”³² John’s contacts in London also enabled a fecund process of “cross-pollination” between the local and international.³³ Issues would feature, for example, occasional poems by Australian poets alongside criticism on D. H. Lawrence, reviews of outback travel literature, and extracts from Australian manuscripts paired, in issue three, with an excerpt from Virginia Woolf’s essay “Beu Brummell” (1929). *Desiderata* achieved all this, despite being in what Carter describes as a doubly disadvantageous position: the magazine both inhabited a marginal position within the world literary system and existed at the edge of provinciality in the national space.³⁴ For this reason, Carter argues that *Desiderata*’s very publication was a “quietly radical act of the imagination,” conceiving of Adelaide as contemporaneous with London.³⁵

Phoenix sits crucially at the nexus of Adelaide-linked little magazines and publications that reshaped Australia’s literary history. Prior to *Phoenix*, these would include not only *Desiderata*, but also *So This is Adelaide* (1932–1933) and *Foolscap* (1933).³⁶ Alongside and after *Phoenix*, more impressive and significant publications emerged, including *Chapbook* (1935–1936), *Venture* (1937–1940), *Jindyworobak Anthology* (1938–1953), *Jindyworobak Review* (1938–1948),

³⁰ Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 182.

³¹ David Carter, “Modernising Anglocentrism: *Desiderata* and Literary Time,” in Dixon and Kirkpatrick, *Republic of Letters*, 88.

³² John Preece, quoted in Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 190. Certainly, at points during the 1920s the Preeces shared the Lindsays’ deep suspicion of modernism, even as, of course, the Lindsays were themselves stimulated by it. See Carter, “Modernising Anglocentrism,” 88.

³³ Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 189.

³⁴ Carter, “Modernising Anglocentrism,” 87.

³⁵ Carter, “Modernising Anglocentrism,” 91.

³⁶ *So This is Adelaide* ran for four issues but was a limited issue for private subscription and circulation. *Foolscap*’s three issues were for public sale, but the issues list their availability at only four bookshops. Recalling modern zines, both publications are characterised by low print runs and poor material quality in their typesetting, illustrations, and printing.

Angry Penguins (1940–1946), and *Poetry* (1941–1947). Despite their more amateurish quality, *So This is Adelaide* and *Foolscap* indicate an expanding periodical culture, presaging the two polarities that came to define *Phoenix*. The former is notable for its attacks on the establishment, for its Australian outlook, and for several reviews of contemporary avant-garde writing that retrospectively appear proto-Penguin in outlook. Two particular essays in the latter, on the “Character of the Australian Bush” and on “Australian Nomenclature,” can be considered proto-Jindyworobak.

By 1935, Adelaide had produced an accomplished platform for book reviews (*Desiderata*), two furtive though specialised magazines for intellectual and artistic comment (*So This is Adelaide* and *Foolscap*), and the “first Australian chapbook” (*Chapbook*). Preceding *Phoenix* by a matter of months, the finely produced *Chapbook* shows a periodical culture conversant with Europe and determined to reanimate aspects of its periodical history to serve contemporary ends.³⁷ Combining striking linocuts in the “modern manner” with creative work from youthful writers (most notably Rex Ingamells), *Chapbook*’s first issue set the stage for *Phoenix*.³⁸ The presence of two more experienced artists in *Chapbook*—Mary P. Harris and Dorrit Black—also reveals key connections between Adelaide and European modernism.³⁹ Among Australia’s most significant modernist painters and evangelists of modernism, Black returned to Adelaide permanently the year before *Phoenix* emerged. Having studied in 1927 at the London Grosvenor School of Modern Art (where Claude Flight was championing the linocut), and having taken tutelage from renowned cubists André Lhote and Albert Gleizes in Paris in 1929 (contact she reestablished in 1934), Black was directly connected to contemporary European modernism. In turn, Mary P. Harris was a socially

³⁷ The front page of the first issue of *Chapbook* declares that the “old chapbooks were the first periodical literature.” *Chapbook* 1 (1935). Like *Chap-Book*, published in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1894 and a key precursor to the ephemeral modernist little magazines, *Chapbook* invokes the old chapbook tradition for a modern, small-press artistic and literary venture.

³⁸ “Local Writers and Artists Produce ‘Chapbook’,” *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 25 November 1935, 16.

³⁹ For the information on Black and Harris in this paragraph, see Tracey Lock “The Mothership of Modernism in South Australia,” in Osborne and Speck, *The Adelaide Art Scene*, 48–57.

progressive Quaker who had been educated at the Edinburgh College of Art. The spiritual and modernist-informed nature of her work has only recently become clear. Harris furthered her influence as an educator by her editorship of the Adelaide South Australian School of Art's annual magazine, the *Forerunner* (1930–1938), which, with its daring woodcuts, linocuts, prints, and work by students alongside work by established professionals, was a direct forerunner to *Phoenix*.⁴⁰

Though the University of Adelaide, another key institution in *Phoenix*'s emergence, was deeply conservative in the early 1930s, the ferment of change was brewing.⁴¹ A small though expanding institution (under 1500 students in 1935), its model and atmosphere had attracted a high-quality faculty, with former students recalling its rigorous intellectual standards.⁴² Amid the social upheaval of the early 1930s, its student body would be emboldened by the establishment first of the student union in 1930 and second of its primary organ, the student newspaper *On Dit*, in 1932.⁴³ Coinciding with growing student agency, the English Department gained two new staff members in the 1930s who were young and well acquainted with contemporary Europe and the moderns. The retiring Jury Chair of English, Archibald Strong, a man who “did not recognise literary figures much beyond the late nineteenth century,” was replaced by John Innes Mackintosh Stewart.⁴⁴ At twenty-nine, reputedly the youngest professor yet appointed at the university, Stewart's appointment as Jury Chair of English coincides with the year of *Phoenix*'s first issue (1935). Having attended Oxford alongside W. H. Auden,

⁴⁰ For information on Harris, see Jenny Aland, *South Australian School of Art: 170 Years Shaping South Australian Visual Arts and Culture* (Wakefield, 2025), 82–85. There is crossover between young artists who appear in the *Forerunner* and those in *Phoenix*, such as Rex Wood. Ivor Francis's *Speed!* (1931) is an example of the daring work printed in the *Forerunner*, transforming a humble Adelaide train into a speeding rocket in a vorticist manner. Art Gallery of South Australia Collection, <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/speed/24944/>.

⁴¹ The University of Adelaide, like Sydney and Melbourne, was based upon the Oxbridge and Edinburgh model; it had “an aura of learning and high seriousness [and] an atmosphere of classicism colonially modified,” yet with its charms it was a “gracious, elegant and tranquil place” (Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin*, 39).

⁴² Hoskin, “‘A Genius About the Place,’” 2.

⁴³ Hoskin, “‘A Genius About the Place,’” 2.

⁴⁴ Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin*, 44.

Stewart had a compulsion to teach “The Moderns”—writers such as Auden, Eliot, Lawrence, and James Joyce. Some of these works faced local censorship—most notably Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), which was kept under lock and key in the library, only accessible “for study purposes” with a letter of permission from Professor Stewart.⁴⁵ Yet Stewart did not merely foster the established and foundational modernists; he remained a lifelong friend of Auden, forming a direct conduit to the Auden group, who combined avant-garde poetics with radical left-wing politics.⁴⁶ His lectures positioned Auden and his disciples as spokespeople for the polarisation of English culture during the 1930s, caught between ideas of catastrophe and rebirth, and these notions recurred in *Phoenix*.⁴⁷ Stewart’s impact is recalled by many of the *Phoenix* cohort who went on to become significant writers and cultural figures. Clement Semmler recalls the aftereffects of Stewart’s uniquely affected reading of *The Waste Land*: “I remember lying in bed awake at night with the words swirling round in my brain—the image was haunting [...] poetry of the sort I had never before encountered. It was a new world.”⁴⁸

Jury was another figure key to *Phoenix*’s rise who returned to work at the university in the 1930s. Absorbed in literary passions considered classical and even archaic, Jury appears an unusual bedfellow of literary modernism. Having left Adelaide to attain his M.A. from Magdalen College, Oxford, Jury served in the Great War, turning down the position of Jury Chair, which his own mother had funded, to spend much of the next two decades pursuing his literary passions in England and Europe. He describes in his youth falling “into passionate calf-love with Greece—a disease, if it be a disease, from which I have never wholly recovered.”⁴⁹ Yet, key to Jury’s classicism were two impulses that marked him as a maverick: a rebellious streak that drove him to thwart others’ expectation that

⁴⁵ Semmler also recalls, in earlier years, Stewart lending students his personal copy of Joyce’s novel (Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin*, 46).

⁴⁶ Russel Ward, a student at the time, recalls how Stewart encouraged students to order from Preece’s the latest “first editions of poems by the youthful and still iconoclastic W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender.” Russel Ward, *A Radical Life: The Autobiography of Russel Ward* (Macmillan, 1988), 68. For further detail, see Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin*, 49–50.

⁴⁷ Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin*, 50.

⁴⁸ Semmler, *Pictures on the Margin*, 46.

⁴⁹ C. R. Jury, quoted in Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 15.

he should become an “Australian” poet, and a desire to subtly, but openly, ennoble homosexual love.⁵⁰ That he might have taken a different path is evident in how shaken his notions around poetry became after giving a paper to the English Association on Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in 1932.⁵¹ Although Jury could never abandon his classical tastes, he was enthusiastic about contemporary and “modern” developments, which aligned with his eccentric streak.⁵²

Jury was part of a network of figures associated with *Phoenix* who shared connections with a small residential college in North Adelaide: St Marks. This quiet college for boarders became a regular meeting place for a remarkable group of young radicals. Colin Thiele would describe them as “Firebrands, out to change the world.”⁵³ By the end of the decade, the room of Pfeiffer, then tutor and resident at the college and future Angry Penguin, became the centre of these gatherings. Thiele recalled that

The poets, a description that fitted almost everyone in the group, met periodically in Paul Pfeiffer’s rooms at St Mark’s, the university residential college. These were volatile meetings, yeasty with poetry and intense with

⁵⁰ Harris, introduction, 15. In a lecture he gave in 1956, Jury recalls receiving criticism in his early twenties from a man who, being at that time the “embodiment of South Australian culture,” felt that Jury might become the poet South Australia had been looking for, but that to achieve this Jury needed to forget about poetry and go “up-country” to a “sheep-station” for a few years. When this man later assessed Jury to be the disappointment of his life, Jury “took it, perversely enough, as a sort of compliment.” Charles Jury, “Life and Letters in Adelaide,” MS and typescript, Jury Papers, State Library of South Australia, PRG 20/20.

⁵¹ This paper would become first an article published in *Desiderata* and then a standalone pamphlet published by Preece’s Bookshop. Jury would confide to a friend that he considered revising his whole creative practice, see Philip Butterss, “Making All Things New” in *South Australia, 1919–1939: Essays from the Professional Historians Association*, ed. Caroline Adams and Brian Dickey (Professional Historians Association South Australia, 2022), 204.

⁵² Barbara Wall recalls that being taught by Jury was “a moving experience.” Philip Butterss, “English and Creative Writing: ‘the abode of ... literature; the home of poetry and fiction,’” in *A History of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Adelaide 1876–2012*, ed. Nick Harvey, Jean Fornasiero, Greg McCarthy, Clem Macintyre, and Carl Crossin (University of Adelaide Press, 2012), 104–105, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781922064363>.

⁵³ Thiele, quoted in Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 79.

argument about literature, art and international politics. Claret of doubtful vintage tended to illuminate the debates early in the evening but blurred them after midnight. As clarity of thought and speech diminished, vehemency intensified, until some of the more passionate orators were in danger of being thrown out.⁵⁴

Among the cluster of literary figures associated with St Mark's were Kerr, Pfeiffer, Harris, Dutton, Thiele, Jury, Rex and John Ingamells, Flexmore Hudson, and Ian Mudie. Stimulated by an international order collapsing, this heteroglot mix of individuals came together, united by an intensity and diversity of views, underlined by a notion that literature and art could—and must—“change the world.”⁵⁵

This Adelaide community had, therefore, an intriguing mix of contrary elements: provinciality and internationality, nativism and modernism, a grounding in the classical and traditional along with the means and increasing desire to pursue the experimental.⁵⁶ There was an established and increasingly self-confident periodical culture which was conversant with contemporary developments in Europe, while also advocating for regional differentiation. A small body of interlinked educational, artistic, and literary institutions enabled the formation of

⁵⁴ Colin Thiele, preface to Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, viii. Both Pfeiffer and Thiele also had associations with the Lutheran Immanuel College, then also based in North Adelaide. Pfeiffer was a student until 1935 and then part-time teacher from 1936, with Thiele a boarder whilst attending university from 1937. Thiele recalls that the College's Arts Club, of which Pfeiffer was the patron, met on Friday nights after dinner, and that Pfeiffer gave more than one lecture at their meetings. See Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*.

⁵⁵ Thiele, quoted in Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 79. Many of these young people were from rural areas and attended university on scholarship, while some were linked to the Adelaide establishment. Belying the predominant Anglo-Celtic make up of Australia at the time, there was also an interesting mixture of German and Jewish heritage.

⁵⁶ Another key element I have not gone into, because it deserves in-depth treatment, but which differentiated the intellectual environment of Adelaide, is increasing local artistic and intellectual interest in the outback and in Aboriginal culture. For example, the automobile facilitated stronger linkages, including tourism, to central Australia across the 1920s and 1930s, as reflected in Hans Heysen's Flinders paintings of the late 1920s and early 1930s. At the same time, there was increasing interest in Aboriginal culture, myth, and story, via the influence of T. G. H. Strehlow and of David Unaipon, whose work was stolen by William Ramsay Smith, and then of Albert Namatjira later in the 1930s.



Figure 3. The covers of Phoenix issues 1 to 4. Publication of the University Union, printed by the Hassall Press, 1935–1938. Reproduced with permission by the Adelaide University Student Association (formally the Adelaide University Union).

Cover design for issues 1, 2, and 4 by John Dowie and for issue 3 by R. A.

Blackburn. Orphan works. Every effort has been made to trace other
copyright holders.

a radical scene. Several important figures also ensured that this scene was directly linked to the latest developments in modernist literature and art.

Phoenix was not merely a product of its environment, but also a defiant reaction against it. As Harris's trial for obscenity in the 1944 shows, Adelaide's establishment was, much like the rest of Australia, laughably, even suffocatingly conservative. Dutton later reflected how in that "dead time in Australian art and literature [...] something new, modern, out front was desperately needed"—something avant-garde.⁵⁷ Teachers from England ruled the roost, maintaining traditional English literature while looking down on local efforts. Where any Australian writers were recognised, they remained the now dated figures of Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall.⁵⁸ Adelaide, emblematic of Australia, resembled an altar committed to the worship of cultural dead wood—homogeneous, conservative, a bourgeois utopia for the anti-intellectual philistine and deferential colonial—that was waiting to be set ablaze. Between 1935 and 1939, *Phoenix* would provide the spark.

Phoenix Journal: Little Magazine as Agent

On Friday, 25 October 1935, the staid *University School Magazine*, epitome of the "unmistakable 'chronicle' tradition," was irrevocably committed to the flames and the inaugural issue of *Phoenix* appeared from its ashes.⁵⁹ The "striking" cover, designed by John Dowie, symbolises this transformation, "its flame-embossed black" as "modern" as the contents inside.⁶⁰ This design was matched by a bold editorial statement:

⁵⁷ Dutton describes how, the "word garde exactly describes the intolerant, authoritarian attitudes of those who controlled, or wished to control the arts in Australia [...] 'Garde: safe-keeping, protection, guard, custody, charge, watch.' Their idea of art or poetry was that of a prisoner in custody, to be guarded against those who might smuggle in a rope and file" (Dutton, *Out in the Open*, 85).

⁵⁸ In 1934's dying *University Magazine*, Maurice Finnis and E. W. Wells declared that, the world of Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall having passed, it was time for something more modern (Butterss, "Making All Things New," 204).

⁵⁹ "Editorial," *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 1.

⁶⁰ "Literature: 'Phoenix'," *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 9 November 1935, 10, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36195454>; "Woman Student Wins Prize," *News* (Adelaide), 2 October 1935, 7, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article129297941>.

No need for apologies. It is time for a change [...] The function of *Phoenix*, as we see it, is to provide an opportunity and incentive for the publication of significant writings [...] it is not for the sake of novelty that we make all things new. We have no alternative.

Here it is, without apology. But *Phoenix* has not risen perfect from the ashes. It clamours for food for its continual growth.⁶¹

As Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman note, when considering a little magazine as an agent, rather than as a context, editorial influence must be considered in almost authorial terms.⁶² However, as *Phoenix*'s editorial staff altered each year, I consider the first (and notably *only*) editorial as the publication's key unifying statement. The 1935 editorial pre-empts criticism by employing a rhetoric of necessary rupture, which must be contextualised in relation to interwar exhaustion, rapid change, and rising global crisis. Both *Phoenix* and its "limp anaemic" predecessor, the *University School Magazine*, are envisioned by the editors, not simply as magazines, but as conditions of possibility for literary and cultural production. Renewal and rebirth form a precondition for significant writing. Indeed, the eponymous phoenix is a totemic presence and symbolic patron of sorts, underwriting the new magazine's project. Keeping this editorial in mind, and guided by Scholes's and Wulfman's methodology, let us turn to the various aspects of the magazine, to contextualise *Phoenix* and its assumed audience.⁶³

Dowie's striking cover artwork pairs with an overall material sophistication that suggests this is not a standard "university" magazine.⁶⁴ In line with the declarative editorial, all the issues are dominated by literary contributions, confirming the magazine's status as a literary annual. Yet there are further elements in each issue that can guide our understanding. Prominent linocut art is a defining feature of *Phoenix*, to which was added the "modern" art of photography from 1937. Meanwhile, looking at the inaugural issue, we also find remnants of university

⁶¹ "Editorial," *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 1.

⁶² Scholes and Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines*, 86.

⁶³ See Scholes and Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines*, 206–243.

⁶⁴ All issues of the magazine were printed by the Hassall Press, Adelaide, a well-established press that would also print the finely produced *Chapbook*, as well as subsequent publications such as *Venture* and the early *Angry Penguins*.

business, from a closing section labelled “Ex Cathedra” to another labelled “Graduates’ Notes.”⁶⁵ Although used by the editors in 1936 to offer a defiant response to critics of the first issue, the “Ex Cathedra” section disappears from 1937. Likewise, while the editorship of “Graduates’ Notes” by Rex Ingamells from 1935 to 1937 signals his role as a key node and connective pivot, the section remains a relic of the old varsity format and is dispensed with in 1938, migrating to a special issue of *On Dit*. Excepting the almost purely literary and artistic *Phoenix* 1939, each issue also includes articles and reviews which tell us about the magazine’s shifting form and the interests of its (intended) audience. Featuring prominent academics alongside leading undergraduates, these intelligent articles include, for example, speculations on the novel in the twenty-first century and on the intermixture of science and art, along with reviews of influential books on socialism and on philosophy, of a popular series encouraging scientific literacy, and of Stephen Spender’s play *Trial of a Judge* (1938).⁶⁶ Such works betray that *Phoenix* and its readers did not view themselves as peripheral, belated, or passive receivers of culture and knowledge: they were across and directly interceding in international developments. Such work also re-immerses us in the ideological vortex of the 1930s, out of which arose the seeming necessity for the “new” in literature and art.

⁶⁵ The use of the Latin phrase *ex cathedra* (“from the chair”) suggests *Phoenix*’s youthful attempts to build a counter-cultural authority.

⁶⁶ C. G. Kerr’s “The Novel in the Next Century: A Sketch” imagines the form’s future, while E. M. Mercer’s “The New Art: The Changed Status of Science” grapples with the triumph of material science and its (quantum) uncertainties and with its impact on literature. See *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 55–60 and 62–71. For reviews, see W. D. Allen, “Reason and Emotion,” a review of John MacMurray’s interwar philosophy, *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 28–32; and Gary Clark, “The Theory and Practice of Socialism by John Strachey,” *Phoenix* 3 (1937): 26–32. E. H. Mercer’s “Hogbeniana—Mathematic for the Millions,” J. A. La Neuze’s “Hogbeniana—Political Arithmetic,” and H. W. Piper’s “Hogbeniana—Science for the Citizen” review *Primers for the Age of Plenty*, a left-rationalist book series by polymath Lancelot Hogben which advocated for science literacy for the masses. See *Phoenix* 4 (1938): 49–57, 58–62, and 63–66. M. M. S. Finnis’s “The Tensions in a Tragic Statement” offers an in-depth treatment of Spender’s poetic drama critiquing Nazi tyranny, notably citing a review in Eliot’s *Criterion* and thereby showing the ready availability of London periodicals in Adelaide. See *Phoenix* 4 (1938): 16–25.

Although ostensibly surplus to the literary content, advertisements can provide key insights to a magazine's environment and audience.⁶⁷ From *Phoenix*'s first issue, advertisements account for over ten percent of the magazine's overall content. Some of these adverts are directed at students, from adverts for medical, science, and sports supplies to adverts for student-discounted holidays promoted by the Tasmanian Tourism Bureau. Yet, these remain significantly less than half the total, with more general advertisements—for bookshops (including Preece's) and binders, clothing and department stores, a stockbroker and luxury cigarettes—indicating an intelligent, moneyed, or upwardly mobile readership. We can discern advertisers adapting to the youthful radical program of *Phoenix* across its print run, best shown by Alliance Insurance Company's advertisement. Recurring from 1936, this advertisement features "PROGRESS" emblazoned above a tagline that reads: "New times bring new risks." Overall, the development of advertisements charts the magazine's growth. From 1937 we see full pictorial images included for the first time, while from 1938 they further expand to be included at the front of the magazine. The 1939 issue features advertisements for watches, stylish leather coats, portable 35mm cameras, and automobile-tyre remoulding services, all speaking to a youthful audience actively engaging with modernity's technologies and trends. Indeed, the 1939 issue would not only be the most literary and radical; it would also, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, include the most advertisements (nineteen).

The picture we are developing of the magazine's implied reader—well educated, intelligent, upwardly mobile—suggests an audience consisting perhaps primarily of students, but by no means exclusively. How the magazine was received and reviewed, in the local press and in the student organ *On Dit*, can tell us more. The opening issue of *Phoenix* attracted reviews in the local newspapers, indicating interest beyond the university, including the major dailies the *Advertiser* and the *News*, as well as the Catholic weekly, *Southern Cross*, while *Phoenix* 1939 would also be reviewed in the weekly *Mail*. Although evidence exists that *Phoenix*'s reach extended beyond South Australia, and even internationally, we can presume its primary audience is local to Adelaide.⁶⁸ The local reviews of *Phoenix* 1935

⁶⁷ Pound long ago showed the value of such critique, a point taken up by Scholes and Wulfman (*Modernism in the Magazines*, 174–205).

⁶⁸ When Kerr leapt to the journal's defence, after it was brought down by conservative elements in the Union, he noted that *Phoenix* had been "praised in Oxford and

show that the magazine was immediately received as modernist, with one paper declaring that “modernism, with its ideals and methods, had taken hold,” while another unfavourably links the magazine to that “incoherent pessimism which was fashionable about twenty years ago.”⁶⁹ Similar criticism also appears in the student organ *On Dit*. One remarkable letter reviews the entire debut issue by parroting the press’s criticism and desecrating the appearance in Australia of the “decadent tradition” influenced by Joyce and Sigmund Freud.⁷⁰ Another letter, supporting the first, criticises the magazine’s “depraved literary taste” and urges that “the tastes” of the majority “be considered.”⁷¹ These reviews express the recurrent criticism that characterises *Phoenix*’s modernism as both derivatively

Cambridge” and that “last year a French University wrote asking for copies.” D. B. Kerr, “Hail and Farewell,” letter to the editor, *On Dit* 10, no. 8 (30 April 1940): 3, <https://connect.adelaide.edu.au/nodes/view/1656#idx128001>.

The journal’s national reach is indicated by the fact that the 1939 issue was reviewed in the second issue of *Southerly*, the first scholarly journal for Australian writing and based in Sydney. Meanwhile the 1935 issue was listed under “Book Received” by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, while *On Dit* noted that “highbrows in other Universities” had complimented the magazine. Helen Wighton and Finlay Crisp, “What’s Wrong with *Phoenix*, Anyway?,” *On Dit* 6, no. 12 (22 June 1937): 1, <https://adelaide.recollect.net.-au/nodes/view/1598>. Melbourne University’s *Farago* called *Phoenix* a “dashing little book with a black cover splashed with flame-coloured letters and filled with purely literary and artistic contributions by members of the University.” “All about Adelaide,” *Farago* 12, no. 15 (23 July 1936): 2, <https://hdl.handle.net/11343/313341>.

Hermes went modern in 1937 (ironically under McAuley), two years after the launch of *Phoenix*. That same year, the University of Western Australia’s *Black Swan* appears to directly reference the *Phoenix* 1935 editorial: “It is without apologies that we present this issue of the *Black Swan*,” write the editors of *Black Swan*, for Australia has for too long been “untouched by the tremendous conflict of ideas which has already raged for some time in Europe.” The editors also mention the “Adelaide Congress” held “last February,” and presumably this was the Australian Universities Students’ Congress. “Editorial,” *Black Swan* (April 1937), <https://collected.uwa.edu.au/nodes/view/2864#idx55761>.

⁶⁹ “Literature: ‘Phoenix’,” 1; “Bilge,” *Southern Cross*, 15 November 1935, 11, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167075734>. The astoundingly hostile review in *Southern Cross* also refers to “a style once conventional and now out of date.”

⁷⁰ [C. H. Mercer], “*Phoenix*,” letter to the editor, *On Dit* 5, no. 6 (1 May 1936): 2, <https://connect.adelaide.edu.au/nodes/view/1571#idx127048>. Mercer contrasts experimental literary corruption with practical and scientific progress, criticising a tradition of disillusionment, cynicism, and confusion which will stand as a “monument to the tolerance and stupidity of this century.”

⁷¹ Iam Speraas, “*Phoenix*,” *On Dit* 5, no. 7 (7 May 1936): 2, <https://connect.adelaide.edu.-au/nodes/view/1572#idx127075>.



Figure 4. John Dowie's frontispiece "The Counterfeiters" appears to be a response to accusations of imitation. Published in *Phoenix* 2 (1936): i. Reproduced with permission by the Adelaide University Student Association (formally the Adelaide University Union). Orphan work. Every effort has been made to trace other copyright holders.

fashionable and yet already out of date, showing that the notion of modernism's belatedness in Australia was first propagated by its enemies.⁷² These reviews also confirm that, within the wider public and even the student body, *Phoenix* was aimed at a minority.

How *Phoenix* responded to such criticism also informs our understanding of the magazine's arc of development. In a seemingly defiant response, *Phoenix* 1936, released in September, would debut a boldly modern and industrial frontispiece—a linocut by Dowie cheekily named “The Counterfeiters”—while the editor's “Ex Cathedra” ironically announces the issue's abandonment of authorial anonymity, lest the authors be mistaken for “T. S. Eliot incognito.”⁷³ In response to further criticism, *On Dit*'s editors felt compelled, the following year, to launch a defence of the magazine while calling for new work, offering both reproachment and placation.⁷⁴ *Phoenix* 1937, debuting new cover art depicting a phoenix propelled upward by a vortex of flames, suggests another defiant response to critics. In spite of these efforts, and four years into the magazine's print run, criticism of *Phoenix* 1938 would continue in familiar terms: “when will young would-be poets learn that there is no particular merit in copying the eccentric allusive style of Mr. T S Eliot or [...] any of the moderns whose outstanding quality is [...] the ease with which they can be imitated?”⁷⁵ *Phoenix* 1939's almost purely radical literary focus is an act of further defiance, even as it stimulated the demise of the magazine, not

⁷² There was an old-establishment-guard element to the local critics. Miles describes how “crusty old fellows” held the “Reins of Poetry in Adelaide,” “nearly octogenarians all” (Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 91).

⁷³ “Ex Cathedra,” *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 73.

⁷⁴ Presumably written by the editors of *On Dit*, Wighton and Crisp, the article begins with the memorable line: “Our mothers thought the first *Phoenix* mildly disgusting, so they told us. Our fathers dismissed us as adolescents.” Parodying in jocular fashion the opposed faculties of history, science, and English, the piece criticises philistine opposition, while promising to publish work on any subject of sufficient quality, stating: “Don't let the English school have it all its own way. All power (and contributions) to *Phoenix*!” This position explains the further expansion of articles by Wighton and Crisp in the subsequent, 1938 issue of *Phoenix*. See Wighton and Crisp, “What's Wrong with *Phoenix*, Anyway?”

⁷⁵ “New Issue of ‘Phoenix’,” *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 22 October 1938, 10, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36586230>.

by external force, but through conservative elements within the university and student body.

Before we turn to the magazine's literary contributions, the editorial staff of *Phoenix* 1935–1939 must also be considered. Although rotating every year, several names recur and stand out.⁷⁶ As repeat editors in the early years, Margaret McKellar Stewart and Russel Ward demand attention. Stewart's contributions to every issue of *Phoenix* signal her importance to the magazine, even if she remains obscured from later histories, though we do know that she went on to marry her fellow inaugural editor, Maurice Finnis.⁷⁷ Ward is well-known as a pioneering left-wing scholar who wrote *The Australian Legend* (1958), which influentially characterised the roots of the national mystique as left-wing and egalitarian, if also masculinist. His involvement in *Phoenix* remains surprising and largely unknown. *Phoenix* 1938's editors, Helen Wighton and Finlay Crisp, along with 1936 "Business Manager" Elliott Johnston, were all key to the establishment of the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS) and the inaugural Australian Universities Students' Congress held in Adelaide in February 1937.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ The editors were, in 1935, Finnis, Margaret McKellar Stewart, and Russel Ward; in 1936, Herbert Piper, Stewart, and Ward; in 1937, Blackburn, Stewart, and Victor C. Madigan; in 1938, Helen Wighton and Finlay Crisp; and, in 1939, Kerr, Swan, and C. B. Ashton.

⁷⁷ This was the first of two marriages which would be forged in the editorship of *Phoenix*'s radical literary fires. Finnis completed his M.A. in philosophy in 1937, going on to become a senior lecturer. Records show that he was involved in literary debate, giving a talk on Imagist Poetry to the Literary, Debating, and Dramatic Society on 22 May 1935 that was "evidently appreciated," leading to a heated debate on whether censorship is "harmful to Australia," a debate which fellow *Phoenix* editor Ward and contributor Rex Ingamells contested and won. "Society Notes," *On Dit* 4, no. 5 (21 June 1935): 3, <https://connect.adelaide.edu.au/nodes/view/1561#idx126892>.

Margaret McKellar Stewart was the daughter of the University's Professor of Philosophy (1923–1950), John McKellar Stewart. She was a mover and shaker in the budding University Union and would go on to be a tutor in the University English Department from 1959 to 1978. Stewart later published a book on the history of the union, *The Lower Level: A Discursive History of the Adelaide University Union* (1975).

⁷⁸ Having jointly edited *On Dit* in 1937, Wighton and Crisp would edit *Phoenix* 1938 before going on to marry. Students of law and politics respectively, they were important figures in left-wing student politics. Crisp went on to be a Rhodes Scholar in 1938 and a founding figure at the Australian National University, while Helen was a prominent feminist educator and advocate.

To these figures, we can add several recognisable literary figures, including *Phoenix*'s 1939 editors, Kerr and Swan, and the founder of the Jindyworobaks, Rex Ingamells, whose editorship of the "Graduates Notes" from 1935 to 1937 has already been noted and who was, alongside Stewart, the only other contributor to feature in every issue.

The editorial staff reveal to us that *Phoenix* was at the heart of both literary modernism and radical left-wing politics in 1930s Australia. We can also say with some confidence that the magazine's audience (and implied reader)—youthful, radical, and enamoured with literary and artistic modernism—did not readily exist: instead, *Phoenix* was an active agent in its creation. When we look at the material developments of the magazine, its reception, and its editorial staff, we see a publication testing its fledgling wings, while also developing, albeit not in a strictly linear fashion, into a more radical literary publication. Therefore, in reading and contextualising the literary and artistic contributions of the magazine, I propose examining *Phoenix* in two phases: first the initial print run from 1935 to 1938, and then the final issue of 1939, which, in hindsight, precipitated an unintended, though perhaps inevitable, act of self-immolation.

Phoenix Journal 1935–1938

can it be that from our modesty
 Shall breed a purpose worthy of our power?
 Stand we in the darkest pre-dawn hour?
 — W., "After Reading Carlyle," *Phoenix* 1935⁷⁹

Debates in assessing the literary contributions of modernism in Australia, often defined by sharp criticism, have tended towards prioritising aesthetic judgement.

Appointed business manager as a consolation prize for having an article on peace turned down, Elliott, known as "Red Silk," became a key figure in radical student politics, a close associate of the future Penguins, and, much later, the first and only communist judge and supreme court justice in Australia. He describes witnessing depression-era conditions in Adelaide as the life-long driver behind his politics. Harris would later describe Elliott thus: "He is that classical irritant, the good communist who is also a good person [...] just the sort of person to inspire frenzies of frustration and anger." Max Harris, quoted in Penelope DeBelle, *Red Silk: The Life of Elliott Johnston*, *QC* (Wakefield, 2011): 92.

⁷⁹ W., "After Reading Carlyle," *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 31.

During the 1960s' smouldering critical warfare between Harris and A. D. Hope, Harris would concede that "the poetic output of the modernists was of nugatory value."⁸⁰ Hope's earlier critique of Harris's novel *The Vegetative Eye* (1943) could be read as at least partially justified on purely aesthetic grounds.⁸¹ However, given the fact that it is an astoundingly harsh takedown of a prodigious twenty-two-year-old experimenting with surrealism, not to mention the deadening cultural effects which the critical triumph of the conservative academic poets produced, such an assessment clearly misses the point. This essay's judgement of *Phoenix*'s creative work follows a different logic. The question is not whether youthful radical writers in their early twenties produced literary contributions equal to those of modernist greats like Eliot and Joyce. The subsequent emergence from *Phoenix*'s contributors of a coterie of publications and two highly influential literary movements—the Angry Penguins and Jindyworobaks—already indicates to us its vital importance. Instead, I am largely interested in what the creative contributions of the magazine tell us about the "germ" that is *Phoenix*.

I have already named Ward as an editor of *Phoenix* (1935–1936) who went on to become a key cultural figure, yet *Phoenix*'s pages also reveal Ward to have been a budding writer.⁸² His creative contributions are best represented by two pieces, a humane short poem, "Kangaroo," inspired by his "first and last experience" shooting a kangaroo, and his poem "After Reading Carlyle," which declares that "You were so droll, you men of other times," while openly wondering if Ward's generation might "breed a purpose worthy of our Power."⁸³ The first poem could be categorised as proto-Jindyworobak, and indeed it would be republished in their first anthology in 1938, while the latter is emblematic of *Phoenix*'s avant-garde

⁸⁰ Max Harris, "Conflicts in Australian Intellectual Life 1940–1964," in *Literary Australia*, ed. Clement Semmler and Derek Whitelock (F. W. Cheshire, 1966), 26. This was, however, something of a tactical rhetorical concession, allowing Harris to make the larger point that the program of the "academic" school of Hope and McAuley had elicited a deadening of the literary landscape beyond themselves.

⁸¹ See A. D. Hope, "Confessions of a Zombi," *Meanjin*, vol 3, no. 1 (1944): 44–48.

⁸² This fact eludes even his own autobiography, though he reprints some of his early creative writing from *Phoenix* without attribution or mention of the origin.

⁸³ W. "Kangaroos," *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 19; W., "After Reading Carlyle," 31. Published under "W.," Ward's contributions are recognisable and identifiable via their later republication. For Ward's account of the inspiration behind "Kangaroo," see Ward, *A Radical Life*, 85.

desire to break with tradition.⁸⁴ Ward emerges from *Phoenix* as a young radical who was interested in the representation of Australian cultural life, yet who also had a passion for modernism.⁸⁵ In Ward, we find a triad of forces—typically seen as contrary—which would define *Phoenix*’s program: left-wing radicalism, Australianist sympathies, and avant-garde experimentation. Alongside Ward we find another of *Phoenix*’s surprises, an eminent cultural figure who appears in *Phoenix* as a young modernist: Semmler.⁸⁶ His contributions across 1935 and 1936 are mostly forgettable, but 1937’s “The Muezzin from the Tower” reveals the scratchings of a youthful but potentially promising modernist poet. Renouncing traditional metre and rhyme, the poem has its images fall jaggedly across eleven short sections, and although it approaches the absurd and nonsensical, it just about holds together thanks to its fertile imagery and the underlying conceit of a “search.” Indeed, with lines such as “fox drunk maudlin drunk / weeping wailing peeling gnashing / still searching” the poem attains what might be described as a proto-Penguin aesthetic.⁸⁷

Art was an essential part of little magazines, and this was especially true for *Phoenix* and its expressions of modernity.⁸⁸ Made from modern linoleum, the linocut was a medium that was simple, cheap, and—most importantly—without tradition. Despite accusations of belatedness in the local press, the artistic form was still developing, only reaching its pinnacle during the 1930s thanks to Claude Flight and the Grosvenor School. Indeed, in contrast to the literary contributions,

⁸⁴ Indeed, the press would declare that “After Reading Carlyle” symbolised “modern youth” (“Woman Student Wins Prize,” 7) and represented the “aspiration[s] for *Phoenix*” as a magazine (“Literature: ‘*Phoenix*’,” 10).

⁸⁵ Ward later recalled John Innes Mackintosh Stewart sending him to Preece’s to order books by the Auden group, and he remained grateful to Stewart “for the windows he opened to me” (Ward, *A Radical Life*, 68).

⁸⁶ The son of poor Lutheran farmers from the mallee, Semmler would rise to become a pioneer of Australian literary criticism and an ABC executive. He would later become the writer most often published by the conservative, CIA-funded journal *Quadrant*, yet his presence here betrays a youthful radicalism.

⁸⁷ “The Muezzin from the Tower,” *Phoenix* 3 (1937): 11–13. Semmler’s later publishing history is also reflective of the forces at play in the crisis-era literary hotbed of Adelaide, alternating between Australianist interests and modernists such as Joyce and Patrick White.

⁸⁸ See Scholes and Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines*, 117–173.

and with the exception of Black's appearance in 1939, the most striking artistic contributions arguably feature in the early issues of *Phoenix*. This is thanks to two young artists "making it new": Dowie and Rex Wood.⁸⁹ Modernism was first understood as "symbolism," and Wood and Dowie both embraced the linocut form's simple shapes and stark lines to render designs of either a symbolic and mythologic or a contemporary nature.⁹⁰ Echoing the magazine's literary contributions, both artists' works are also marked by bold nudity and hints of modernist primitivism. Other influences are present, too, with Wood's "Nativity" displaying a cubist influence, while Dowie engages with visceral representations of industrial modernity.⁹¹ *Phoenix*'s combination of art with literature signals its modernist intent, yet it also foreshadows the contemporary art push of the early 1940s in South Australia and the centrality of artistic contributions to the future *Angry Penguins*. Reproductions in the 1939 issue of linocuts by Adelaide artists Black, Victor Adolfsson, and May Voke, alongside work by Harris, prefigure the involvement of all four in the establishment of the South Australian branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) in 1942.⁹²

Rex Ingamells was never formally an editor of *Phoenix*, likely due to the completion of his B.A. in 1934, but his charge of the "Graduates' Notes" and the regularity of his contributions mark him as a significant influence.⁹³ The magazine's print run coincides with Ingamells's development from promising young local poet to one of the "most energetic mover[s] and shaker[s]" that

⁸⁹ Dowie and Wood would both leave for Europe, with Dowie studying art in London and Florence before returning to prominence in Adelaide, while Wood, linked to *Chapbook*, would also leave for London and then Portugal. Their *Phoenix* linocuts appear to be largely unknown productions of their early careers.

⁹⁰ See Scholes and Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines*, 126.

⁹¹ One article described Wood's linocuts as "agreeable" but mistook them for woodcuts. "Talking Points for Women: University Magazine," *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 3 December 1935, 6, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article36201239>.

⁹² For a discussion of the CAS(SA), see Osborne, "Overview 1939–49," 29.

⁹³ Ingamells is notably the only writer other than Stewart to appear in every issue. By the publication of 1935's issue he was a poet on the rise, having published his inaugural collection *Gumtops* through Preece's and having been praised in the press by the British Poet Laureate, John Masefield. "Praise Young South Australian Poet," *Mail* (Adelaide), 27 April 1935, 5, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article58860789>.



Figure 5. Four linocuts by John Dowie and Rex Wood. Wood's "Nativity" and "Consolation" were published in *Phoenix 1* (1935): 2, 45. Dowie's "Firelight" was published in *Phoenix 1* (1935): 29; Dowie's "The Skaters" was published in *Phoenix 2* (1936): 17. Reproduced with permission by the Adelaide University Student Association (formally the Adelaide University Union). Orphan work. Every effort has been made to trace other copyright holders.

Australian poetry has ever seen.”⁹⁴ His presence in *Phoenix* prompts further reassessment of the Jindyworobak movement and its relationship to modernism, but, although aware of work in this area, I seek instead to read his contributions in the context of the magazine and its contemporary surrounds.⁹⁵

Phoenix 1935 printed Ingamells’s “Bush Cameo,” depicting the unknown beauty of “tan-legged children / with towsled hair” in an outback valley.⁹⁶ The poem, like his verse in *Gumtops* (1935), shows Ingamells using Central Australia as emblematic of Australian otherness, foreshadowing its later use by modernist artists in subsequent decades.⁹⁷ However, his editorship of the “Graduates’ Notes” also reveals direct connections to T. G. H. Strehlow, a man whom Ingamells describes as having grown up absorbing Aranda culture in a way that “an adult could never obtain.”⁹⁸ For all the reflections that have been written on the Jindyworobak program, reading Ingamells’s work as it is located within *Phoenix* returns us to just how radical his impulse initially was. Surrounded entirely by contributions which, uttered in a European idiom, give no indication of being located in Australia—let alone confronting Indigenous presence—Ingamells’s

⁹⁴ Kirkpatrick, “Jindy Modernist,” 100.

⁹⁵ Peter Kirkpatrick, Ellen Smith, and Dan Tout have all examined the Jindyworobaks in detail and placed them in relation to modernism. However, as none of these critics has examined *Phoenix*, and as I want to read the magazine as an agent, and not merely as a context, I attempt to read the Ingamells and Jindyworobak contributions as they exist within the context of the magazine, leaving such engagements for future criticism. See Kirkpatrick, “Jindy Modernist,” 99–112; Ellen Smith, “Local Moderns: The Jindyworobak Movement and Australian Modernism,” *Australian Literary Studies* 27, no. 1 (2012): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.20314/als.927d4ae36b>; and Dan Tout, “Neither Nationalists nor Universalists: Rex Ingamells and the Jindyworobaks,” *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 61 (2017).

⁹⁶ R. C. I., “Bush Cameo,” *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 39. The publication of this poem in the 1936 collection *Forgotten People* confirms that “R. C. I.” stands for Rex Charles Ingamells.

⁹⁷ Ingamells’s depiction of the outback would develop into what Tregenza describes as the Jindyworobaks’ “cult of the outback” (Tregenza, *Australian Little Magazines*, 51). Ingamells, born at Orroroo on the footsteps of the Flinders Ranges, must also have been aware of Heysen’s revolutionary artistic forays into the region in the late 1920s and 1930s.

⁹⁸ Ingamells also shows a notably progressive attitude for the era by emphasising Strehlow’s suitability for maintaining law among the natives “from their point of view.” Rex Ingamells, “The Graduates,” *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 79.

“Change” attempts to reimagine the “black man’s age of gold” on the Adelaide Plains and the seemingly innocuous (though ultimately disastrous) arrival of “a strange white cloud upon the sea.”⁹⁹ The return to this moment, within the atmosphere of the late 1930s and the pages of *Phoenix*, clearly foregrounds confrontation with the Indigenous past as one clear source of cultural rebirth. Meanwhile, “Rivers and Mountains” finds this forgotten history in the Indigenous place names that live on, “old and new” hopefully side by side. Yet the poem also suggests the partly inaccessible nature of this source: the “secrets of / The days gone by” remain latent in the land but are opaque to Euro-Australians.¹⁰⁰

Following the launch of *Venture* in 1937, Ingamells’s contributions run alongside the nascent Jindyworobak publishing program. *Venture*’s treatise on “Environmental Values” (1937), referring to Lawrence as a “great writer” and praising his Australian novel *Kangaroo* (1923), signals overt modernist influences from the beginning of the Jindyworobak program.¹⁰¹ Ingamells’s 1937 contribution, “The Spark,” reflects a blazing transformative intensity, elevated over explanation, which was characteristic of both Ingamells¹⁰² and *Phoenix*:

A SPARK-CRACK
of fanging fire
hurtled on burnt-black
corpses of trap desire.

The flame-breast
asht where
mulgas have grim rest
from cloud-fare.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Rex Ingamells, “Change,” *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 5.

¹⁰⁰ Rex Ingamells, “Rivers and Mountains,” *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 7.

¹⁰¹ Rex Ingamells, “Editorial: Concerning Environmental Values,” *Venture* 1 (1937): 7. The first Jindyworobak manifesto of sorts, “Environmental Values” would lay the basis for Ingamells’s *Conditional Culture* (1938).

¹⁰² As Ingamells was the son of a methodist minister who possessed a certain zeal, fire might have been his chosen element.

¹⁰³ Rex Ingamells, “The Spark,” *Phoenix* 3 (1937): 7.

The poem's initial sound-event—the “SPARK-CRACK” of ignition—speaks to *Phoenix* and the Jindyworobak movement yet also appears to deny the pastoral desire for renewal, instead suggesting a site of burnt-out intensity. 1938's “Earth Colors [*sic*]” builds on these themes by offering a vision of the Australian landscape, as the “blaze and smoulder” of the land's “Earth-colors” become a medium contaminated by a “blood-hungry” globe. A sunset in the bush, a site of traditional aesthetic pleasure, is no longer a retreat from the world; its primary colours are psychically tainted by a world ablaze in conflict. From Ethiopia, where the “air is filled with smoke of gunning,” to “Death's keen minstrels” in Spain and China, where “Death's engined angels / range the sky,” the poem personifies modern war through grotesque inversions.¹⁰⁴ Immersing us in this era of chaos, the poem also suggests lyric and aesthetic refusal: “my heart should burn to praise but it rebels, refusing.” In this refusal, Ingamells expresses *Phoenix*'s justification for modernist experimentation: traditional aesthetic perception has itself become suspect. Given modernity's offering of fire without renewal, energy without futurity, “Earth Colors” asks, “Dare you now behold the new day dawning?”¹⁰⁵

Phoenix's pages also included numerous writers whose role in the fanning of local modernist flames remains unrecognised, including several women obscured from wider literary history. Returning to *Phoenix* reveals their contributions as essential to the “germ” of Australian modernism, even as historical conditions obstructed their later careers. Editor from 1935 to 1937, Stewart's writing is also among the most polished of the early issues. Her open depiction of nudity in *Phoenix* 1935's “The Candle Flame” is representative of the issue as a whole and of its “modern” program, which some found shocking.¹⁰⁶ Across her eleven *Phoenix* contributions, Stewart's poetry displays a modern rejection of traditional metre

¹⁰⁴ Rex Ingamells, “Earth Colors,” *Phoenix* 4 (1938): 48.

¹⁰⁵ “Earth Colors” displays signs of poetic experimentation and it recreates some of the characteristic concerns of British Late Modernism, including flight, in its images of death raining from the skies and in, like many works in *Phoenix*, its “acute war dread.” See Leo Mellor, “The 1930s, the Second World War, and Late Modernism,” in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 143, 154.

¹⁰⁶ The *Advertiser* declared the issue “daringly frank, with a decidedly erotic strain” (“Literature: ‘Phoenix’,” 10). Even Dutton would later reflect that “there were some strange and sexy stories” (Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 126). Though the issue attributes “The Candle Flame” to “S.,” contextual evidence makes it clear that the author is Stewart. See *Phoenix* 1 (1935): 3–6.

and rhyme, while her short stories would variously explore shifting streams of consciousness, an intense subjectivity that recalls the writing of Virginia Woolf, psychological madness, time, and even a grappling with the infinite that recalls Jorge Luis Borges's later work.

Though Charlotte Jay made only one contribution, 1938's "Cosmos," she is another figure of interest as she later became a prolific author of genre fiction, writing mystery and thriller novels.¹⁰⁷ Remembered as a "rebel," Jay was deeply interested in writers such as Woolf, Christina Stead, E. M. Forster, and Henry Handel Richardson. She always aspired to write what she referred to as "straight" fiction, though she became typecast as a genre writer early in her career. "Cosmos," with its free-verse experimentation and psychological themes, suggests Jay's desire and ability to write "high-brow" fiction. The poem's speaker, "drugged with sleep," is gifted with some kind of psychic foreknowledge of the planet and its civilisational history—surely part of modernity's inheritance.¹⁰⁸ "Cosmos," with its etymological pun linking its title to cosmopolitan themes, suggests how modernity's powerful globalising forces contributed to igniting *Phoenix*'s drive towards disruption and renewal.

Given her crucial role in the Angry Penguins, undoubtedly the most important female contributor to *Phoenix* was the talented young modernist, Swan. Her obscurity in national literary history is explained by a publishing career limited to local little magazines, but attention to *Phoenix* reveals her significance.¹⁰⁹ Later declaring herself influenced by "Kafka, Rilke, and modern symbolists," Swan served on the editorial staff of (and published within) both *Phoenix* and *Angry*

¹⁰⁷ Various writing as Charlotte Jay and Geraldine Halls, Jay became a prolific mystery and thriller writer, penning sixteen novels that were acclaimed in Britain and America. The concerns of the poem are also wonderfully prophetic of her life, as she lived and worked in places as varied as New Guinea, Pakistan, Thailand, Lebanon, India, France, and England. See Jane Costessi, "Halls, Geraldine Mary (1919–1996)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2024), <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/halls-geraldine-mary-33289/text41539>.

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Jay, "Cosmos," *Phoenix* 4 (1937): 68–69.

¹⁰⁹ Swan was a key figure in the early *Angry Penguins*, later also publishing in Flexmore Hudson's *Poetry* (1942–1947).

Penguins.¹¹⁰ Indeed, in 1937 she would become the first of the future Angry Penguins to publish in *Phoenix* under her own name. Of Swan's three contributions in 1937, "Childhood," which laments the onset of maturity in modern fashion, best displays her precocious poetic talents. Although seemingly dealing with a contemporary everyday setting and the minor affects of childhood—"Sweet boredom, rainy days, and illness / lying in a grey bare room unamused"—the poem's hard caesura between childhood and adulthood evokes a broken temporality, a future that arrives too soon, impoverishing the present:

That is childhood.
 Not this sudden ripening
 This harsh unmellowed vintage
 This dull omniscience—
 This damned precocity.¹¹¹

"Childhood" reveals a more restrained poet who is already interested in the exploration of individual psychological experience.¹¹² Swan's 1938 poem "Imprisonment" channels the tenor of the times, imagining the world as a gaol—"this brilliant sky / this harsh enclosing arc of / unyielding metal"—but also, curiously, envisioning freedom in darkness: "soft uncoloured / blackness."¹¹³ (39). Meanwhile, "Wireless" (1938) ponders the divided modern world in unconventional stanzas that alternate between internment in the "sordid" confines of a boarding house room, with its "yellow covers," its "furniture," and its

¹¹⁰ Swan's influences are listed in Max Harris and John Reed, "Contributors," *Angry Penguins* 4 (1943): 41, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3084411268>. I'm grateful to Cheryl Hoskin for pointing me towards this information. Betty Snowden notes Swan's editorship of the two journals in "Max Harris: A Phenomenal Literary Figure," in *Adelaide: A Literary City*, ed. Philip Butters (University of Adelaide Press, 2013), 170. Wayne Bradshaw points out that "Swan was the most productive of the women associated with *Angry Penguins*." Wayne Bradshaw, "Misapprehensions of a Caustic Eye: A. D. Hope and the Failure of Angry Penguins as a Modernist Literary Movement," *Journal of Australian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2024): 306, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2024.-2369499>.

¹¹¹ M. Swan, "Childhood," *Phoenix* 3 (1937): 7.

¹¹² Bradshaw defines Swan's *Angry Penguins* work as surrealist (Bradshaw, "Misapprehensions of a Caustic Eye," 306).

¹¹³ M. Swan, "Imprisonment," *Phoenix* 4 (1938): 39.

“inmates,” and scenes stimulated, seemingly, by dreams that have gone “wireless.”¹¹⁴ Swan’s more advanced poetics signal the magazine’s ongoing transformation.

The only other future Penguin to appear in *Phoenix* before the defining 1939 issue is Kerr. The appearance of a poem by Kerr in the magazine’s second issue can retrospectively be read as portending the emergence of not one but two radical literary programs from *Phoenix*. As Kerr was still only sixteen and in his final year of high school, the anonymous publication of the poem was reportedly facilitated by Pfeiffer.¹¹⁵ The work of an adolescent poet, Kerr’s two-stanza poem nonetheless displays a sparseness and lyric quality clouded by tragedy, which would mark his small but notable body of work, concluding:

Through all the weary weight of days,
The crushing bitterness of hopes decayed,
You had to live, with few to know
The price you paid.¹¹⁶

Miles speculates that the poem concerns the death of Kerr’s father; certainly, much of his work is characterised by a tragic mien which is amplified by the wider war-dread that characterises *Phoenix*. This aspect is heightened in any retrospective reading by the foreknowledge of Kerr’s premature death on 15 December 1942, when his plane was shot down over Soputa, Papua New Guinea.

Kerr entered the university as an undergraduate in 1937, and his return to *Phoenix* in 1938 coincided with his becoming a boarder at St Mark’s and his appointment to *On Dit*’s editorial staff, alongside Johnston. Kerr possessed dashing good looks, whilst also being a dedicated, gregarious, and talented young poet, marked by a melancholic streak.¹¹⁷ His influences included the metaphysical poets, who

¹¹⁴ M. Swan, “Wireless,” *Phoenix* 4 (1938): 42.

¹¹⁵ Pfeiffer’s assistance shows that, although he would not be published in *Phoenix* until 1939, he was already an important figure behind the scenes (Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 64).

¹¹⁶ [D. B. Kerr], “For So He Giveth His Beloved Sleep,” *Phoenix* 2 (1936): 18.

¹¹⁷ Kerr was said to resemble a Greek satyr (Dutton, *Out in the Open*, 81). For Jury, Kerr was Byronic (Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 17).

had recently undergone a revival, and the modernist giants Eliot and Auden. Dutton recalls that Kerr was “crazy about Virginia Woolf’s novels,” an “odd taste for an Aussie lad [in that era].”¹¹⁸ There is a reticence to be explicit that led Jury to argue that Kerr’s poems are “too private,” but this also makes his verse ambiguously allusive.¹¹⁹ His poems might be read as expressions of a deeply personal pain or the howl of a dying society. The opening lines of his 1938 poem, “Poem,” captures the anxiety of the late thirties: “The bottom has fallen from the river; / The banks closed in.”¹²⁰ The speaker urges the listener to “Drink to the death of the year” as all is “moved by the river”:

The year has no regrets; it has sinned,
And from its blindness forgiven you.
Now you move forward across its hypocrisy,
You have to laugh, but, later, you too will be torn
Down by the river to the sea.

In the face of war, chaos, and conflict, Kerr’s poem expresses the Antipodean cry of a generation being pulled down by the undertow. As the storm clouds gathered, threatening to wash all away, *Phoenix* 1939 would stand as a fiery radical beacon.

What unites the contributions to *Phoenix* 1935–1938 is a disavowal of the suitability of established aesthetic means to envision the present. The modern world, its psychic forces and atmosphere, its changing ethics and understandings of sexuality and desire, and its vastly altered material and technological conditions present a rupture with the past. This rupture aligns with left-wing radicalism which advocates the reorganisation of society and above all is impelled by a rising sense of global conflict and impending doom in a world increasingly aflame, from Asia to Africa and Europe. (In *Phoenix*, fire is increasingly diagnostic rather than restorative.) The tyranny of distance and of its underside, belatedness, if it ever existed, is no more. In line with modernity, female contributors and influences are not peripheral, but central to recurring explorations of psychological interiority, sexuality, and cosmopolitanism. What began partly as imitation by the magazine’s

¹¹⁸ Geoffrey Dutton, quoted in Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 76.

¹¹⁹ C. R. Jury, “Phoenix 1939,” *Southerly* 1, No. 2 (1940): 35.

¹²⁰ D. Kerr, “Poem,” *Phoenix* 4 (1938): 41.

youthful contributors has led to the germination. *Phoenix*'s emergent modernism is radicalism without orthodoxy, eclecticism without synthesis, raw abrasion and fiery combustion as opposed to polished finish.

Phoenix Journal 1939

This number of "Phoenix" has an atmosphere of modernness that I like[.]

— C. R. Jury, preface to *Phoenix* 1939¹²¹

strange and disturbing growths push up from the cracks[.]

— H. M. Swan, "I, Philip Henslowe" (1939)¹²²

as we wait for the inescapable storm.

— Flexmore Hudson, "Modern Youth" (1939)¹²³

If 1935 to 1938 had been years to keep the fires burning and test fledgling wings, 1939 was the year *Phoenix* truly blazed. As though to better contain the conflagration, the 1939 issue is materially larger in dimensions. In this issue, edited by Kerr and Swan, the young modernists had entered the building and taken charge. The four prior issues had already produced a groundbreaking radical literary journal and published figures who would fundamentally alter Australian cultural life. The issue of 1939, however, should be remembered as one of the most significant issues of an Australian little magazine ever published. As Dutton, the only critic to note its significance, writes, "It was the first little magazine of any kind in Australia to bring together the ideals of cosmopolitan modernism and Jindyworobak nationalism."¹²⁴ Like all significant publications, *Phoenix* 1939 reshapes our understanding of what came before and after. It is the culmination of the magazine's development: it brings the formative Penguins together for the first time, and it captures the Jindyworobaks just as their movement has launched. Their presence together in *Phoenix* forces a reassessment of both movements and of their relation to Australian modernism.

¹²¹ C. R. Jury, preface to *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 15.

¹²² H. M. Swan, "I, Philip Henslowe," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 45–46.

¹²³ Flexmore Hudson, "Modern Youth: (From a play, 'Asoka')," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 56.

¹²⁴ Dutton, *Snow on the Saltbush*, 127.

However, *Phoenix* 1939's radical fires were nearly quenched before they could propagate: when the Vice Chancellor challenged the magazine's literary quality, the typescript of the new issue was sent to a known classicist and literary conservative for assessment. In an ironic twist of fate, this man was none other than Jury, who would become *Angry Penguins*'s first patron. Jury recalls a young Kerr, who might have been "Byron himself," arriving at his door with the typescript. Although it ran against his personal aesthetic predilections, Jury's judgement was emphatic: "I thought [...] that qualitatively it was by far the best literary document produced by young students that I had—have—ever seen [...] it was astonishingly alive."¹²⁵ Responsible for the issue's first printing, Jury also acts as spokesperson for the issue by penning a notable preface declaring the issue's modern intent:

This number of "Phoenix" has an atmosphere of modernness that I like. "Modernness" is almost as large, vague, and blessed a word as "Mesopotamia;" I mean it here to cover not only the absence in most of these poems of the continual end-rhymes, highly regularised rhythm, and explicitness one expects in conservative poetry, but the kinds of subjects treated and the methods of treatment.¹²⁶

Jury was an important scholarly influence and supporter in a largely hostile critical environment. He was, however, no tame critic: *Phoenix* 1939 also featured what the *Advertiser* called a "burlesque essay" by Jury, which outrageously satirises modernist titans Eliot and Auden.¹²⁷ He would also gently parody the Jindyworobaks in his review of *Phoenix* in a nascent *Southerly* in 1940, paving

¹²⁵ C. R. Jury, quoted in Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 43–45.

¹²⁶ Jury, preface, 15–16. In a review of *Phoenix* 1939, the *Advertiser* warned once again that the "trappings of modernity are easy to put on." "Latest Number Of 'Phoenix'," *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 25 November 1939, 10, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article-48851935>. Meanwhile, the *Mail* decided that the poems in *Phoenix* 1939 "lack virility." "Reviews of the Week by Bodleian," *Mail* (Adelaide), 2 December 1939, 13, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55754780>.

¹²⁷ "Latest Number of 'Phoenix'," 10. Jury's parody masquerades as the review of a verse tragedy entitled *Coffee after Luncheon* and is attributed to P. S. Hellyet and Piston Exe Odin. It mocks the nonsensical collages of imagery which many critics thought Eliot was famous for, before taking aim at Auden's Marxist pretensions. See C. R. Jury, "Review of a Book," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 31–36.

the way for harsher satirical treatment by McAuley, Hope, and others in 1941 and 1942.

The largely conservative criticism which the Jindyworobaks would receive was ultimately an indication of the movement's success. Although foreknowledge of *Angry Penguins* might dominate any retrospective reading, in *Phoenix* 1939 the Jindyworobaks were *the* radical literary movement. Ingamells's triumphant update, simply titled "Jindyworobak" (1939), announces that the success of the Jindyworobak Club had been clinched after the launch of their anthology in 1938. The only anthology of local verse in Australia at the time of launch, it drew upon *Phoenix* alumni to gather contributions from five Australian States.¹²⁸ Ingamells proudly records that the anthology sold out in seven weeks, while the club already had 110 members, including "Walter Murdoch, Vance Palmer, James Devaney, and Leonard Mann." Refuting the notion that the Jindyworobaks are "anti-everything not shrieking of Eucalyptus and boronia," Ingamells declares that

The Jindyworobaks are not against overseas art, from which they have much to learn; but they insist that there are such things as environmental values; that the natural environment of Australia, particularly, requires a distinctive treatment in literature which has not yet been accorded to it.¹²⁹

Ingamells resented the dual and interrelated cultural hegemonies of his inheritance: the endless colonial deference to imperial British culture and the lame dilettantism of that culture's local iteration, often dictated to the provinces from the eastern seaboard.¹³⁰ In *Phoenix* 1939 he could, for the first time, truthfully declare the Jindyworobaks a "force to be reckoned with in Australian literature."¹³¹

¹²⁸ These included Ward in Victoria, local seventeen-year-old provocateur Harris, and local graduate Brian Elliott, who was at the time living in Perth.

¹²⁹ Rex Ingamells, "Jindyworobak," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 55–56.

¹³⁰ Tregenza admits that the Jindyworobaks did help "banish the exotic, consciously generic poetical, 'Bardic' verse" that had been prevalent (Tregenza, *Australian Little Magazines*, 52).

¹³¹ Ingamells, "Jindyworobak," 56.

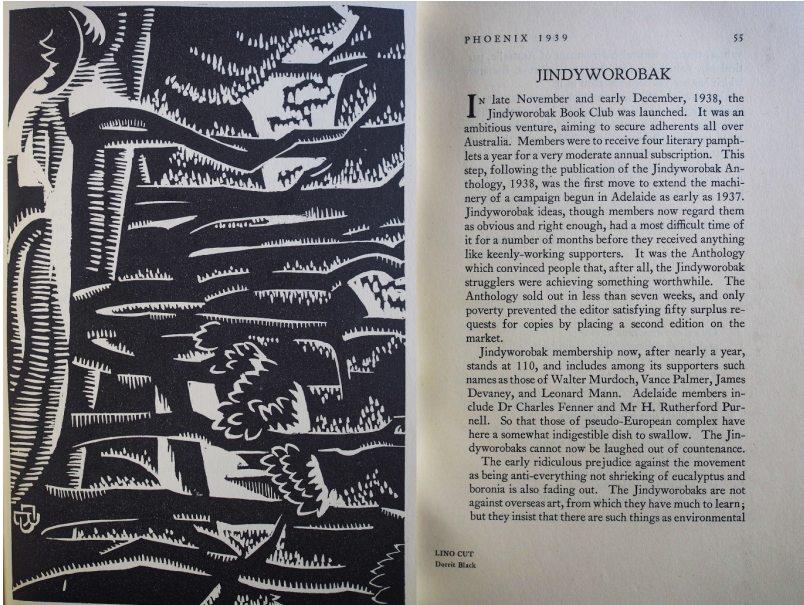


Figure 6. Dorrit Black's "Lino Cut" is placed opposite Rex Ingamells's "Jindyworobak" in *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 54–55. Note that although no other title appears here, this print is titled "Gum Trees" and listed as having been made in Sydney in 1933 in the Art Gallery of South Australia's online collection: <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/gum-trees/32981/>. Black's work is in the public domain and free to be reproduced here.

The editorial positioning of Ingamells's "Jindyworobak" opposite Black's modernist linocut "Gum Trees" (1939) shows that in *Phoenix* there was no ideological division between Jindyworobakism and modernism, a fact further evidenced by the straddling of both camps by Harris, the *enfant terrible*.¹³² Harris was initially excited by Ingamells's radical dismissal of the "old"—both of the bush ballads of the "larrikin Australian" tradition and of the establishment's imperial British traditionalism—and by his expression of the "new" that brought

¹³² Described by Ingamells as a precocious young poet of "talent and personality," Harris had "with fervour" become a founding Jindyworobak member in 1938, while still a schoolboy working at the *News*. Rex Ingamells, "On the Origin and Development of Jindyworobak," in *Jindyworobak Review 1938–1948*, ed. Rex Ingamells and Margaret Preston (Jindyworobak Publications, 1948), 14. See, also, Snowden, "Max Harris," 166.

the *Phoenix* poets together. The relationship between Harris and Ingamells is suggested by the placement of their poems alongside each other, though these poems can also be read as foreshadowing the coming schism. Harris's "Sonnet" (1939) and "To an Unknown" (1939) adopt the idiom of a more internationalist (and Eurocentric) modernism that more than anything defined the early Penguin poets, while the predilection with inner psychic landscapes anticipates Harris's development towards surrealism.¹³³ Over the page, somewhat discordantly, lies Ingamells's "Black Mary" (1939). The poem eschews traditional metrical structure, yet is more identifiably Jindyworobak than his 1937–1938 contributions, at once idealising Indigenous culture (through the figure of Mary) and suggesting the modern problematics of that idealism.

Likewise, the extreme experimentalism of Harris's "Boat-Train" (1939) hints at key differences between the two poets.¹³⁴ However, Harris's short poem "Hills Scene" (1939) also suggests early coalescence between his Jindyworobak affiliation and internationalist modernist tendencies. Intertextually linked to German Romantic Eduard Moerike's "The Forsaken Maiden" (1832), Harris's verse channels Moerike's representation of internal melancholy via an external landscape. Harris, though, describes local—presumably the Adelaide hills—with a "hopeless echo of a crow" and the speaker "walk[ing] the worn / bush-track":

There I must watch, wearily stay
Hearing the bush pain-cries,
And redream the dreams, the pain of your words,
And move in tears as my lonely herds.¹³⁵

Harris's poem draws on the metaphysics of German Romanticism to explore the unique creative potential of the Australian bush, whose otherness Europeans often depicted as tormenting and isolating, to act as ground for psychic exploration and reflection. "Hills Scene" shows that *Phoenix* was not merely a meeting ground for

¹³³ Bradshaw, "Misapprehensions of a Caustic Eye," 306.

¹³⁴ Singled out by Jury as especially experimental, "Boat-Train" suggests the journey of youth through life, or perhaps to war, through allusive but obscure imagery, in an idiom that marks his separation from Ingamells. Max Harris, "Boat-Train," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 52–53.

¹³⁵ Max Harris, "Hills Scene," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 49.

disparate ideas—in hindsight represented at their polarity by the Jindyworobaks and Angry Penguins—but a medium for their formative coalescence.

In addition to Harris, *Phoenix* 1939 also brought together, for the first time, all the early literary Penguins, excepting Dutton: Kerr, Pfeiffer, and Swan. Given Jury's recollections, we have to position Kerr as undoubtedly the driving editorial force behind *Phoenix*'s final issue—a role he continued for the first issue of *Angry Penguins*.¹³⁶ In light of the 1939 issue's significant elevation in quality, Kerr should be remembered as not only a fine young poet, but also an important organiser and editor of radical work. Kerr's poetry stands in contrast with Harris's: Kerr is undoubtedly modernist, but more restrained, echoing traditional poetic structures even as he defies them. "Lady, Amen" (1939), republished upon his death in *Angry Penguins* and later anthologised, evokes the form of a fourteen-line sonnet though it disregards conventions of rhyme and metre. It poignantly begins, "If we could halt this passing hour," lamenting time's passing through elevated moments, before culminating in another contemporary image of temporal rupture: "I know again / The black and white of broken time / The absurd before and after."¹³⁷ Kerr's verse is often so finely wrought that it conveys and creates its own taut patterns. By titling his second work "Poem" (1939), Kerr makes a modernist rhetorical gesture that refuses aesthetic conventions—in line with *Phoenix*'s program. "Poem" creates a sense of circularity, even entrapment, by beginning as it ends, suggesting that only death will truly out: "This wound will hold some truth perhaps."¹³⁸ All of Kerr's *Phoenix* poems are clouded by an encounter with darkness or death. There is a tragic mien to his work, which *Angry Penguins* would characterise as an "elegiac bitterness" and which retrospectively appears prescient.¹³⁹ His poems are emblematic of the atmosphere of the late-1930s which *Phoenix* represents, an atmosphere of temporal and societal rupture;

¹³⁶ Following Kerr's tragic death during the war, Harris would attribute the foundation of *Angry Penguins* to him, suggesting Kerr's seniority, though both served as inaugural editors (this fact is reinforced by Kerr's name and university address being printed at the end of the first issue as the contact for sales of the magazine). See Max Harris, "Donald Kerr," *Angry Penguins* 4 (1943): 30, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3084411245/view?-partId=nla.obj-3084490305#page/n31/mode/1up>.

¹³⁷ D. B. Kerr, "Lady, Amen," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 51.

¹³⁸ D. B. Kerr, "Poem," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 29.

¹³⁹ Harris, "Donald Kerr," 30.

the poems deliver moments of heightened feeling beneath the shadow of a war which would brutally maim society and the *Phoenix* poets alike.

Pfeiffer is the other young Penguin who, like Kerr, would also tragically lose his life in the coming war. A comparative elder statesman at twenty-two, the quiet and studious Pfeiffer has been characterised as the Yin to Kerr's Yang, though the poetry of both is marked by qualities of restraint and technical skill.¹⁴⁰ Jury praised Pfeiffer in both *Southerly* and *Angry Penguins*, admiring in particular his "beautiful aubade" "At the Window"; Jury thought it recalled the "neatness of French."¹⁴¹ "At the Window" combines modern imagery and lyrical experimentation, even as it also vaguely echoes traditional forms:

The last dismantled star flung into space,
In swift graduation
Night ripens into day.
Thought patterns flailed like octopus
Dichotomize.
Hen-coop cocks crow up the dawn
"The guttural goose hath ushered in the day!"¹⁴²

The poem skilfully contrasts images of disorder with the certainty of the arriving dawn, itself humorously marked by the mundane. Like Kerr, Pfeiffer also inverts convention by publishing a "Poem" (1939). It can be read as the poet's credo. His "Poem" begins by seeking to avoid and overcome superficiality and meaninglessness before ending with a memorable warning: "Surfeit, ignominy of drab Gemütlichkeit."¹⁴³ Invoking *Gemütlichkeit*, a German term for cosiness and comfort, Pfeiffer cautions against the uninspired and conformist life. The term is

¹⁴⁰ Miles, *Lost Angry Penguins*, 145. It should also be noted that Pfeiffer was a boarder with the Kerr family from 1936. John Miles, "Penguins that Flew: Paul Pfeiffer and Modernism in War and Peace," in *Germans: Travellers, Settlers and Their Descendants in South Australia*, ed. Peter Monteath (Wakefield, 2011): 331.

¹⁴¹ Jury, "Phoenix 1939," 34. See, also, C. R. Jury, "Two Poets," *Angry Penguins* 1 (1941): 9–17, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3084411185/view?partId=nla.obj-3084462272#page/n10/mode/lup>.

¹⁴² P. Pfeiffer, "At the Window," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 37.

¹⁴³ P. Pfeiffer, "Poem," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 37.

another reminder of the German cultural influence on Adelaide's modernism.¹⁴⁴ Pfeiffer's third poem "Nondum" (1939), Latin for "not yet," suggests youthful hopefulness and indecision, opening with the line, "This young one breathes not yet," before confessing:

We have gone a little on:
Put razor-edge to febrile antennae
Our sometimes mis-directed laughter
Wedged into thought;
Grown into trees that have
Not yet burnt out themselves.¹⁴⁵

The poem is both an embrace of youth—the tendency to break convention, pursue a heightened sensitivity, and wilfully go astray—and a premonition of an exhausted and burnt-out world.¹⁴⁶ Quietly spoken and clear-minded, Pfeiffer's *Angry Penguins* "poetry can seem quite conservative," but his *Phoenix* verse suggests the obverse: a radical, even heated streak that is present throughout his body of work.¹⁴⁷ His *Phoenix* poems reject the precepts of an ever-maddening world, proffering in its place the idealism and misdirection of youth.

Swan shared editorial duties with Kerr in 1939. Jury places Swan's "difficult and dangerous" "Collage" (1939) in the "post-Hopkins" modern manner, though he argues that its unique rhythm and harmony manage to unite in "uncommon achievement."¹⁴⁸ Heightened by the lack of grammar, images of the natural world of sunlight and stone collide with the modern—the sacred rising from the mundane and urban—which brings a motion and life of its own. Meanwhile, the absurd inclusion of death and a parrot adds a surreal dreamlike element. Echoing these

¹⁴⁴ The local German cultural influence is significant and unusual, with important figures like Heyesen, Strehlow, Semmler, and Thiele sharing Germanic descent and linguistic capacity. Dutton learnt German, while Harris was fluent, and both shared a passion for figures such as Hölderlin and Rilke.

¹⁴⁵ P. Pfeiffer, "Nondum," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 27.

¹⁴⁶ We can perhaps read the reference to trees that have not yet burnt themselves out as being in conversation with Ingamells's imagery in "The Spark."

¹⁴⁷ Bradshaw, "Misapprehensions of a Caustic Eye," 305.

¹⁴⁸ Jury, "*Phoenix* 1939," 34.

ideas, Swan's second poem, "Frozen Circles" (1939), expresses a paradox in its very title between continuity and stasis that the poem explores through contradiction and fragmentation.¹⁴⁹ Her opening line echoes the magazine in imagery: "Flame entrained spirit clawing drain away," surrounded by a "hate-horizoned sea" and a central lake where "peace has long lain drowned."¹⁵⁰ The poem appears to spatialise the moral and historical impasse which the *Phoenix* poets confront, while also perhaps presaging the fracturing of the magazine's project.

Swan's short story, "I, Philip Henslowe," represents an alternative to this impasse: a combination of the two seemingly most contradictory forces in *Phoenix*. The story begins in experimental modernist prose, depicting Adelaide as Joyce might Dublin or Woolf London. An ordinary day walking through the city and going to the shops becomes a swirling reality, entirely propelled by internal stream-of-consciousness monologue. However, the story changes tone, as the physically looming hills beyond the cityscape suggest another psychic influence. Silent and "scarred by the invader," these hills become emblematic "of this dark earth's hostility" towards a city likened to "pale, spreading fungoid growth."¹⁵¹ The isolation and alienation of settler modernity in Australia—"a nation spiritually dead," whose "slack mouthed poet[s]" pen verse to enunciate their rejection—finds a psychic counter in this "strangeness."¹⁵² Swan characterises modernity's material and representational destruction of that local environment with "images of stone and concrete and asphalt" and the planting of "alien [art] flowers," which are doomed to wilt. In their place, "strange and disturbing growths push up from the cracks in the pavements" with "beautiful and deformed petals." In its stylistics, critique of contemporary Australia, and search for a spiritual core beyond the established bounds of materialistic modernity, the story is an articulation of a nascent *Phoenix* aesthetic that foreshadows Australian modernism.

¹⁴⁹ The poem's sharp shifts create an unstable tone—images colliding without syntactic mediation—showing Swan's continuing experimentation.

¹⁵⁰ M. H. Swan, "Frozen Circles," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 57.

¹⁵¹ Swan, "I, Philip Henslowe."

¹⁵² Aspects of this passage's critique echo Lawrence's *Kangaroo*, though going beyond it.

Foremost among *Phoenix* 1939's "strange and disturbing growths" are poems by Mudie and Hudson. Existing at opposite ends within the broad church of Jindyworobak—Mudie being the most overtly Australianist, as well as environmentalist, Hudson the most cosmopolitan—the two men would be published together for the first time in *Phoenix*. Their poems' use of trees marks organic imagery as a recurring motif in *Phoenix* 1939, signalling shared concerns with roots, foundations, and origins, yet also, in a bleak global landscape, the germinative potential for transformation.¹⁵³ Mudie's "As Are the Gums" (1939) unites his environmental and nativist concerns in the figure of the gum tree: not "of bodies are we born but of the earth—/ as are the gums that grow as we should grow."¹⁵⁴ While Mudie's work was passionate and radical, it could also fall into artless simplicities, and this poem likely provided the ammunition for Jury's satire.¹⁵⁵ Hudson's more ambiguous arborescent structure in "Modern Youth" (1939) conveys hope, anxiety, vulnerability, and even the helplessness of youth in a world on the cusp of cataclysmic war, beginning: "Our roots were sunk in sand."¹⁵⁶ That the trees still "thrust forth buds / and blossom" to the song of birds suggests the desire, nonetheless, to generate. The final stanza powerfully expresses the fading of youthful bravado into existential dread, insignificance, and isolation, as world war approaches, inevitably, inexorably:

Though in the loneliness of night
under indifferent stars
our courage falters and we tremble
at each soft stir of leaves
as we wait for the inescapable storm.

¹⁵³ To add to the international crises gripping the world, there was in South Australia at this time a local soil erosion crisis. Samuel Jesse Cox, "Dust Country: Stories from a Shifting Land" (PhD diss., University of Adelaide, 2023): 26.

¹⁵⁴ Ian Mudie, "As Are the Gums," *Phoenix* 5 (1939): 58.

¹⁵⁵ I refer to Mudie's descriptions, to his apostrophe "oh Land, free us," and to his contrast of "alien gods" with "totem-gods of stone and tree" (Mudie, "As Are the Gums," 58).

¹⁵⁶ Hudson, "Modern Youth," 56.

Hudson's poem has the subtitle "(From a play, 'Asoka')", evoking the Indian emperor who converted to Buddhism following conflict and brought peace.¹⁵⁷ Hudson's poem, with its international idiom, poetic experimentation, and existential themes, could be mistaken for an Angry Penguin work, suggesting the protean qualities of *Phoenix*.

By having Kerr and Swan as editors and by publishing the work of Pfeiffer and Harris, *Phoenix* 1939 combined the early literary core of the Angry Penguins for the first time. Equally, by publishing Ingamells along with Hudson and Mudie, the issue also contained arguably the three most important Jindyworobak agitators. Thus, the 1939 issue brings together the two radical fires which had been smouldering away in *Phoenix* since its inception. Yet it does not merely bring them together: it captures them at a vital moment. Having launched their program and anthology the previous year, the Jindyworobaks were still in their early phase, which Harris would later admit provided the "central stimulus" for the expansion and reinvigoration of Australian poetry from its "feeble state."¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the early Penguins were brought together for the first time in the pages of *Phoenix* 1939. Yet, at the very moment *Phoenix* gathered all the key young agitators of these two radical movements, which would radically alter Australian cultural life, the magazine was brought down by conservative elements.¹⁵⁹ Too radical to live, too rare to completely die, *Phoenix*'s demise was written in its very name. Yet so too was the resurrection of its radical energies. Upon the demise of *Phoenix*, Kerr would declare in *On Dit* that, "In its darkest hour, it is said, the phoenix shines brightest, but it thirsts for a gift of blood."¹⁶⁰ The statement takes on the prophetic ambiguity of a Delphic utterance. By vanishing at its apotheosis, *Phoenix* never

¹⁵⁷ The poem was part of a longer verse play or sequence published subsequently. Hinayana Buddhism was a key influence on Hudson's humanism. Anthony Laube, "Flexmore Hudson," SA History Hub, History Trust of South Australia, <https://sahistoryhub.history.sa.gov.au/people/flexmore-hudson/>.

¹⁵⁸ Harris, "Conflicts in Australian Intellectual Life 1940–1963," 23.

¹⁵⁹ In 1940 the Student Union was stacked by "philistine" elements from the Sports Association (Dutton, *Out in the Open*, 85). As Joanna Murray-Smith explains, it was a mob "spearheaded by sports heavies and engineers" who cancelled *Phoenix*'s funding. Joanna Murray-Smith, "Angry Penguins as Cultural Gesture," in Malley, *The Poems of Ern Malley*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ Kerr, "Hail and Farewell," 3.

fully solidified nor became conventional, instead birthing two movements which would develop into contraries and antagonistically provoke further development.¹⁶¹ This schism between the Angry Penguins and Jindyworobaks is detectable in *Phoenix* 1939, but the issue also captures evidence, in the work of Harris, Swan, and Hudson, of nascent cross-experimentation.

Phoenix 1939 shows that the magazine's significance was not merely as a vehicle and context for the Jindyworobak and Angry Penguin poets' later emergence, though their presence signals its importance. *Phoenix* as a magazine had its own unique atmosphere and program, shaped by the temporal and spatial situatedness of its existence. It provided the stimulus and energy for these two movements, yet it cannot be reduced to them. *Phoenix*'s "strange and disturbing growths" show how what began as imitation led to cross-pollination and propagation. The magazine's radicalism had not yet congealed into orthodoxy or outright antagonism: its abrasiveness and contrary elements reveal it to have been the kernel of these later forces. *Phoenix* presages a mature Australian modernism in ways in which the Angry Penguins and Jindyworobaks—understood in isolation—cannot. Upon the passing of both movements' flames, marked by death, tragedy, and farce, the embers of *Phoenix* would remain and light the way for those traversing the postwar cultural desert that was Australia.¹⁶² But that is another story for another essay.

Little magazines often exist at the margins, and *Phoenix* lived in the margins of a local literary culture upon the edge of global modernity. The extinguishing of its revolutionary fire and the transitioning of its energies into two subsequent movements also explain its relative absence from literary history, even as they

¹⁶¹ Harris would in 1948 refer to the Jindyworobaks and Angry Penguins as Blakean "contraries without which there is no progression." Max Harris "The Importance of Disagreeing," in Ingamells and Preston, *Jindyworobak Review, 1938–1948*, 73–75.

¹⁶² I am referring to the turn inland, both spatially and imaginatively, in the late 1940s and 1950s of modernist artists such as Russell Drysdale and former Angry Penguins Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, and Arthur Boyd. This is echoed by the works of White, Randolph Stow, and Judith Wright across a similar period. Together, these writers and artists represented the development of a distinct and mature Australian modernism. Tony Hughes-d'Aeth has referred to this confluence as creating the "desert metaphysics of Australian modernism," in *Like Nothing on this Earth: A Literary History of the Wheatbelt* (University of Western Australia Press, 2017), 512.

provide proof of the magazine's agency. To borrow Miles's terminology, *Phoenix* was the "pilot-ship" that guided into their haven the two contrary movements that would exert untold influence on Australian letters, before it was itself set ablaze. Out of those dark and moody waters, Australian modernism would have to chart its own course.