

edited by shirley le



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# LOVE TO OUR SPONSORS

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The inclusion of writers from the Hunter region was made possible through the StoryMakers Literacy Project: a community of practice and mentorship program for Hunter-based culturally diverse storytellers and writers, developed in partnership with Hunter Writers' Centre.

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# LOVE TO OUR FAM

**Editor:** Shirley Le

**Sub Editors:** Adam Novaldy Anderson & Winnie Dunn

**Commissioning Editor:** Phoebe Grainer

**StoryMakers Facilitators:** Adam Novaldy Anderson & Winnie Dunn

**Cover Design & Typesetting:** Julien Ortiz

**Cover Photographer:** Johanna Ng

**Cover Model:** Mark Mariano

**Project Director:** Michael Mohammed Ahmad

# LOVE TO OUR PEEPS

**Hunter Writers' Centre:** Katherine McLean

**Diversity Arts Australia:** Lena Nahlous & Glaiza Perez

**PYT Fairfield:** Jacqueline Hornjik, Gabriela Green Olea,  
Bina Bhattacharya, Neda Taha & Daisy Montalvo

# PAY IT FOREWORD

Always was, always will be: Aboriginal land. I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians on the lands on which we work and on which this book was produced, and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded. Love always to my First Nations brothers and sisters.



Why did I make a book about love? Truth is, I don't like talking about gooeey stuff like love but I do like hearing what other people have to say about it. At the time of writing this, I am a single and childless woman entering my mid-thirties. When Tết rolls around, uncles and aunties only have one wish for me; that I *finally* find love. I retaliate by wishing my elders good blood test results year-round and gobbling up all the chả giò as soon as it comes out of the air fryer. In both the Vietnamese and Australian communities' eyes, I have failed to find love.

If I ask the internet, *Which Asian is most toxic?*, it's always us Brown Asians who top the list. In a TikTok vox pop conducted on the main street of Cabra, a bunch of Asian Baby Girls and Baby Boys agree that Viet girls are indeed the 'most toxic, craziest, gold-digging females who will cut a man off if he can't afford to buy us an LV bag'. We don't get to be the soft and innocent characters in those glossy K-dramas or the Hollywood rom-coms where a Pilates-perfect heroine gets to choose between Pedro Pascal or Captain America. From *Miss Saigon's* Crazy-For-White-Man Kim to the internet's favourite fuck boi, Kevin Nguyen, broke Brown Asians are told by the world that we're too hungry and too uncivilised to love fully, earnestly and honestly.

When I chose 'love' as the core theme of this anthology, I encouraged contributors to think about it broadly, outside of romance. This mirrored a decision I had made in my personal life — to decentre romance and deprioritise the quest to secure it for myself. That meant deleting distractions like dating apps and focusing on being better at practising love in the important relationships in my life. It was scary but I already had plenty of role models who showed me what real love is; friends who checked in on me every day after my Bà Nội passed away at the beginning of the year; a community at the Sweatshop Literacy Movement, who have had my back since 2014 when I had bleached hair and wrote about gangas in Bankstown; and my parents, who always give me the straight truth: that I need to improve on my 'people skills', manage my PMS and wear a damn jacket when it's cold. In the Year of the Snake, I showed up to all of my relationships and I found myself deeply, deeply in love with everyone I felt safe with in my life. That's the type of fulfilling love that I wanted on the pages of this book.

The writers included in this anthology come from communities that have faced scrutiny under *Fuck Off We're Full*: *how* we love or *whether* we love at all. This anthology gathers thirty-five voices from First Nations and culturally marginalised communities across so-called Australia, to share what we know about love. We are also aware that we are privileged to have a voice in an era of live-streamed genocide. At the time of writing this, more than 62,000 Palestinians have been murdered by the state of Israel. In Sudan, more than 150,000 people have been murdered in Darfur by militia forces. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, 602 Indigenous people have died in custody since the Royal Commission concluded in 1991. More than three million Vietnamese people died during the Vietnam War, exactly fifty years ago. It is in the spirit of defiance and self-determination that I chose 'love' as the anchor for each writer to tell their story.

*Love* features First Nations writers, Luca Sawyer, Luisa Mitchell, Sheila Rose and Forever Tupou, who speak about love as a connection to place. Palestinian-Australian writer Katie Shammas reflects on love

as resistance in a series of vignettes that detail the strength and will embodied within a diaspora. Lebanese-Australian writer Rayann Bekdache, Vietnamese-Australian writer Andrew Lac and Sudanese-Australian writer Yasir Elgamil talk about love in a family context, particularly the love that lingers for a dear one who has passed away. Samoan-Australian poet Christine Afoa and Vietnamese-Australian writer Lieu-Chi Nguyen write about self-love, whether that's learning to love the physicality of a body or following their aspirations in life. Thai-Australian writer Diane Wanasawek writes about the unconditional love that flows between different generations and the responsibility we carry towards teaching the next gen. For Filipino-Australian writer Mark Mariano, love is to embrace ourselves and our communities wholly. Mark also kindly lent his loving face for the cover of this book, which was shot by award-winning Chinese-Australian artist, Johanna Ng.

Duh, there are also stories about romance. Lebanese-Australian author Sheree Joseph, First Nations writer Luana Sanders, Indian-Australian poet Gayatri Nair and Pakistani-Australian writer Amani Mahmoud explore the messiness of the heart with strong female protagonists navigating patriarchal systems. Vietnamese-Australian writer Jenny Nguyen, Lebanese-Australian writer Adrian Mouhajer, Chinese-Australian writer Cherry Zheng, Egyptian-Australian author Daniel Nour and Assyrian-Australian poet Marel Parono find love on the intersection between sexuality, faith and community. Chinese-Australian writer Victor Guan Yi Zhou and Lebanese-Australian writer Meyrnah Khodr explore the empowering love that reconnects us to our cultural identities. Uruguayan-Australian author Natalia Figueroa Barroso, Chinese-Australian writer Janette Chen and Indonesian-Australian writer Adam Novaldy Anderson write about love and solidarity across class lines in Australian society. Iranian-Australian writer Kian Farzam and Sri Lankan-Australian writer Satara Uthayakumaran explore the non-verbal ways that love can be expressed, whether that's through music or sign language. And African-American author Tyree Barnette contributes a powerful personal essay about love as an integral ingredient in the language of solidarity.

Alongside this eclectic collection of letters, *Love* includes a showcase of stories by diverse writers from the Hunter region in NSW, which were edited by Adam Novaldy Anderson and Winnie Dunn. Developed in partnership with Hunter Writers' Centre, the combined works in this feature introduce Australian readers to an exciting new literary group, the StoryMakers Collective, from which Soul Takawira Joyner, Fran Obicoco and Suman Lahiry each reveal love as both fixed and fluid, fleeting and eternal, personal and universal.

And last but certainly not least, included in this book is a stunning collection of First Nations writing, titled 'Our Blak Hearts', which was commissioned by Kuku Djungan, Muluridji, Wakaman, Tagalaka, Kunjen, Warrgamay and Yindinji writer and editor, Phoebe Grainer. The three pieces, written by Isobel Morphy-Walsh, Amy Sole and Maurial Spearim, come together to illustrate a vivid portrait of love on Country: before, now and after.

On the eve of completing the draft of this manuscript, an estimated 250,000 Australians — Black, Brown and White — walked alongside each other across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the pouring rain, demanding an end to Israel's genocide against the people of Palestine. This 'March for Humanity' was a strong reminder that our greatest strength as a species is the undying and uncompromising capacity to love. It is in this spirit that I give you our latest contribution to world literature, titled simply: *Love*.

Sincerely,  
Shirley Le

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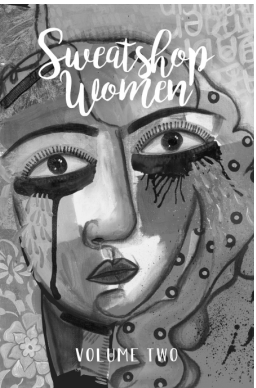
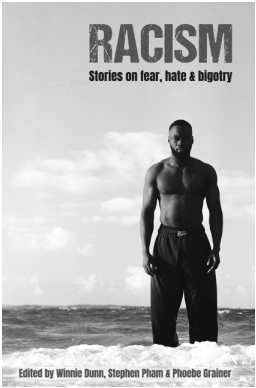
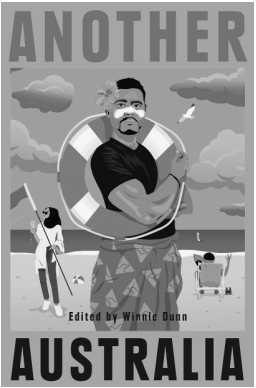
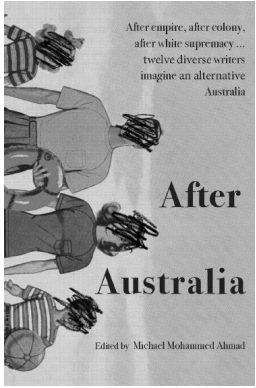
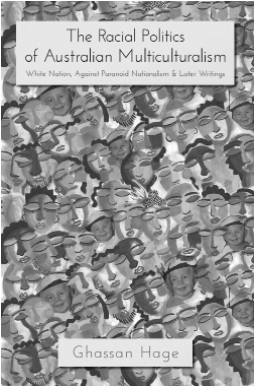
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# "YOU FALL IN LOVE AND YOU GET FAT"

Love. It is a beautiful mess of complex, confusing and interconnecting emotions. For some, it means romance, for others, family. There are those who understand love as empowerment, resistance and existence; those who say it is created from nothing; and those who believe it is always there, binding the universe together, waiting for us to find it and grab on tight.

In this mesmerising collection of stories, poems and essays from the award-winning team of Sweatshop Literacy Movement, you are invited to take a journey through dingy streets and pristine sunsets, delve deep into the tormented soul, and explore that big crazy thing called the human heart.

**Featuring:** Luca Sawyer, Katie Shammass, Tyree Barnette, Christine Afoa, Adrian Mouhajer, Marel Parono, Forever Tupou, Mark Mariano, Luana Sanders, Yasir Elgamil, Cherry Zheng, Gayatri Nair, Adam Novaldy Anderson, Andrew Lac, Amani Mahmoud, Daniel Nour, Satara Uthayakumaran, Meyrnah Khodr, Natalia Figueroa Barroso, Soul Takawira Joyner, Fran Obicoco, Suman Lahiry, Diane Wanasawek, Kian Farzam, Lieu-Chi Nguyen, Victor Guan Yi Zhou, Rayann Bekdache, Jenny Nguyen, Sheree Joseph, Isobel Morphy-Walsh, Amy Sole, Maurial Spearim, Sheila Rose, Janette Chen and Luisa Mitchell.

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