

NON-FICTION

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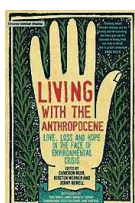
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PICK OF THE WEEK

Living with the Anthropocene

Edited by Cameron Muir, Kirsten Wehner & Jenny Newell
NewSouth, \$34.99

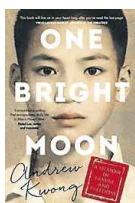
It's not hard to see why some scholars have nicknamed the Anthropocene 'the Obscene', given what we've done to our planet. The beauty of this collection is that it walks a tightrope over this chasm of self-disgust and dread without toppling into it. After his brother's death, global warming lost all meaning for Tony Birch. It was only as he walked his country along the Yarra, where he felt his brother's presence, and as he reconnected with young people who refused to be defeated that he realised "I must be *in the world* in order to respect it". From James Bradley on cuttlefish to Saskia Beudel on the changing soundscape of her mother's garden, the quality of writing in these pieces, their delight in nature and their determination not to give in to despair make for stirring reading despite the grim truths they confront.



Growing Up Disabled in Australia

Edited by Carly Findlay
Black Inc, \$29.99

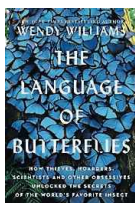
There is a fine art to gripping the reader by the collar while pulling the rug out from under their feet. This neat trick is achieved by many of the contributions in this anthology about what it means to be regarded as different. El Gibbs felt broken until she realised that what disabled her was not her severe psoriasis but "the barriers of an ableist world". When Andy Jackson's spine began to bend in his teenage years as a result of Marfan syndrome, every stare felt like a burning spark. Then, at a poetry reading, he discovered that to be seen could also "warm and sustain". Yvonne Fein knows well the ironies inherent in the notion of luck. She is "lucky" because her parents survived the Nazi death camps, "lucky" because lithium saved her life. Like all good writing, these pieces not only put us in the writers' shoes but upend our ideas about where the disability lies.



One Bright Moon

Andrew Kwong
HarperCollins, \$34.99

Every letter from his mother, after Andrew Kwong fled Mao's China to Macau, Hong Kong, and finally to study in Australia, ended with the same words: *Don't look back*. It would be 15 years before he would see her again. Although his mother and father had supported the Communist revolution, they were denounced as intellectuals. As the family said their farewells to Kwong's father when he was sentenced to a re-education camp, the eight-year-old Kwong experienced "the most powerful feeling of love and belonging, a moment of inexplicable magic and pain". It was this feeling that carried Kwong through the many trials he and his family endured - famine, persecution and separation - and that permeate this moving family saga, shot through with yearning and hard-won joy.



The Language of Butterflies

Wendy Williams
Black Inc, \$29.99

They are the loud dressers of the insect world. Fluent in the language of colour, butterflies communicate through the dazzle of their wings, says Wendy Williams. For all her enthusiasm for this language, the stars of her book are the not-so-flashy orange and black monarchs whose 'Methuselah generation' migrate thousands of kilometres from the north of the US to Mexico. The stars, however, are almost upstaged by the supporting role played by the 17th-century teenager Maria Merian, whose keen study of the insect revealed its life cycle at a time when the connection between butterflies and caterpillars was not understood. Although little-known now, she was famous in her day for her discoveries and her watercolours, which were bought by Peter the Great. Despite Williams' mannered style, there's much to relish in this flashy tale.