

THEA'S TYPER



Thea Astley's typer, UQFL97

This Hermes "Baby" typewriter belonged to writer Thea Astley and was a gift from her husband, Jack. She used it from the late fifties to the seventies, during which time she won an astonishing three Miles Franklin awards.

Astley's first novel, *Girl with Monkey* (1958) was followed by *A Descant for Gossips* (1960), *The Well-Dressed Explorer* (1962), *The Slow Natives* (1965), *A Boat Load of Home Folk* (1968), *The Acolyte* (1972), *A Kindness Cup* (1974), and *Hunting the Wild Pineapple* (1979). All apart from *Girl with Monkey* (which was "done on borrowed typers") would have been written by Thea Astley on this typewriter. She called it her "typer".

Fryer Library holds the original typescripts for most of these early works, as well as for later ones. They include the author's handwritten corrections on the drafts and explanatory notes which she wrote for the library. The material provides a unique insight into the processes of composition of Astley's novels, as well as revealing much of the personality of the author.

For example there are three typescript drafts, a final edited version, and a folder containing miscellaneous rewrites for *A Kindness Cup*. This won the *Age Book of the Year* award in 1975.

In the handwritten note accompanying the first draft, Astley writes,

"...The whole book was written on the typer. After I reached p34 of this section, I thought "Damn! I'll start again- spacing- so that I can see it better". So off we went again."

Of the second draft, she writes,

"At this stage I've been working on it 6 months and want to cut my throat". And the third draft is accompanied by the following notes,

"This is just about the final pre-draft for typing. Even then I kept making changes. And I kept wanting to change the edited final. Oh the hell of it!"

On display with the typewriter is a typescript carbon copy of *The Slow Natives*. This won Thea Astley's second Miles Franklin award in 1965. The typescript is the final draft of the novel, and contains handwritten corrections by the author.



There are 23 boxes of papers and 4 parcels in the Thea Astley Collection (UQFL97) in Fryer Library. The collection was described by Professor Susan Sheridan in the January 2009 issue of *Fryer Folios*, in her article "Queensland is where the tall yarn happens : the Thea Astley collection in Fryer Library".

Cathy Leutenegger, Fryer Library