

February 2026

Kia ora koutou,

A warm welcome to those of you who have recently joined the library. It has been wonderful to see our membership grow over this past year. Increasing engagement with the community and beyond will ensure the continuation of the Athenaeum for many generations to come.

A friendly reminder that if you would like to renew your books, then please feel free to email me to request this. We don't charge any late fees, but we do ask that if you are borrowing a recent release that this is bought back within the month. However, this is flexible as we all read at different paces!

Happy reading!

Holly

What's Happening

AGM followed by a Salon for Athenaeum members.

Thursday March 19th

Times and RSVP email will be sent

Keep an eye out, in March, for an article about the Athenaeum in the Ara Toi newsletter—Toi Oho.

You can subscribe to the Ara Toi newsletters [here](#).

Participants for this year's Melbourne Literary Programmers Roundtable have been announced. To find out more follow the Melbourne City of Literature page-[here](#).



Book Review

**Wifedom: Mrs Orwell's
Invisible Life**

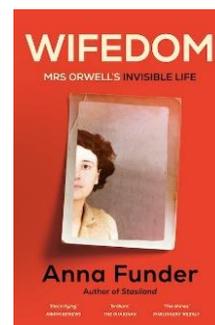
By Anna Funder

I hadn't intended to read this biography, put off partly by the title and partly by a reluctance to discover that yes, perhaps Orwell was a problematic person. But when the book was returned to the Athenaeum, I opened to the first page and was immediately drawn into a compelling story of a woman I knew nothing about.

Wifedom examines the life of Eileen O'Shaughnessy — George Orwell's wife. Anna Funder brings a double capacity to this task: as an accomplished author and as a wife herself, she is able to breathe life into a woman who history has

largely ignored. She is aided by a collection of newly discovered letters between Eileen and her best friend, which open a direct and intimate window into her inner world.

Funder is skilled at filling in the edges — writing in a way that holds and empathises with her subject in a manner no previous biographer of Orwell has managed. The book blurs styles, reading as compellingly as a novel while remaining grounded in fact. It paints a vivid picture of what life was like for a talented woman in the 1930s and 40s — one whose gifts were quietly surrendered to assist a man with his own talents. A husband who was often pursuing other woman, including Eileen's friends.



Orwell of course will endure as one of the most significant writers of the twentieth century, but this biography sheds much needed light on the woman who made his writing possible — her intellectual contribution, her domestic labour, her financial sacrifices. In short: her invisible work.