

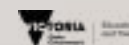


Megan Evans:

UNstable

KELOID # 8

Horsham Regional Art Gallery





KELOID

n. used to describe both an unsightly scar from the healing of a wound and a sign of initiation or significant life event.

- # 1 Reveal
- # 2 UNsettling
- # 3 UNreconciled
- # 4 Squatters and Savages
- # 5 Curious Cabinets
- # 6 Parlour
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- # 8 UNstable





How does Evans, as a white Australian of colonial settler/intruder ancestry, take responsibility for the actions of her ancestors and use the privilege she has inherited to unpack and decolonise her thinking?

Alison Eggleton

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Family Tree 2014

dressmakers table, modelling clay, wire, digital print on rag paper, dressmakers pins

from *Reveal* | KELOID #1

[this page]

Fire Screen 2017

antique fire screen, velvet, glass beads, cotton

Peeyal (Tribute to Les Griggs) & Video Stranger 2014

piano stool, tapestry cotton, digital television, velvet, glass beads, HDV video 10:33 mins

from *Squatters and Savages* | KELOID # 4

This work is a tribute to Evans' late husband Les Griggs who was Gunditjmarra. The word Peeyal means gunshot in his language, a language that has been reconstructed since his death. From a large First Nations family, Les's life was profoundly impacted by the policy that took Aboriginal children away from their parents. When Evans met him he had spent 21 out of 28 years in institutions as a result of that policy.

The tapestry on the seat of the piano stool is a representation of a postcard from the turn of the century. The video shows Evans dressed in a replica of her great grandmothers' Victorian dress.

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Proof 2017

Found chaise lounge, rabbit fur, Victorian double barrel and single barrel shotguns, star pickets, embroidery cotton, glass beads

from *Squatters and Savages* | KELOID # 4

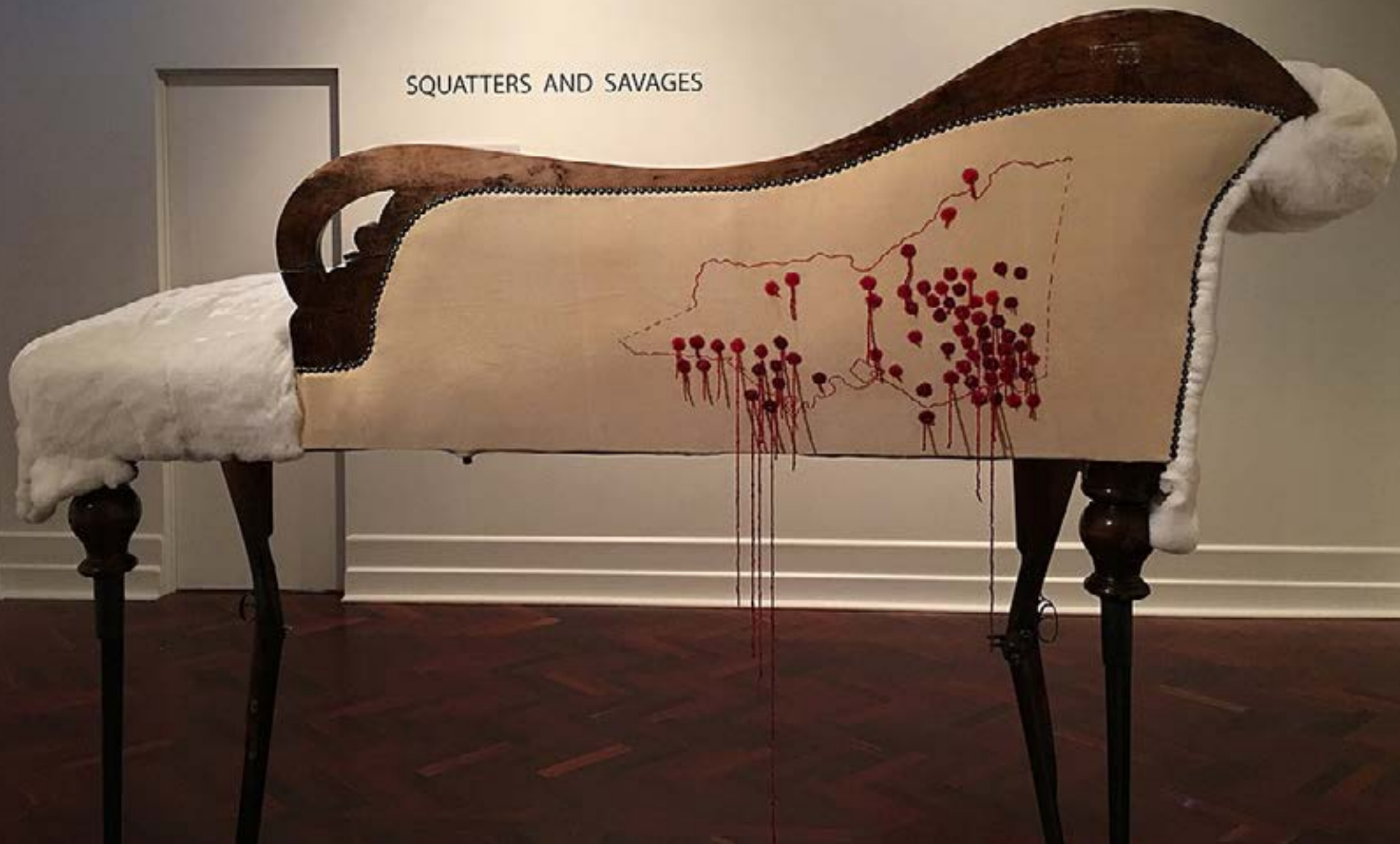
Proof is a play on words. It both references the famous film, *Rabbit Proof Fence* by Phillip Noyce about the Stolen Generation, and the notion of evidence, or proof of the violence of the frontier. It points to the fact that the trauma of the frontier is still evident in contemporary times.

What is a sensuous surface in white rabbit fur, is counterpointed by the legs which have turned into rifles. These rifles are antiques and likely from the era when the coloniser defended their stolen land by shotgun. They did more than defend which is depicted on the back of the furniture in a side that would traditionally be pushed against a wall, out of site.

You can see an embroidered map of Victoria placed back to front with markers in beaded spots where massacres have been proved to have taken place. These are sites where numbers of dead are recorded and here each person is represented by a red bead. The map being reversed is another attempt to hide from this brutal history, as we have to really think hard to determine where we live or come from on this backwards map.



SQUATTERS AND SAVAGES



*She sits erectly with her
needlework, in the presence of
Victorian objects and unlikely
guests, with a manner so closed
and absent she might actually
believe herself alone in the room.
Perhaps she is little more than
ornamentation herself, a woman
de-bodied and de-sexed; just another
object in the colonial 'interior'.*

Neika Lehman

[this page]
Isabella's helmet 2019
digital print on rag paper

[next page]
Parlour 2019
digital print on rag paper

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Megan Evans:

UNstable

KELOID # 8

UNstable is #8 in a series of exhibitions that are part of an ongoing body of work by artist Megan Evans titled the KELOID project, through which she examines the traces of early colonial history and the impact of that history as it unfolds today.

It is from her own Scottish, Irish and Welsh heritage and born on Wurundjerri land, that Evans looks at the role of the coloniser and its impact from the perspective of a descendant of a settler/colonial family.

She draws on objects from the Victorian era, her great grandmother Isabella's era; objects with a particular aesthetic, often highly polished and finely crafted. Evans has come to regard the silverware, books and parlour furniture as bearing witness to the violence of the time which coincided with the dispossession of First Nations peoples. Each object has been disrupted and transformed by the artist into those that contain violence and acts of oppression while still remaining aesthetically beautiful. Through this act the objects bear the scars of history.

While Evans does not know her ancestors part in the violence and brutality of the era, she acknowledges her ancestors as being present. The artist never met her great grandmother but there are familial similarities in temperament and appearance. Either through self-portraiture or the manipulation /disruption of objects she embeds the presence of this colonial identity

in the work to confront the painful stories of the Australian colonial past from which she has certainly benefited.

Her 'colonial identity' is a central tenet of *UNstable* in the ongoing KELOID project. It is from this position she asks, How do I, as a white Australian of colonial settler/invader ancestry, take responsibility for the actions of my ancestors and use the privilege I have inherited to unpack and decolonise my thinking ?

UNstable speaks to the absurd, fragile and unstable claim non Indigenous Australians have on the land and the denial of First Nations history. The artist asserts it is a claim built on white colonial privilege and theft, the unsustainable legacy of which can be seen in the lack of a treaty with the First Nations people of today. While Evans has inherited this legacy with the rest of contemporary Australia, her work proposes the question how long do we accept this as the status quo?

Alison Eggleton

Curator
Horsham Regional Art Gallery



She and I

2020

lenticular print

from *UNstable* | KELOID # 8

One image of both the artist and her great-grandmother, her first born Australian ancestor as a result of migration, elected and forced, of her Scottish/Irish ancestors in the early 1800's.

The lenticular print allows the image to transform from Evans into her great-grandmother, presenting an image of collapsed histories.

Isabella Kelly nee Robertson was born in Melbourne in 1860 on Wurundjeri lands. Evans inherited some of her jewellery which she wears in the image. Her earrings have been reconstructed to replicate images from her family photographs.











UNstable: living our ancestors, disrupting their legacies

Over the past decade, settler historian Lyndall Ryan and her research team have been scouring colonial archives to put together a digital map, which records the detail of hundreds of colonial frontier massacres. What we know is that most of the massacres were conducted by arms of the state, that many were premeditated and carried out in (attempted) secrecy, and that nearly always, the perpetrators were men. A question I have been asking myself, also raised in Megan Evans' exhibition *UNstable* concerns the position of the Victorian settler woman during these 'Killing Times'. What did she know of these unforgivable acts; what did she have to say? How did she respond? Victorian settler artist Megan Evans has been wondering about her too. The woman who sits idly by as the British empire conquers another desired territory. But what were the desires, thoughts and beliefs of the Victorian settler woman? Looking to her own lineage and ancestors, Megan Evans has been doing a sort of summoning.

In her seminal text *Talking Up to the White Woman*, Goenpul woman Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson reminds her readers that Aboriginal women have come to learn a great deal about the white woman – the uninvited guest who treads upon their land. ^[1] In a similar vein, Megan Evans reflects that it was her introduction into 1980s Aboriginal politics in Narrm/Melbourne that led her to properly recognise and know herself not just

as an Australian, but as a 'white Australian'. ^[2] Learning exactly what that social position meant was to understand herself as the benefactor of settler colonial privileges, built off the back of First Nations peoples' dispossession. To reckon with this was to also reckon with a preceding ignorance the artist had been living her entire life; an ignorance that was inherited.

Questioning the cultural and political mechanisms behind this ignorance has since become the topic of Megan Evans' art practice. We might see this body of work as a passing on, as a message of that process of awakening. Through her embodied portraits and aesthetic manipulation of colonial era objects, the artist demonstrates just how easy it is to uncover the uncomfortable, violent stories of Australia's settler colonial past. Having done this historic and psychic work herself, Evans invites the settler-colonial audience to consider what stories are waiting to be uncovered in their own family lines.

In the photographic portraits 'Sitting & Sewing' (2016) and 'Parlour' (2019), Evans' introduces the audience to a recurring Victorian-era woman dressed in black. Throughout the exhibition, this woman appears figuratively or is alluded to throughout the exhibition. Whether she is in mourning clothing or just conservatively dressed is unclear. What we know is that she seems somehow ubiquitous – we've all seen a version of this woman before,

in stately portraits hanging in national museums and galleries. Indeed, there is an uneasy semblance between Evans's darkly dressed woman featured in the portraits, with a fictional younger woman I came to know through my own performance work. In 2017, drawing on the haunting lineage of my non-Aboriginal mother's settler side, an alter ego came to me. She was the vision of a young, pale, pastel linen and cotton clad folly who, finding herself alone on the Frontier with her imagination and not much else, came to experience a sense of belonging with her new environment through an erotic relationship to the bush.

This is the relationship between hard, mysterious rocks and the slippage of stockings and hair ribbons in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* [3] It is the film adaptation of *We of The Never Never*, the story of upper-class Jeannie who, when finding herself on a remote outstation, begins to wear more and more low-cut necklines as she learns to 'become' with the Australian landscape. [4] These whimsical white women on screen are represented as finding a new kind of joie de vivre by rejecting the limited script for settler women living in the colony, instead finding new desires within Aboriginal Country. The Aboriginal woman who owns this Country is usually absent from these narratives. As it occurred in reality, those First Nations women, also my ancestors, were busy trying their very best to survive the multifaceted violence of colonial occupation.

So what of the portraits of Evans' stern, steely and black clothed woman? She sits erectly with her needlework, in the presence of Victorian objects and unlikely guests, with a manner so closed and absent she might actually believe herself alone in the room. Perhaps she is little more than ornamentation herself, a woman de-bodied and de-sexed; just another object in the colonial 'interior'. Or has she chosen a more wilful path, carefully ignoring the disturbing politics of the Frontier that surrounds her? Look closer and see there is trouble seeping from within the upholstery. That trouble is dripping red, and the imported fabric can contain only so many lies. Evan's portrayal of a woman's reluctance to look up from her handicraft is a nod and perhaps a warning against the privilege of settler women's political malaise, which continues to disempower First Nations resistance since the beginning of invasion.

Inside Evans' colonial interior, the world of *UNstable* is a world of objects and ornamentation, the clear casualty of a perturbed collector. I wonder how the artist deals with the elephant in the room, this giant collection of antique materials that make up the fabric of the artist's life. What to do with these loaded and beautifully crafted objects? What to do with the past? One response of Evans, as suggested in this exhibition's title is to make them aesthetically unstable. To disturb their function by painting over them or simply making them absurd, such in the case of



Carving
from *REpainting series 2020*
gouache on antique newspaper, on timber

Painting on the pages of the *London Illustrated News* from 1899 is like speaking back to the aesthetics and attitudes of the day. The copy from 120 years ago displays the ignorance and absurdity of the knowledge base of the colonial empire when seen in a contemporary light. The painted objects tell stories that reflect violence and theft of land and language by the self-identified 'civilised people'.



Harbour Trusts to Lunacy

2020

gouache on antique book 'Victoria Statues' 1883

Markets to Public Works

2020

gouache on antique book 'Victoria Statues' 1884

Rabbits Suppression to Wrongs

2020

gouache on antique book 'Victoria Statues' 1865

from *UNstable* | KELOID # 8

These books are records of the British laws bought to this country that already had a sophisticated legal system in place. They document the occupations of lands claimed for the crown under the Land Act, amendments to that act and the divisions of land into districts which became electorates. Painting objects of the era that represent the excess of Victorian wealth, highlights the injustice of these official documents.

Evans's gravity defying sculptures of teapots, saucers and spoons is to show these objects as precarious as white supremacy.

Speaking of beautiful objects, *UNstable* features 'Reveal', the 2013 series of antique wooden hand mirrors with words and images drilled into the glass reflective surface. We might find some of these mirrors, such as the pieces 'Reflect 8' and '9' in a refurbished vintage boutique and not think twice about it. But here is where our critical eye kicks in. The hand mirrors are dark wood, with botanically illustrated etchings of gum leaves on the mirror component. These two symbols are traditionally in opposition: the hand mirror is an introduced item on this continent's soil, the gum leaf is a teardrop in sovereign Aboriginal Country. On first inspection we might not think these images as culturally clashing because is the gum leaf not a clear symbol of this nation-state? But here lies the answer too. Evans proposes the icon of the Australian bush as appropriated and possessed by the white imaginary. The artist's point is made clear when holding the mirror up to one's own face, the leaf's reflection branding your image like a trademark. Looking to other mirrors in this collection, Evans leaves no room for ambiguity: the reflective surfaces are drilled with the words 'privilege' and 'witness'.

The privilege of walking on stolen land is evidenced in Evans's most recent video work, aptly titled 'Walking on Words'. In taking

literally an Acknowledgement of Country, the artist 'walks the talk', moving her feet along the continuous, calligraphed path of Aboriginal Territory that envelopes us all. If *UNstable* comes with a message, it also ends with a question: Well, audience, what will we do now?

Neika Lehman

Based in Narrm on Kulin Country since 2014 Neika Lehman is a Trawlwoolway writer and artist.

1. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talking Up to the White Woman*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 2001, pg. xvi.
2. Megan Evans personal communication to Neika Lehman, 21/08/2020. Email.
3. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, dir. Peter Weir, B.E.F., 1975, 115 mins.
4. *We of the Never Never*, dir. Igor Auzins, Umbrella Entertainment, 1982, 121 mins



List of works

Reveal | KELOID #1

The Three Graces 2012
digital print on rag, charcoal eucalyptus leaves, pins

Witness 2013
engraving on antique hand mirror
[page 3]

Blackened 2014
digital print on rag paper, charcoal eucalyptus leaves, pins

Dis eased 2014
digital print on rag paper, eucalyptus leaves, pins

Family Tree 2014
dressmakers table, modelling clay, wire, digital print on rag paper, dressmakers pins
[page 4]

Squatters and Savages | KELOID # 4

Peeyal (Tribute to Les Griggs) & Video Stranger 2014
piano stool, tapestry cotton, digital television, velvet, glass beads, HDV video 10:33 mins
[page 5]

Settle - Patrick John Kelly 2016
antique colonial chair, velvet, glass beads, cotton
[page 20]

Sovereign 2016
antique colonial bedroom chair, leather, carving forks

Fire Screen 2017
antique fire screen, velvet, glass beads, cotton
[page 5]

[page 19]

Proof 2017
found chaise lounge, rabbit fur, Victorian double barrel and single barrel shotguns, star pickets, embroidery cotton, glass beads

Parlour | KELOID # 6

Whine table 2016
engraved antique wine table

Parlour - Maree 2019
digital print on rag paper
[page 8]

The Observance of Objects | KELOID # 7

Isabella and Patrick 2019
digital print on rag

Isabella's helmet 2019
digital print on rag paper
[page 7]

Rabbits and Wrongs 2019
digital print on rag

UNstable | KELOID #8

Bone Orchard 2018
Victorian antique mahogany tilt top wine table, antique silver soup spoons and label, brass fixtures

Sweet Thing 2018
Antique mahogany wine table, antique silver sugar spoons, antique silver water jug, brass fixtures
[page 2]

This Whispering 2018
Victorian antique flame mahogany tilt top table, antique silver tea pots, coffee pots, brass fixtures
[page 18]

Edge (of empire) 2019-20
found antique chaise, ebony and silver antique knives, #3black acrylic paint

UNstable table 2019
antique wine table, EPNS silver objects, brass bolts, #3 black acrylic paint
[page 15]

UNstable aesthetic 1-10, 2019
antique silver plated objects, #3black acrylic paint, brass fixtures

UNstable aesthetic 11-17, 2019-20
antique silver plated objects, #3black acrylic paint, brass fixtures
[page 1, 11]

She and I 2020
lenticular print
[page 10]

Walking on my words #1 and #2 2020
HD video
Duration 4:26 and 4:54

from the *REpainting* series 2020
[page 12, 16, 17]

All the silver spoons
gouache on paper, on timber

Carving
gouache on antique newspaper, on timber

Locked
gouache on antique newspaper

Under Key
gouache on antique newspaper

Historical Sketch
gouache on antique newspaper

On the sheep's back
gouache on antique newspaper

Harbour Trusts to Lunacy
gouache on antique book 'Victoria Statues' 1883

Markets to Public Works
gouache on antique book 'Victoria Statues' 1884

Rabbits Suppression to Wrongs
gouache on antique book 'Victoria Statues' 1865

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First published in 2021 by
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