In a fresh take on Australian colonial history, Ross Gibson brilliantly speculates on the life and notebooks of astronomer William Dawes – an enigmatic colonist who was the first to make extensive records of any Aboriginal language.

Dawes was a First Fleet Marine at Sydney Cove in the years when Britain seized the country, yet he also shared ideas and language with a small group of Aboriginal people that he encountered. Dawes called his collaborators ‘the Eora’; they told him it was their word for ‘people’.

The Eora would utter skeins of sound; in response Dawes would record raveled stains in the notebooks he carried. These crucial relics were re-discovered in 1972 at the University of London.

Fragmentary and intriguing, these 26 vignettes are both imaginative and historical, to be criss-crossed or read in order, provoking new insights and debates from this paradoxical man and his encounters.

A historical figure about whom little information survives, this account of the man and his work is deliberately multi-faceted in response to the ambiguities of Dawes’ character.

26 Views of the Starburst World captures the wonder of a new world opening up and reflects the power of language in exquisite prose.

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Dawes and the Eora have previously been given attention in the SBS series First Australians and Kate Grenville’s novel The Lieutenant. A film about Dawes, called The Comet, is also in production.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ross Gibson is an Australian writer and researcher who also makes films and multi-media environments, and is currently Professor of Contemporary Arts in the Sydney College of the Arts, at the University of Sydney. Ross was previously the Creative Director at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and spent several years as a Consultant Producer for the Museum of Sydney. This is the twelfth book he has authored or edited.