Aileen Palmer – poet, translator, political activist, adventurer – was the daughter of two writers prominent in Australian literature in the first half of the twentieth century. Vance and Nettie Palmer were well known as novelists, poets, critics and journalists, and Nettie suspected that their eldest would grow up with ‘ink in her veins’.

Aileen certainly inherited her parents’ talents, publishing poetry, translating the work of Ho Chi Minh, and recording what she referred to as ‘semi-fictional bits of egocentric writing’. She also absorbed their interest in leftist politics, joining the Communist Party at university. This, combined with her bravery, led to participation in the Spanish Civil War and the ambulance service in London during World War II.

The return to Australia was not easy, and Aileen never successfully reintegrated into civilian life. In Ink in Her Veins Sylvia Martin paints an honest and moving portrait in which we see a talented woman slowly brought down by war, family expectations, and psychiatric illness and the sometimes cruel ‘treatments’ common in the 20th century.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Sylvia Martin is a scholar based at the University of Tasmania. Her previous publications include Passionate Friends: Mary Fullerton, Mabel Singleton and Miles Franklin (Onlywomen Press 2001), and Ida Leeson: a Life - not a blue-stockling lady (Allen & Unwin 2006).

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INK IN HER VEINS
The Troubled Life of Aileen Palmer
by Sylvia Martin

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PRAISE FOR INK IN HER VEINS

Poet, writer, translator, Aileen Palmer – eldest daughter of Vance and Nettie Palmer, sister of Helen – volunteered for service in the Spanish Civil War and for Ambulance work in London during the second World War. This vivid study highlights her courageous struggle for freedom and self-definition as a writer and political activist in Melbourne's post war literary and arts community.

Sylvia Martin, author of the classic study of Ida Leeson, the Mitchell Librarian, has had unrivalled access to hitherto unexplored archives, and presents a memorable group portrait of interwoven lives.

–Vivian Smith, poet and writer

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