

THE AUSTRALIAN

Clive James pens own 'cheaper' obituary

By **KERRI-ANN ROPER**
PRESS ASSOCIATION
10:44AM NOVEMBER 28, 2019

Clive James penned his own obituary before he died aged 80, saying it would "serve as a cheaper obituary than anything most newspapers are likely to have in the freezer".

The erudite and charismatic author, broadcaster and critic added he would be "updating it until they carry me to the slab, during which journey I will try to give details of my final medication".

In the piece, published on his official website, clivejames.com, he documents his early literary beginnings as the editor of the University of Sydney's student newspaper, *Honi Soit*.

He later travelled to London where he read at Cambridge University and it was during his time there that he gained further notoriety for his writing skills.

In his own words, his "prominence in extracurricular activities having attracted the attention of the London literary editors".

The author details how his rise to literary prominence was not without irony - as the article that gained much attention did not have his byline on it.

The online obituary explains: "At the invitation of Ian Hamilton, who as well as editing the Review was assistant editor of the Times Literary Supplement - which was still holding at the time to its traditional policy of strict anonymity - the new man in town was given several pages of the paper for a long, valedictory article about Edmund Wilson."

The resulting piece, which was called *The Metropolitan Critic*, "aroused widespread speculation as to its authorship".

The obituary adds that among the respondents was the author Graham Greene, who "wrote to the editor asking for their congratulations to be passed on, and it became a point of honour in the literary world to know the masked man's real identity".

He spent 10 years as a TV reviewer for The Observer and "gradually became a prominent television performer himself".

His wide-ranging literary achievements include four novels, poetry books and travel writings.

His talents extended to the world of music and he collaborated on many albums with Pete Atkin, including tours and a stint at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

It was in 2010 that "he fell seriously ill and was diagnosed with leukaemia and COPD", a condition described as a "group of lung conditions that cause breathing difficulties".

The obituary tells how "during his long illness, he came increasingly to focus on writing poetry", with his 2014 offering titled Japanese Maple becoming a hit.

James spent two seasons of 2019 working on The Fire of Joy, an anthology.

It followed what the obituary describes as "a long and ultimately unsuccessful operation to remove a cancer on his cheek in February 2019, which left him frail and almost blind".

He finished the book a month before his death and it is due to be published in 2020.