

## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Clive James was smart and witty to the end: Bruce Beresford

By **ASHLEIGH WILSON**, ARTS EDITOR  
2:13PM NOVEMBER 29, 2019 •  COMMENTS

Bruce Beresford and [Clive James](#), their friendship spanning six decades, caught up for the final time in England three weeks ago. Beresford had travelled to Cambridge, twice, to say goodbye. He had gone to share memories with a man who was close to the end but still busy making sense of the world around him.

“The brain wasn’t affected at all,” Beresford says. “His range of interests was just so incredible. People dying aren’t in great shape but he was as smart and witty as ever. We talked about poets and poetry and books and translations.”

**READ MORE:** [Clive James’ own obituary to himself](#) | [Obituary: Clive James and his long goodbye](#) | [Geordie Williamson — Clive’s lives](#) | [Troy Bramston — Clive James’s mini-epic a major flowering of ‘honest, reliable memoirs’](#)

On Thursday, as the world digested the news that James had passed away, aged 80, Beresford looked back with affection on the career of one of Australia’s great cultural exports. The filmmaker was 19 when he first met James at Sydney University. Later in London, they shared a house in Holland Park beside a young Brett and Wendy Whiteley before developing a close bond that lasted a lifetime.

In recent years, James made no secret about his poor health, and Beresford had been bracing for this week’s news for a long time. A statement from James’s agent released early on Thursday morning, Australian time, noted that his death on Sunday came almost 10 years after his first terminal diagnosis and one month after he laid down his pen for the last time.

Beresford will remember his friend as an “exhilarating companion”.

“He was always fabulous company, and so funny,” Beresford says. “We saw each other regularly over that 60 years. There were periods when I would be away filming and all that, but we

always stayed in touch.”

As his admirers know well, James was a versatile talent and a formidable intellect, full of curiosity as a poet, critic and broadcaster. Asked which part of James’s work he most enjoyed, Beresford points to the poetry and those “hilariously funny” volumes of autobiography.

“I was always fascinated by the range of his interests and how perceptive his comments were about everything,” he says. “It didn’t matter what you were talking about — it could be poetry or books or politics or economics — he was always interesting. He’d thought it through.

“And he was very, very thorough. But never pedantic. He was always approachable and easy to talk to, witty, and he never got carried away with his celebrity. He was very charming. And he always had interesting things to say.”

#### **ASHLEIGH WILSON, ARTS EDITOR**

Ashleigh Wilson has been arts editor since 2011. He has been at the paper for more than 15 years in various roles around the country, including several years as Darwin correspondent. In 2006, he and Nicolas Rot... [Read more](#)

#### **More stories on this topic**

- [When autumn came](#)
- [James’s Kogarah idyll lives on](#)
- [Critic who bridged cultural divide](#)

#### **Topics**

[Clive James](#)