

The

# Victorian Writer

Tension

|

Feb-Mar 2020







# NT Writers Festival Darwin

14–17 May 2020

Gunamidirra garawa birditj | When the tides turn

Artwork: Fiona Hall, *Mangrove* 2010, etching on Hahnemühle cotton rag paper, 79.5 x 94 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.



[ntwriters.com.au](http://ntwriters.com.au)



Australian Government



Art Series Hotels

Contemporary, boutique interiors, featuring artwork by John Blackman.

452 St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Just the place for creativity.

## Editorial – Angela Savage

---

When we came up with Tension as a theme for 'The Victorian Writer', we had no idea that we'd be releasing this issue during one of the most tense periods in Australia in living memory. As bushfires rage across the country, the fate of entire communities, human and animal, rests on a sudden wind change, an unpredictable lightning strike. For those who have studied climate change, however, there is nothing sudden nor unpredictable about the current crisis.

'We need writers to tell the stories of these times,' urges Chris McKenzie in her PEN Melbourne column. But how do we tell those stories in ways that make people want to read them?

A key part of the answer lies in the concept of narrative tension. As Sarah Epstein explains in 'Tension in Storytelling', we need to hook readers in and engage them to keep them reading. Charles Reade's famous formula for storytelling was, 'Make em laugh; make em cry; make em wait.' Bestselling Australian crime writer Michael Robotham, in our exclusive interview, adds his own writing mantra: 'Make them care.'

Justine Sless's short story 'Jumble' captures a moment of explosive tension during the UK miners' strike.

Narrative is by no means the only source of tension in writers' lives. The pathway to publication is seldom swift or smooth. In 'On Waiting', Alice Bishop describes how her timely collection of short stories about bushfire, 'A Constant Hum', was actually ten years in the making.

Our digital writer in residence Bel Woods writes of fragility, which creates its own kind of tension: insecurity, imposter syndrome and self-sabotage all impacting on writing practice. Rosey Chang explores similar themes in 'Confidence Trick', offering practical steps to move beyond anxiety.

Also in this issue, we have an interview with crime writer Helen FitzGerald by Jacqui Byron. And Robert Whalley reflects on the impact of changing technology over a life of writing.

Finally, having opened this editorial with the bushfires, I want to close by acknowledging the response of the literary industry to the crisis. In January, a Twitter-based auction devised by YA writers Emily Gale and Nova Weetman using the hashtag #AuthorsForFireys saw over 800 writers, editors, illustrators and other artists donate their time, works, support and skills to raise funds for the Country Fire Authority and other bushfire appeals. At the time of writing, the auction had raised over \$500,000 and counting – an extraordinary outcome from a group of artists not exactly renowned for our disposable income.

At Writers Victoria, we are committed to supporting our vibrant and generous writing community through these tense times.

**Cover image: 'Ascension' by Sonia Kretschmar, a well-established illustrator/artist/ animator/teacher based in Melbourne. Clients have included Walker Books, illustrating the covers of the 'Dragonkeeper' series by Caroline Wilkinson, and the Harper Collins' 'Whimsy and Woe' by Rebecca McRitchie.**

**Acknowledgement**

The Writers Victoria office is situated on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation.

# Writing Prizes

## . Flash Fiction

Judge: Tania Hershman

Word limit: 300

Closes: 28 Feb '20

10 from each prize will be  
published in the

FISH ANTHOLOGY 2020

## . Poetry

Judge: Billy Collins

Word limit: 300

Closes: 31 March '20

**PRIZES:** \$6,000 fund

incl week at Writers' Retreat,  
Anam Cara (Ireland)

Entry Fee: \$22 (\$12 subsequent)

*Details & Online Entry:*

**www.fishpublishing.com**

Fish Publishing, Durrus, Co. Cork, Ireland



**30 May 2020**

**Melbourne  
Town Hall**

## Meet the Publishers

A chance to meet Australia's top publishers & agents

Alex Adsett

Affirm Press

Allen & Unwin

Danielle Binks

Berbay

Donna Rawlins

EK Books

Jacinta di Mase

Justine Barker

Ford Street Publishing

Hachette Australia

Hardie Grant Egmont

HarperCollins Australia

Lake Press

Larrikin

MidnightSun Books

Penguin Random House

Scholastic Australia

Scribble

Text Publishing

UQP

Walker Books Australia

Wild Dog

Windy Hollow Books

**Bookings open  
10 February, 8pm (AESDT)**

Scholarships available.

See website for details

[kidlitvic.com.au](http://kidlitvic.com.au)

[kidlitvic@gmail.com](mailto:kidlitvic@gmail.com)

# Advertise with Writers Victoria

**and engage with our passionate community**

**Writers Victoria offers affordable advertising to a targeted audience of readers and writers from across Victoria and beyond. We have a variety of packages available across our print and online channels.**

Download our ad kit at  
[writersvictoria.org.au/about-us/advertise-us](http://writersvictoria.org.au/about-us/advertise-us)  
or contact us at [info@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@writersvictoria.org.au)

**WRITERS**  
VICTORIA  
All about writers



### The Victorian Writer

**Director/Editor** Angela Savage  
**Editorial Committee** Anna Brasier,  
 Kirstie Reeve, Cory Zanon

**Magazine Coordinator** Kirsten Krauth

**Printing** Metro Printing

**Distribution** Melbourne Mailing

'The Victorian Writer' is printed on paper that is partly recycled and uses pulp from well-managed forests. Vegetable-based inks and environmental practices are used in the printing process.

### Subscribe

Receive all editions of The Victorian Writer with Writers Victoria membership from \$50/year. Join or renew memberships at [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au) or phone 03 9094 7855.

### Submit

Submissions on upcoming themes are welcome from Writers Victoria members at least two issues in advance. Please see themes listed online first.

### Advertise

For enquiries about advertising in 'The Victorian Writer' or in the enews, program or online, see [writersvictoria.org.au/about-us/advertise-us](http://writersvictoria.org.au/about-us/advertise-us) or email [editor@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:editor@writersvictoria.org.au).

### Disclaimer

While information is printed in good faith, Writers Victoria can take no responsibility for its accuracy or integrity. Inclusion of content, including advertising material, does not imply endorsement by Writers Victoria. Views expressed are not necessarily those of Writers Victoria staff or committees.

### Contact

Writers Victoria Inc,  
 Level 3, The Wheeler Centre,  
 176 Little Lonsdale St  
 Melbourne VIC 3000  
 03 9094 7855 | [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au)  
 Email [info@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@writersvictoria.org.au)  
 ABN 18 268 487 576 | ISSN 2203-1197  
 ASN A0019533Z

### Staff

**Director/Editor** Angela Savage  
**Communications** TBC  
**Program** Kate Cuthbert  
**Competitions** Deanne Sheldon-Collins  
**Membership** Frances Terrett  
**Finance** Flora Lun  
**Studios/Online Clinics** Emma Mackenzie  
**Write-ability** Lyndel Caffrey, Andy Jackson  
**Digital Communications** Leah McIntosh  
**Publishability** Jax Jacki Brown

## Features

**On Waiting**  
 Alice Bishop 6

**Tension in Storytelling**  
 Sarah Epstein 8

**Compulsive, Heart-Stopping**  
 Angela Savage + Michael Robotham 10

**Jumble**  
 Justine Sless 12

**Into the Miraculous Squall**  
 Bel Woods 14

## Fiction/Creative/Non-Fiction

**Cultural Adaptation**  
 Jacqui Byron + Helen FitzGerald 16

**That Final Dessication**  
 Robert Whalley 20

**Confidence Trick**  
 Rosey Chang 22

## Regulars

**PEN: Update**  
 Chris McKenzie 19

**Nitpicker**  
 Penny Johnson 19

**Workshops and Courses** 24

**Milestones/Classifieds** 29

**Comps and Opps** 29

# On Waiting

Alice Bishop plays the long waiting game to publish her first collection 'A Constant Hum'

---

## Things take the time they take.

**Don't worry.** — Mary Oliver

I keep the above quote Blu-tacked to the fridge. Sometimes I forget about it and then, looking up — usually from a rushed before-office coffee, often on a day when I haven't written for weeks — I remember: it's okay for things to take the time they need to take. Writing projects can take months (if not years) of patience, a lot of work, plenty of procrastinating and, especially in the publishing world, lots (and lots) of waiting.

Published six months ago, my first book, 'A Constant Hum', is a collection of short fiction about bushfire. I had been compiling the stories of Black Saturday aftermath, mainly in scattered notebooks, on the backs of receipts and in my head, since the day we drove back to find our house, along with the bush we knew as home, turned to the softest blue-grey ash. I'll always remember the eerie quiet of that smoke-tainted weekend — all the colours and the birds disappeared.

I was 22 when these bushfires of 2009 burnt through over 2,029 houses and almost incomprehensibly killed 180 people. I didn't, at first, think I'd ever write about it. But once the basic practicalities had been sorted for our family (temporary housing, clothes, shoes and cutlery for the new rental's drawers) I felt a drive to document the quieter sense of loss bushfire causes — the often-lingering struggles communities face for years and years following fires of that historic scale.

If you'd — back then — asked me how long I thought it would take to put a book together, from first draft to print (assuming everything worked out perfectly) I would have said, at

most, well, maybe a few years? I didn't factor in potential work or personal life fog. Or the almost inevitable setbacks, the pretty much guaranteed rejections or the handful of semi-indifferent emails: 'We love this, but it's not for us right now — would really love to see it when you've worked on it more.'

But the good emails did eventually come. The shortlistings and the actual book too — read across Australia and overseas. It just took a bit longer than a few years.

Almost a decade after Black Saturday, and just recently, really (August 2018), I was 32 and finally holding a freshly printed and signed publishing contract for 'A Constant Hum' in my hands. It was a decade of getting close, then closer, then not so close at all. It was years of feeling I was either just at the edge of something big — getting shortlisted or longlisted for a prize, having short stories and essays published — or feeling as if I was kidding myself completely, that the stories I'd been working on would never see the light as a collection.

Recently at Broadside Festival 2019, I was lucky to see Zadie Smith speak on her own incomparable success:

'Is this good or am I deluded? As a writer you're always managing your self-love, your self-hatred: both of which are always excessive.'

I think about those lines a lot.

\*

There were months in the decade that followed Black Saturday where I worked on the stories of 'A Constant Hum' constantly, on my office

job lunch breaks, in interstate airport café chains, sneakily on weekends and holidays, and many more months where I wrote for only an hour or so every few weeks. I had work and a social life, relationships and share houses to move in and out of – all the things that, in different ways, fed into my work. There was love and heartbreak, health and illness, financial stress and months of feeling content. There was doubt and hope. There was so much of everything.

But it was this time, and the roundabouts of everyday life, that ended up giving texture and depth to 'A Constant Hum'. The amount of time I had to research, process, gather and think, led to a book that was much more nuanced in the end. With the years I got to step back and look at the project more clearly.

Time allowed me to include the months following fire where everything turned the colours of rained-on rust, a colour that, strangely now, still feels like home. I began to realise that sitting on the deck of our rebuilt house would make me feel far enough from Black Saturday to lace that feeling – of looking back, and seeing the hope in regrowth – through the last few stories.

\*

Few writers, if any, are handed book deals and guaranteed success. The dream stories, whispered excitedly through writing sessions and courses, of people picked up out of the blue off a slush pile or from a single successful piece online (think 'Cat Person'), are often just that: stories of the lucky few. My experience of getting a book published, like so many writers, was more often shared confessions of wracked-up Submittable rejections, along with pleasant yet disappointing emails from editors such as: 'These stories aren't really for us, this time, but best of luck.'

Despite the high-highs and low-lows of the last ten years – and maybe those fluctuations are just what it means to be human – writing and reading have helped me to stay grounded through the white-noise blur: my office day job, ending relationships, balancing friendships and money.

When I'm writing (and reading) I get to take notice again: the smell of toast in a city

apartment, or the wattle powder – yellow dust across my father's flannel shoulders like snow. Writing and reading can be a simple but (easily forgotten) thing in a world with so many distracting feeds.

\*

Quoting William Burroughs, Patti Smith says:

'Don't worry about making a bunch of money or being successful. Be concerned with doing good work. And make the right choices and protect your work. And if you can build a good name, eventually that name will be its own currency.'

I'm not sure what people think of when they see my name on the spine of 'A Constant Hum', in the library, a bookshop or in op shops across Australia, as people surely will, in years to come. I do know, however, that I gave it my all. I thought about the work, did the work, procrastinated about the work and edited the work in a genuine way for years and years. And that itself is enough; I can stand tall beside the book knowing I gave it my best shot. There's comfort in that.

In blurrier moments I still worry how long it will take to write the next thing. I worry that I might not get the second manuscript accepted, that I'll somehow miss the mark. I worry that I'll spend hours and week and months and years putting effort into something that'll never see the light. But that's how I felt with 'A Constant Hum'.

I do know that I am concerned with doing good work and – although you can sometimes forget it with the white noise of Twitter updates and Instagram feeds and, well, life – good work can sometimes take a lot of time.

It's something I always forget.

██

**Alice Bishop is a writer from Christmas Hills, Victoria. Her first book, 'A Constant Hum', tracks the ten-year fallout of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. It was shortlisted for the 2019 Readings Prize for New Australian Fiction. She now lives in Thornbury.**

# Tension in Storytelling

Sarah Epstein on how to hook an audience using crime fiction

---

As I wait with bated breath to find out what readers will think of my upcoming new YA crime novel, I've been reflecting on how I got started in this whole storytelling caper in the first place. Specifically, how I learned to hook an audience and keep them engaged in a story rippling with tension. It's not something I actively studied, nor is it something I could effectively teach. For me it comes down to instinct, pacing and revision, three key things I learned through verbal storytelling when I was young.

On a Saturday evening sometime in the late 80s, when I was around 14 years old, my parents left me and my younger sister home alone at night for the first time. They popped out for dinner with friends at a local restaurant, and I assured them I was old enough to remain at home with my sister. After my parents left, I made a big production of walking around our two-storey house making sure all the doors and windows were locked, mostly to reassure my sister she was in very capable hands. As darkness set in, I made sure the cat was inside and the curtains were drawn, and we then set ourselves up for an evening of TV and pizza.

Usually we'd be unfazed by our home's familiar settling noises – it was an old house and we were used to its creaks and groans. But we also grew up on a diet of 80s horror movies. So when we heard three very clear creaks like footsteps along the upstairs landing, we were convinced somebody was inside the house.

I put on a brave face for my sister, but my mind was racing. Of course somebody would sneak in the one and only time my parents left us alone at night. This stranger must have been watching the house. How did they get in? What if they'd been inside the whole

time? Wardrobes would need to be checked. Underneath beds. Behind doors. We couldn't possibly laugh this off and continue watching TV with the staircase at our backs – in horror movies that's rookie error number one! Armed with a bread knife and a can of Mortein, I ordered my sister to stay in the living room for her own protection before realising I was committing rookie error number two: splitting up. Instead, I handed her a rolling pin and told her to stay close.

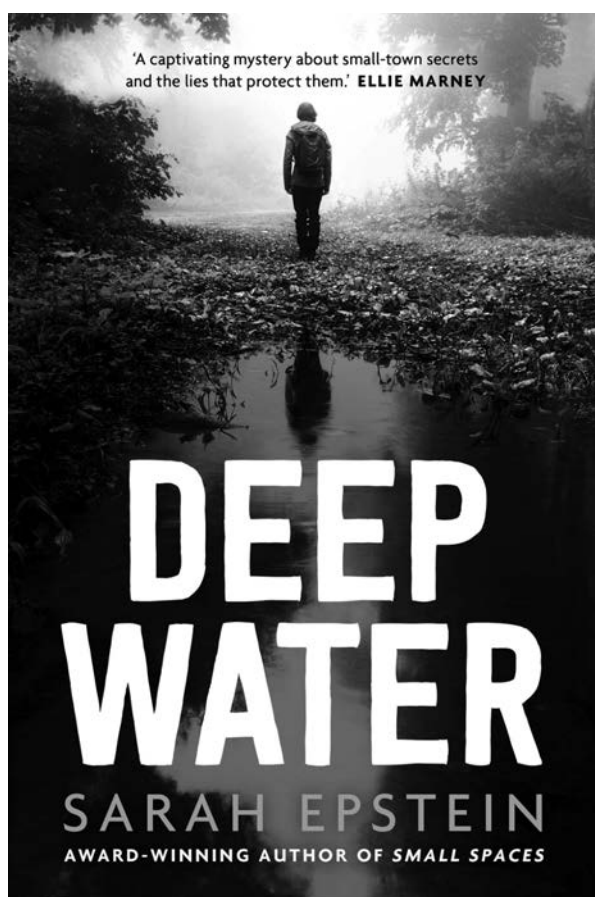
It goes without saying my vivid imagination fed nicely into the situation we found ourselves in, eliminating rooms one by one, panic rising with every step. A writer's mind is always playing with what-ifs, growing the seeds of ideas long after most people have shrugged and moved on. A writer's mind lingers and entertains different scenarios, and in my case, my imagination can always come up with ways of how any given situation could go from bad to worse. So my sister and I searched every room in the house that evening and found absolutely nothing. When we finally returned to the living room and our cold pizza, feeling giddy with relief and slightly foolish, things were not quite how we'd left them. One of the couch's seat cushions was mysteriously askew.

'Did you do that?' I asked my sister.

'No,' she replied. 'Did you?'

We both eyed each other with suspicion, but it didn't really matter what the truth was. Our story had now taken a supernatural turn. Just wait till we told people! This was going to blow their tiny minds! We were absolutely bursting by the time our parents came home, but as we relayed our eventful evening to them, they rolled their eyes and chuckled, akin to patting us on the heads and saying, 'That's nice.' They





didn't understand the gravity of what we'd been through.

Instinct told me I was going to have to adjust the way I explained the circumstances to the next person if I wanted them to understand what was racing through our minds, the way our hearts thundered as we searched room by room, dread growing with every step, terrorised by our own shadows. I needed them to understand the set-up, the context, the agonising search and the stunning twist of the wonky couch cushion.

And so the story grew darker and tenser with every telling. It didn't matter that the creaking sound was most likely a floorboard shrinking in the cool of the evening. It didn't matter that it was probably one of us who had knocked the couch cushion askew in our rush to arm ourselves with kitchen utensils. I learned that people were entertained by the building suspense, hanging off every word, wanting to know where the story was going and willing to come along for the ride. I was gauging their reactions, and then revising and refining my skills in narrative tension before I even knew what it meant.

I learned there are ways of telling the same story to achieve a different impact. And this is a tool we use as storytellers. We want to engage readers, ease them into the narrative and hook them with an inciting incident like the creaking floorboards. We want them to understand our point of view and investigate alongside us, thinking we are perfectly reasonable for arming ourselves with a bread knife and a can of Mortein. We want to pace the unfolding events so readers are suspended in a state of rising tension, chewing their fingernails upon hearing about every agonising step of the search, peeking through fingers as we describe looking under beds and behind doors. And as we lead them into the story's climax, we deliver a conclusion that rewards them for being so invested. Even better if there's a twist they never saw coming.

The what-if questions planted the seeds for my two novels, 'Small Spaces' and 'Deep Water', and instinct, pacing and revision are what shaped them into suspenseful page-turners. Just as important as what the story is about, is how we tell it. Narrative tension is what can transform a very ordinary Saturday night in sleepy suburbia into quite another gripping tale altogether.

---

**Sarah Epstein is an award-winning Australian author, illustrator and designer. Her debut novel 'Small Spaces' is a CBCA Honour Book, winner of the Davitt Award for Best YA Crime Novel, and was shortlisted for another seven awards including the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards and the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature. Her suspenseful new YA crime novel 'Deep Water' will be released in April 2020.**

[sarahepsteinbooks.com](http://sarahepsteinbooks.com)

# Compulsive, heart-stopping

Angela Savage chats to Michael Robotham about crime psychology and creating conflict

---

Michael Robotham is one of Australia's most successful crime writers. His psychological thrillers, a mix of series and standalone novels, have been translated into 25 languages and published in more than 50 countries, with several adapted and in the process of being adapted for television. His books have won multiple awards in Australia and overseas, including the 2015 Crime Writers Association Gold Dagger for 'Life or Death'. Former President of the Australian Crime Writers Association, Michael agreed to let Angela Savage interrogate him specially for 'The Victorian Writer'.

**Michael, thank you for participating in this Q&A. As someone whose work has been described as 'compulsive', 'chilling', 'heart stopping' and 'pulse-pounding', I thought you were the perfect guest for this edition on Tension. Let's start with the basics: what creates narrative tension in a story?**

Three words. Conflict. Conflict. Conflict. This is true of any storytelling whether you are writing a romance, a whodunit, a thriller, or a literary novel. Your protagonist must want something but somebody or something is standing in his or her way. Will the boy get the girl? Will the detective solve the crime? Will the bomb be defused in time? Will they land their dream job? Without conflict there is no tension. Perfect lives and perfect people make for boring stories.

**Your books are described as psychological thrillers. What defines a psychological thriller and how does it differ from, say, a classic crime novel (whodunit?) or murder mystery?**

I'm interested in human behaviour and the psychology of the crime. There are typically questions that have to be answered: what, when, who, how and why – the why is the most important to me. What went through the

mind of the killer and the victim? What was the motivation? What is the psychological impact of the crime on the investigators, the victim's family and the perpetrator?

**Your stories often start with a compelling premise or unanswered question that kick-starts the tension from the very first page. Describe for us how you come up with a compelling premise using examples from your work.**

Almost all of my ideas for novels are seeded in real-life events or incidents – stories that I covered when I was a journalist, or that I collect because I'm a complete news junkie, who devours newspapers every day.

The idea for 'Life or Death' came from a two-paragraph story in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' in March 1985, when I read about a convicted killer who escaped from prison the day before he was due to be released. I kept hold of that cutting for more than 20 years, knowing it held the seed of a novel if I could just answer the question: Why?

'The Night Ferry' was triggered by a story I read about an Albanian woman trafficked into sexual slavery, who fell pregnant while working off her debt to people smugglers. Rather than force her to have an abortion, these men made her give birth and auctioned the baby on the internet.

'The Wreckage' arose out of reading a Pulitzer prize-winning article about the airlifting of planeloads of cash to Baghdad after the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Between April 2003 and June 2004, a total of \$12 billion of U.S. currency was shipped to Iraq, of which \$9 billion vanished without trace, lost in the fog of war.

**Stephen King praises the ‘whipcrack pacing’ of your writing. What are some of the dos and don’ts when it comes to maintaining a cracking pace in fiction?**

More than any other element of writing, I think pacing is a gut feeling rather than something that can be taught. Each writer has to ‘feel’ when the story is slowing down, or when it’s time to give the reader space to draw breath and relax, before slowly building the tension again.

I often think the pace in my storytelling is a reflection of how slowly I write. What most readers will consume in a night before they turn off the light, will take me weeks to create and polish. This makes me think the story is moving too slowly, so I often try to speed it up. It’s only later when I’m re-writing and editing, that I realise the story is generating its own momentum and I needn’t have been so worried. I also tend to rush the ending because I’m so relieved to have found one (evidence that I don’t plot in advance). This is why I often have to go back to the ending and add material to give the reader moments when they can savour the tension, or emotion.

**What is the role of character when it comes to creating narrative tension or suspense? I ask this because when we think of what creates narrative tension, we tend to think about structure, plot and pacing. Yet it seems to me that character is central to what makes your own writing so heart stopping.**

I dislike three-word slogans (for many reasons) but my writing mantra would be this: MAKE THEM CARE. This doesn’t mean that all of your main characters have to be likeable, but they must be compelling. Narrative tension is automatically created once you put a compelling character in danger or have him or her confront a terrible dilemma. We have all watched TV dramas, or read books, where half-way through we realise that we don’t care about a single character. Who wins, who loses, who lives, who dies – we just don’t care. This is the death of good storytelling.

**I’m struck by the visceral responses reviewers have to your books: they talk about ‘nail-biting’ and ‘white-knuckled’ suspense, ‘trembling and shaking’, even ‘tissue-chewing’. How does a writer evoke these kinds of visceral responses in a reader?**

One of my favourite reviews described how she read with one hand over her eyes and the other over the page ahead because she didn’t want to know what happened next. That’s an enormous compliment.

I am my first ‘reader’, which means my writing has to trigger these responses in me first. I have to be frightened. I have to cry. I have to tremble and shake. It helps, perhaps, that I don’t plot the stories out, which means they unfold on the page with all the uncertainty and suspense that a reader must feel. My characters also become very real to me. They live and breathe on the page. When they are in jeopardy, I am with them, clinging to that cliff-face, desperate to escape. I have made myself cry writing the endings of books – not just on the first draft, but every subsequent rewrite.

**Some critics maintain that the conventions of genre fiction – say, the requirement to maintain pace in a thriller – mitigate against great writing.**

I think this comes down to your definition of great writing. If you think great writing involves pages of beautifully crafted prose, describing landscape, and characters; or philosophical treatise about what it is to be human, then maybe thrillers won’t deliver this. Saying that, my favourite crime novels are ‘Smilla’s Feeling for Snow’ by Peter Hoeg and ‘The Secret History’ by Donna Tartt, both books which have been called literary thrillers because they are beautifully written, intelligent, character-driven mysteries.

Genre fiction is a broad church. There are crime novels you will read but not inhale, and will be forgotten almost before you finish, while there are others that can rightly sit alongside the best of literary fiction.

**Any final advice for crime writers?**

We have all had moments of great tension in our lives. We have lost sight of children in busy shopping centres, or worried when somebody we love is late getting home and not answering their phone. We have all been frightened, or experienced sadness, or tragedy. Draw on these emotions. Make people care.



# Jumble

By Justine Sless

---

'Get ready, girls. Get ready. I'm letting them in.' Miss Carruthers's netball skirt twitches as she unbolts the door. The pithead looms silent and still in the morning mist, beyond the restless mob of women who've been waiting an age to be let in.

The crowd surges forward, thunderous, wedging the stall holders behind their tables, against the walls and under the cavernous backdrop of the empty stage. Like bird beaks, the shoppers' hands snap at pullovers, cardigans and cotton dresses. Threads are stretched to breaking point by tug-of-war shenanigans, and barks of 'Ger' off I had it first!' echo through the eaves of St Peter's Church Hall.

From the kitchen hatch a chorus of Girl Guides sings out to the marauding pack of bargain hunters, 'Twenty pence a toffee cake, only twenty pence.'

'I've just come to look me mind, I'll not be wasting me time with these tatty clays.' Mrs McKenty shrugs at Miss Carruthers. Her voice is dull, like her epiglottis is being clasped by the knot of the green headscarf pulled tight under her chin.

Mrs McKenty has a shop in town, stocked with curios from jumble sales. Everything there is sold at high prices to people who come in from the cities to chronicle the strikes.

Clumps of people shout out their orders to the Guides who move as a shoal of fish, preparing tea and serving up toffee cakes with such practised ceremony, it's a wonder that they don't finish on a curtsy. This measured approach is to ensure that they will each be awarded the Hostess Badge for their work today.

An hour in and the Guides have eaten more toffee cakes than they have sold, their fingers and mouths tacky with toffee and dust. The crowd has churned mountains of clothes into valleys and their big black rubbish bags, which

they use rather than their usual smaller string shopping bags, spill over with second-hand clothes.

Mrs McKenty considers the items before her, her face a mask of orange powder that thickens in the cleaves around her furrowed brow. She flicks her fingers against toby jugs, checking for cracks, holds up bone-china items to assess their pedigree, and peers inside lustre vases looking for vestiges of dried flora. 'I'll give yer 50 pence and that's me final offer,' she says, clutching a lustre vase close to her blue mackintosh. The stall holder declines the offer and Mrs McKenty drops the vase back on the table as if she intends to shatter it.

Mrs McKenty moves on, her beige stockings wrinkling further around her spindly ankles with each step. Shoppers keep a wide berth as they pass. Some whisper and nudge each other. She spies a fireplace accessory set leaning against a table and wrenches the poker from it, the brush and pan sway in its absence. The stall holder splutters into their cup of tea, 'You'll be buying that as a set, you will. You can't just take the poker on its own mind.'

'Gobby cow,' Mrs McKenty barks in response. 'I'll buy what I want.' She jabs the air with the poker as a jousting knight would at a tournament, drawing the attention of the crowd. The snatching of items and the rambling crowd halt momentarily. Some shoppers jeer or shake their heads. Some close to Mrs McKenty jolt her as they walk past.

Miss Carruthers, as captain of the netball team and Guides' Leader, has dealt with many a ruckus. She puts on her pink thick-rimmed National Health glasses, pushing them firmly onto her nose, adjusts the knot on her Girl Guide Leader's tie and tugs down her navy-blue pleated skirt. But, as more women push past her to join the scuffle, Miss Carruthers suspects that she'll be needing more than the netball rules on this occasion.

The stallholder and Mrs McKenty are eye to eye now, their necks jutting and jerking like chickens. Mrs McKenty's headscarf has shifted with all of the jostling and her dark hair writhes like vipers across her face. The crowd is a jeering circle around them. Someone yells, 'Put the poker back yer daft git!'

The Guides have given up trying to watch from the kitchen hatch and have scored a ringside view after ducking and weaving through stockinged legs and bulging carrier bags. They giggle at the sight of Miss Carruthers' flipped-up netball skirt that exposes the white fold of a sanitary towel peeking out of her floral knickers on the curve of her bum.

Miss Carruthers automatically pats her clavicle in search of her netball whistle.

'Don't stop shopping now ladies,' her voice is strident. 'There's plenty more bargains to be had.' She puts both hands up, as if demonstrating the best technique for the defence player on a team.

Mrs McKenty sketches a zig zag in the air with the poker, the tip like a burnt match, the handle a shimmering yellow brass. 'Beggars wantin' bargains, the lot of youse,' she shouts. 'We eat scran we've bought, in my house, because my husband's working.'

The crowd surges and roars, 'Scab!'

Miss Carruthers, her mouth agape, turns her defending hands around to cover her face, her fingers splayed as if she is spying on the scene before her.

The Guides wipe their badged arms over their sticky faces and shriek 'Scrap! Scrap! Scrap!' They haven't been so enlivened since the last Guide camp, when Lisa Morrison won, under false pretences, the Entertainer Badge for her costume of chief Womble Uncle Bulgaria. The rules stipulated that costumes had to be made from items to hand at the camp. But Lisa had later admitted in the dark of the cabin that the tartan shawl, cotton-wool beard and the black pipe cleaners for the spectacles had in fact been brought in from home. The Guides had given her what for, and torched her Entertainer's Badge, their faces glowing then as they do now.

The Guides lurch with the crowd, knocking Mrs McKenty to the floor, stamping and kicking

whatever part of the woman they can find. The stall holder takes the fallen poker and moves it over Mrs McKenty's body like she is broddling a fire. As the crowd heaves and snarls, the sway of heavy bags thump and clout at Mrs McKenty. Her head bounces rhythmically on the floor. Her body twists. Her headscarf dislodges, lifting for a moment then falling like a flag of surrender at her side. The crowd retreats, breathless like long-distance runners at the finish line.

The doors open to the cold slap of air and the squaw of gulls. The crowd disperses onto the street like tadpoles from a jam jar into a pond. Quietly, the stall holders pack away what is left of their goods into prams and go-carts to take back home.

The Guides hunch together, their heads bent as if in prayer, averting their gaze from the mess before them. Miss Carruthers bends over Mrs McKenty, whose blue mackintosh is now a tattoo of footprints. She feels the dull throb of a pulse on her fingertips. The wailing of the ambulance siren is nearing.

'A bucket of water and the mop, girls.' Miss Carruthers gestures to the rivulets of red oozing from Mrs McKenty's orange powdery face and forming an estuary on the floor boards.

'And for our efforts, Miss?' the Guides chorus.

'The Helper Badge,' Miss Carruthers says, nodding as she stands and brushes down her netball skirt. 'The Helper Badge, for each of you.'

**Justine Sless is a writer and comedian. She grew up in Sunderland in north-east UK, a place that haunts her writing. Justine won the Grace Marion Wilson Prize for Fiction in 2016. Her writing appears in 'Tempest: An Anthology' (Patrician Press) and 'The Journal of Working Class Studies', and will be part of the inaugural Glimmer Press anthology in 2020. Justine has written numerous one-woman shows and tailored comedy pieces for a vast range of audiences and toured her comedy and storytelling nationally and internationally.**

# Into the Miraculous Squall

Bel Woods on the restorative power of grief

---

When I applied for the 'Writers Victoria Only Connect Digital Writer Residency for Carers: Regional and Rural Writers for 2019', I was on autopilot. Two friends had sent me texts, including the link, and my phone sang reminders, but pulling myself out of my grief long enough to apply, seemed impossible. Opportunities like this require you to be confident, diligent, in some way active in the community. I was not any of these things. But I felt I could be again – and that was something – so I pulled out my old computer, the one I'd worn on my hip from the Sandringham line to Glenfern Writers' Studios for almost a year, and tried to remember who I was before my husband died.

Grief had reduced me to the most basic of living. It still does some days. I ate whatever there was, showered rarely, took care of the kids as best I could, and could not remember the last time I looked in the mirror. But I also started writing my first full-length non-fiction project, by hand, in one of the notebooks I'd always used, with a blue pencil I found in the move from Melbourne. Unable to find the motivation to type any of it accurately, I applied with an excerpt of a story I'd been writing in the months before the initial shock, where for ten months – from September to July – I stopped writing altogether.

I don't know what happened to the writing; I don't know what happened to that first year. I'd moved, and had buried Stuart. I'd read a total of six books – what I used to read in two weeks. I'd lost weight, gained weight. I'd aged ... God, how I had aged. The writing I was doing felt meaningful, but I had no plans, no motivation to frame it or give it structure or even make

it digital. It felt like journal writing, though I refused to compromise craft. It wasn't just getting it down. Something made me work the sentences in the same way I always had. Even so, that previous life, the one where I'd been accumulating work, pushing forward despite obstacles – and my writing aspirations were modest – was so far behind me.

After I won the Residency, worries persisted: Do I really have anything to contribute to the writing world at this time? Can I write anything other than this culmination, of memories I'm not yet ready to part with? This wasn't writer's block, it was the absence of the very tools I'd always prided myself in having: imagination, versatility, skill. I felt unfit and out of practice as a writer. I'd already made the switch from literary fiction to genre-based crime upon the birth of my second child, and it had set me back considerably. And now, all I could write about was this trauma and all the while articles were expected, and the Digital Writers Festival loomed. But mostly, all I could think about was how my husband, who was also a writer, would never publish. My writing life still so intrinsically linked to Stuart's.

I met my husband in my very first writing class. It was July 2005, and I was married to another man. We wouldn't get together for years, but in this one tutorial, where most of the students were experienced, Stuart and I were not. He had endured a lot. We knew family as responsibility. Love too. We'd both attended state schools, I'd left early for financial reasons. After that first class, I felt panicky in a way I've never really shaken about higher learning. Circumstances denied me the tools for tertiary education, and,



without them, I didn't feel the comfort of the moor line tension. But Stuart could always see the undercurrents. So when it came to writing, we both turned together into the miraculous squall.

In 2017, twelve years after meeting Stuart, two months before his death, I was preparing for Literary Speed Dating, where you have just minutes to pitch your work-in-progress to either an agent or publisher. It was something I put a great deal of work into, and a time I felt confident. I remember few things from that day. My ellipses earrings and god-awful insecurity. Stuart and I had had a baby, were married, and he'd become stepfather to my teenaged son. He knew my imposter syndrome intimately, and my ability to self-sabotage often shocked him. He'd seen me pull an essay from a prominent academic journal because my son's mental health took a nosedive and I thought I wasn't clear-headed enough to complete the suggested edits. He called me on it, pointed out I could have asked for more time. And I think he was right. What I really was, was ashamed that I had submitted to Text as an undergrad, not realising it was a journal for graduates, and that I didn't really know what being peer-reviewed was until it happened to me.

My heightened levels of insecurity usually mean I tend to obsess and alter my approach until things begin to work. Since pulling that essay years ago, I've focused on showing up, completing work, and fully committing to whatever comes from submission. I think about the pitching event: the packages I photocopied, placed in folders, clear and weatherproofed. I memorised my pitch, researched the publishers and agents. Those folders I now pull out from a box labelled 'Subs and Stuff'. I approached a trade publisher that day. She didn't care that I didn't have a PhD, that I hadn't interned for the Melbourne Writers' Festival, or written for Meanjin. The only question she asked me was why I hadn't published a full-length novel if I'd been writing for so long. I breathed out. It was the first time I had a platform to fully explain to a publisher I was a carer as well as a writer.

I pull out my writing bag from the same box. It's still packed, from my last day at Glenfern. Back then, for the first time in my life, I'd had adequate childcare and a supportive partner. No one talks about the value of a supportive partner in our industry. I wasn't to know that within weeks this part of my life would dissolve and I'd be back living the life of a solo parent; that I'd be writing

with grief and anger, and with that writing, my life would be lonely and guilt-ridden and hard and full. Because this is the crux of it: the thing about someone so close to you dying is that you realise that if you stop, there is nothing left to hold you up.

At his grave, odd thoughts often pop into my head and it's harder to hear what he's telling me now. When something big happens, the other things become temporarily small – quieter. But it's just perspective, and that perspective can shift; it doesn't mean the other things are no longer there. Before, when I was submitting, I would always take it as a certainty that I'd be rejected. Now I have deadlines and no choice but to try. It's going to take me a while to master nonfiction writing and showing people this work too early could be detrimental, but there are people to help and perhaps I can find balance in the interim.

I return to the documents from before Their dates as still as ever. Until now, digital memorials of their own. There is a crossing. Perhaps I could pick up here. Do both. It's not like the years of fiction writing were invalid, I'm just changed. A weathered vessel of PTSD, loss, and their stories, too low in the water. A Bitter End.

An email from Emma Viskic sits in my inbox. This takes me back to the thick of grief, when I received my mentorship with her just days after Stuart died. She nudges me now. I think she realises I'm fragile. It's embarrassing, but at least I'm working on the writing from before. On her instruction, I begin to add action to the final chapter of my novel. I know adrenaline now, I know minutes where seconds count, and I know it all in its wake. Being mentored has helped me realise that there are multitudes to this industry, and we learn as much from our peers as we do from academia. Once 'good or not' used to be all I cared about. Now I realise engagement can happen in the mess of creating, in the edits, and in the reaching out to other writers.

On the inner waves is my other writing, always coming. I can't shut either down now, so I guess I have two channels to explore. Both moored, or unmoored.

**Bel Woods is a WoMentoring Project mentee. This commission was supported by the City of Melbourne Arts Grants Program.**

# Cultural adaptation

Jacqui Byron meets up with crime writer Helen FitzGerald in Edinburgh to talk about moving from the novel to the small screen

---

En route to Bloody Scotland, the international crime fiction festival held in Stirling each September, I had the pleasure of sitting down at Glasgow Women's Library to interview ex-pat Australian author, Helen FitzGerald. As one of the festival's official author-guests she was days away from participating in a number of official events, including a live broadcast of the Two Crime Writers And A Microphone podcast.

Some might know Helen's work from her book 'The Cry' which was adapted (by screenwriter Jacqueline Perskein) into miniseries format by UK production company, Synchronicity Films. It aired on ABC television at the beginning of 2019 and has been on regular iView rotation since. For this ex-Kilmore girl who now calls Glasgow home, 'The Cry' was her sixth book for adults. She had also written two YA novels.

Helen's most recent book, 'Worst Case Scenario', is also set to transition to screens. The story of an off-kilter, menopause-plagued probation officer dealing with some of Glasgow's worst male sex offenders, the story was informed by the author's 10-year stint working as a criminal justice social worker in the same city. Only in 2019 did Helen step down to concentrate on fiction; previously she wrote her novels around her 'day job'.

After an auction process that attracted seven separate bidders, 'Worst Case Scenario' is now in development with a major production company looking to translate it into a series. Helen's contract this time around guarantees her a seat in the writers' room. Claire Mundell, one of the producers of 'The Cry', is also keen for first dabs on the book Helen is currently at work on, titled 'Ash Mountain'.

'The Cry' was the first novel Helen set in Australia and, she says, at the time it was her

best. When it came out in 2013 it was longlisted for the Theakstons Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year. Having lived in Glasgow for more than 20 years and raised two children there, Helen says she never felt like a Scottish author but, similarly, didn't feel like an Australian one either. The confidence to set a book 'back home' came from an unexpected source.

'I wrote what was probably one of my best received pieces ever, just a small article on a BBC website comparing the differences between a day-drive in country Victoria to one in Scotland,' she says. The comments section exploded; people loved her description of repetitive hometown scenery: 'blue sky, yellow grass, gnarled trees, blue sky, yellow grass, gnarled trees.' The same distance in Scotland, she wrote, offered everything from grey skies and brown rivers to black skies, Stirling Castle, green hills and the Kessock Bridge across the Beaully Firth.

'I'd never felt confident to write setting in Scotland but country Victoria was in my bones. I'd lived and breathed it so I was really thrilled and proud to see it up there.'

With 'Ash Mountain', she returns to country Victoria with a 'bushfire' story that is 'not actually' about her hometown of Kilmore but 'about towns like it, ones with a Marist Brother school for instance and lots of nastiness', she says.

Helen is married to scriptwriter Sergio Casci and the pair often work from home, firing questions at each other through walls or across rooms. Originally, they shared two rooms in the attic, an office each, but gradually started moving around the house. 'Let's face it, you can't block life out,' she says. Since then she has tried working in a shared studio 'in town' but found herself having

too much fun with all the artistic types around her. Since leaving the day job she has found it hard to develop a routine. 'I just have to try harder,' she says with a laugh. 'I've been watching 'Housewives' of Everywhere.'

Overall the process of leaving social work initially slowed Helen's writing down. She jokes she is 'writing about a sentence a day', perhaps concerned about how existing fans will react to a book with no UK connections at all (in 'The Cry' the female protagonist is from England, her in-laws from Scotland) or more likely just adjusting to the new lifestyle. She has in the past said she used to sit down and write 3000 words a day, easily, but now finds the process more intense and particular – like she doesn't want to waste 'even a word'.

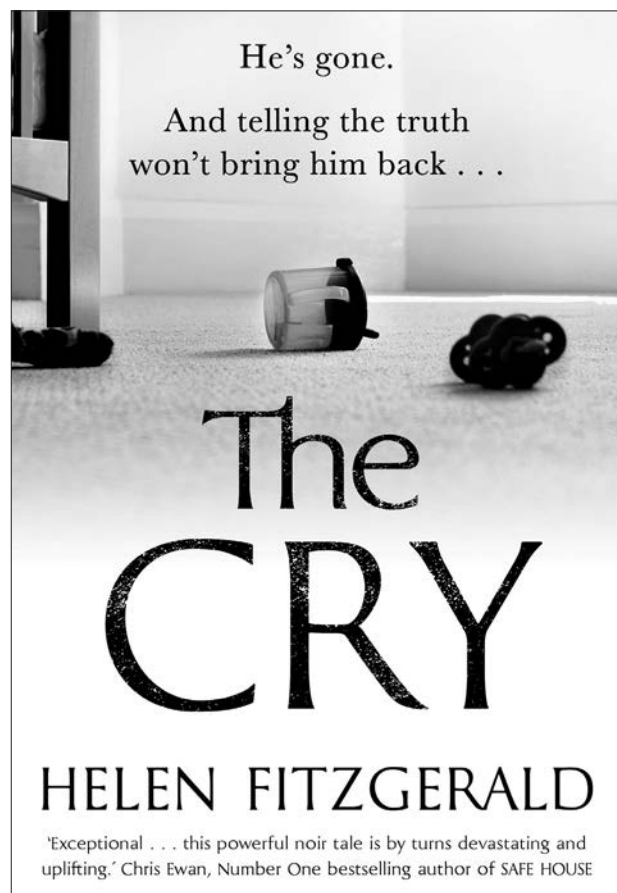
A writer who finds unexpected inspiration from songs, her muse-tune for the current book about country Victoria is actually by American singer, Iris Dement. 'It's called "Our Town" and is about saying goodbye to your hometown,' says Helen. 'With each book, I seem to find one song that I play over and over and it gets me there, to the end.'

Perhaps because Helen is married to a scriptwriter or perhaps because she began her own career writing screenplays ('always romantic comedies or straight comedy') the author seems very relaxed when it comes to the adaption process of her novels. She's at peace with standing back so other creatives can interpret the work.

With 'Worst Case Scenario', however, she says she would love to see a woman heading up any writers' room connected to the screen version. 'It would be too scary for a man to write,' she suggests. 'I think they'd like the story but might not feel they have the authority to write about a lot of it.' (Enthusiastic masturbating and hot flushes are recurrent themes in the book.)

The growing success Helen is enjoying with screen adaptations of her books amuses her considering the time she devoted to actually trying to get scripts up. Once she turned to the novel form, the producers came knocking.

'Claire Mundell and I had been working together on things for a while before 'The Cry',' explains Helen. 'She optioned my very first book in 2007, and a number of others since. In fact, I sent her 'The Cry' before I sent it to my publisher.'



Helen says that conversations with other novelists whose books had leaped from page to TV and film convinced her to switch formats.

The thing I learned is that producers don't read treatments and that's because they're a really shit read. More and more they want to read a book. When it came to 'The Cry' I said to Claire, "Maybe tell me what you're up to but don't tell me anything else."

In the end Helen shared a dinner with screenwriter Jacqueline Perskein where they talked the book over but Helen says it was very clear that the project belonged to the other writer now and she was happy with that.

'I got her and I got that, and boy did she do a good job! Everything they (Synchronicity Films) whittled down I would have done the same or I look at it and think, yeah that was the right thing to do,' says Helen. 'Some changes were made because of funding or practical reasons. For instance, Claire wanted it to be a co-production – half Australia, half Scotland – so that changed where certain events happened. But it didn't bother me at all. In fact, there were times when I thought, God I wish I'd done that.'



# Telling the Stories of These Times



Chris McKenzie gives the PEN Melbourne update

---

As I write the air is dense with smoke and the times are dark with grief, anguish and fury at the inaction of those we have elected to lead the work of making the earth a better place. We had been clearly forewarned of the potential for these catastrophic firestorms and their consequences many many years ago by worldwide climate scientists and experts including the First Nations peoples of Australia.

By the time you read this I cannot say what will be happening, other than hundreds of people will be homeless, millions and millions of creatures will be dead, and the environment will be utterly changed. In my lifetime beloved country will not have recovered.

While this is not the main concern of PEN, it is dominating our thoughts right now. And we need writers to tell the stories of these times, of the people whose lives are forever changed, the surprising and bighearted stories of resilience and the strength and amazing generosity of local communities faced with disaster, those who are doing the real work on the ground.

For those of us living in safety, despair is an indulgence we cannot afford and the work of PEN is aimed at campaigning for those writers around the world whose voices are silenced by imprisonment and even death. So, putting ourselves in the shoes of these oppressed writers we imagine what it might be like to have the freedom to write taken from us and we send to them messages of solidarity. The letters cost us nothing and in many cases lift

the spirits of those in the solitary darkness of prison cells.

At present PEN is gravely concerned for the people and particularly the writers in Iran, a country that brooks no hint of criticism of the regime. The recent arrest and detention of Iranian writer and translator Arash Ganji, the secretary of the Iranian Writers' Association, is a blatant attack on Ganji for his writing and work to foster free expression and cross-cultural literary understanding. Ganji is a courageous leader in a country where free expression is all too often met with harassment or imprisonment.

PEN Melbourne also continues to campaign for Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, incarcerated in Evin Prison, who was handed over 38 years in prison and 148 lashes for national security-related offences. Sotoudeh, an award-winning human rights defender, is known for her role as a defender of rights of women detained for refusing mandatory covering of their hair in public. She was arrested in June 2018 for defending women prosecuted for appearing in public without a headscarf, or hijab.

PEN Melbourne committee member Mammad Aidani is a human rights advocate and acclaimed writer who is researching the torture and trauma experienced by Iranians and Middle Eastern immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers who have resettled in Australia and the West. Mammad has written of the recent brutal crackdown and murder of innocent protesters in Iran. Mammad goes a

long way towards expressing the heart of PEN's work in this comment:

'I have always believed that to be indifferent to all the recent tragedies, injustices and abuses of power we are experiencing in societies around the world is to acquiesce to the notion of the banality of evil. One must neither turn away or pretend to be ignorant when one sees violence, injustice and the humiliation of other human beings enacted by the state, especially when coming from a repressive society such as I have come from. Those who remain silent and do not directly criticise despotic regimes enable these governments to continue to abuse, imprison, torture and murder innocent people.'

Recently nine female political prisoners have started a hunger strike to protest their harsh conditions in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison. Among them is Sotoudeh who began a hunger strike after prison authorities banned her relatives from visiting. Since the November 2019 crackdown in which over 1500 people were killed and disappeared and countless more were injured, hundreds who have arrested and their families do not know whether they are still alive or dead.

Writers who are unafraid to speak out are a threat to repressive governments who see the power of the written word to mobilise people. The mighty pen reveals the brutality and human rights abuses of those states who would control information that it is the public's right to know.

PEN Melbourne stands beside writers who are at risk and who are prepared to pay with their liberty, and sometimes their lives, for speaking and writing freely.

Truth and facts are under threat around the world.

Stand with us to defend freedom of expression now.

JOIN PEN Melbourne. [penmelbourne.org](http://penmelbourne.org)

**pen**  
INTERNATIONAL  
MELBOURNE CENTRE

## Nitpicker

**Your regular editing lesson,  
brought to you by Penny Johnson,  
Program Manager of Professional  
Writing and Editing at RMIT.**

1. Every afternoon Tandi would walk a (metre-high / metre high) rope strung tautly between two trees.
2. If she (was / were) trying out for the variety night as planned, she had to perfect her routine.
3. Yael loved watching Tandi (practice / practise).
4. The ability to walk a tensioned rope required not only focus but also (required balance / balance).
5. Yael wondered (whether/ , whether) the same principles could be applied to writing a short story.

**Answers on page 23**



# That Final Desiccation

Robert Whalley on spirituality and stretching into your limits

---

It is late September, almost Michaelmas, after a cold Australian winter and in Wangaratta, two and a half hours north-east of Melbourne, it is 7 degrees with a forecast high of 18 degrees. After almost 20 years in the southern hemisphere, it still surprises me that the beginning of spring comes here when the northern California clime where I grew up starts seeing autumnal colours and a few cold nights. Can it be both obvious and profound that the same world offers, according to the angle of geography, different seasons at the same time? Doesn't it seem slightly magic to live on a planet where summer can be winter depending on where you are?

Here I am; a man, an old man (not that old, 70-something is the new late-50s), lying in bed next to his partner and writing in bed with that first steaming hot coffee cup on the bedside table by the light, a Mac Book Air balancing gently on somewhat arthritic knees (the right one's now titanium). But I'm not just that man: there's a teenage kid on a California sheep ranch who just wants to live his life but doesn't quite know where to find or how to recognise it; a perennial student and pothead; a struggling seminarian. All these identities, together with the peripatetic printing salesman, pedant, poet and priest — are part of who I am, the man who's not yet reconciled to being awake at seventy-something, yet trying to embrace it all as if there were no living alternative.

I read recently that half the men who make 70 don't live to 80. When I asked our family doctor, he said I was likely to live into my late 80s, but I wonder — and approaching the prospect of death brings the present into abrupt, sharp relief. While I'm just getting reconciled to more chins and wrinkles, rebranding them as a severe beauty, a new

humility to be endured for the next 15 or 20 years, it turns out they are preparing me for that final desiccation coming much sooner. Paraphrasing Woody Allen, I'm not sure about death, but I'd still like to be there when it happens to me.

Even at this advanced age I don't know where I am going, but I am increasingly aware, and thankful, of where I've come from and where I am now. I am a man formed in the particular mixture of history and spirituality, psychology and poetry, politics and piety called Anglican Christianity; but I've learned much from a Sufi poet named Rumi, lived for months in a Buddhist temple and loved it, and probably have picked up more practical wisdom from good Hollywood comedies and brassy Broadway musicals than I ever expected.

T. S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Rainer Maria Rilke and Mary Oliver float my poetry boat and feed me rich images. Christian writers like Rowan Williams, Cynthia Bourgeault, Richard Rohr and Marilynne Robinson keep me breathing deeply, and the Buddhist community represented by Jack Kornfield, Pema Chodron and Norman Fischer increasingly offer me fresh air and new hope.

Anyone over the age of 50 knows the vast difference between typing a page back then and writing a document now. Today I blithely run through a black, grey and white world of keys and symbols, pushing squares and watching words appear. Both the operating system — which I experience as a benevolent force — and the craft required to attend it has become gentler and more tender than in earlier times.

Thirty or 40 years ago sharing words and meaning required carbon paper and



mimeograph masters, white-out paste and sometimes thin and easily crinkled erasable bond. I remember one existential moment in 1984 when I decided not to sharpen a particular sentence because of the effort required in correcting the choices already committed to the paper. I was chasing the muse and feared that bending to the demands of the craft might stop that process of aspiration.

Getting older broke that yoke. Now I relish doing less. On a good day I intentionally underachieve by allowing 20 minutes for a slow stretching routine, a bit more for morning meditation, for breathing fresh air, for prayer, for time in the pool at the Y. I stretch into my limits, letting it all go, and going on from there. Maybe it's just me, but the world seems more forgiving and renewing.

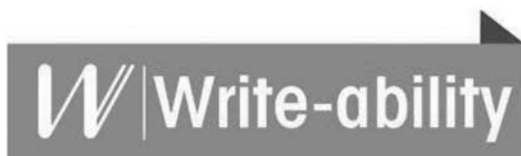
Modern technology means this old man revises with abandon with no erasable bonds being

broken, no papers torn asunder and, for the present, no memory white-out. It is a new creation, a graceful process akin to what one mystic called 'continually renewed immediacy'. I weave art and craft, moving from process to product even while keeping evidence of conceptual virginity on each and every page. It is an exercise approaching the ecstasy of meeting the God-head just in time — for when I touch Command/S, all things become new!

---

**Robert Whalley attended the 2019 Wodonga WGRO writers group.**

**This commission was supported by the Australia Council for the Arts and the Australian government through the Catalyst—Australian Arts and Culture Fund.**



Our award-winning Write-ability program aims to remove some of the barriers that have traditionally prevented people with disability from connecting with writing and publishing.

We offer:

- Advice on writing and professional development
- Write-ability workshops and writing programs for libraries and local government
- Write-ability & Publishability Fellowships
- Disability Awareness Training

Tel: (03)90947837 Mon-Thurs

Email: [writeability@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:writeability@writersvictoria.org.au)

Web: <https://writersvictoria.org.au/Writeability>



# Confidence Trick

By Rosey Chang

---

'It's such a confidence trick, writing a novel. The main person you have to trick into confidence is yourself.' – Zadie Smith

Your writing whispers to you.

Although you're busy washing, answering emails, fixing that urgent work problem — your writing skulks in your laptop, pining for you.

Beckoning.

You turn towards it, yet something always drags you away, drags your focus back to washing, emailing, texting. Procrastinating.

There are many reasons for procrastinating. I'm going to focus on one reason I know well. I'd like to explore a murky feeling I have. Do you know it? It's the feeling that swirls in my belly that says simply ... my writing sucks. This feeling lives in a hazy place. It pulls me between the tension of yearning to write, and yet feeling my writing is rubbish. And the fear of writing rubbish, the anxiety of that is too great. So I delay.

This place is so familiar to me that I am using a PhD project in creative writing to dig in deeper. In my project, I draw on psychological theory, Zen arts practice, and the latest evidence from mindfulness science.

I'd like to share with you a theory from social psychology. It is the Feelings-As-Information theory. Of the many aspects to this theory, there's one that is particularly useful to writers. It's the idea that people use feelings as information to make judgements, but sometimes mis-interpret the information. Some of those judgements are about themselves. Here's an example: when an activity feels hard (say, finishing a novel), people are likely to mis-interpret this feeling as being about their ability.

The interpretation goes like this: Ugh, it's the fifth time I have revised this chapter, and I haven't nailed it. If it feels this hard, I must be no good at writing. Cue potato chips, chocolate, Netflix or your social media of choice.

I suspect this is where many writers give up. But the research on feelings-as-information tells us one more thing. People are likely to judge a task as reflecting on them, when the task is difficult for **everyone**. I'll repeat that, because this is the takeaway message: the task is difficult for everyone. It has nothing to do with your ability.

Finishing that novel feels difficult. Starting the short story feels difficult. Restructuring that long-form article feels difficult. It feels difficult for *everyone*. So that feeling is real, but is not a reflection of who you are. It's a reflection on the nature of the task, because as the novelist Shivaun Plozza says: 'Writing is hard. Always.'

Yes, that voice inside who whispers, 'Everything I do is rubbish,' is a fear, an anxiety. The fear is that writing comes easily to others and that there's something wrong with me. This is an anxious feeling. And feelings are important. But remember, feelings as information need careful interpretation. Fearful, anxious feelings aren't information about your ability.

Of course, there is another possibility here. What if you feel that your writing project is off-track? You still need to listen to your instincts. Perhaps your draft isn't working. Perhaps there is a structural problem. Perhaps there is a fundamental crack in the architecture of your work, as Annie Dillard would say. And perhaps you can't wallpaper it over. What will you do?

There's no easy answer. But you can work through the possibilities. This is about the

potential ways to interpret this feeling that your draft is off-track. Can you get a second opinion? Who do you look to for constructive criticism? If the issue is about structure, consider: are your narrative choices leading the draft to a dead end? Can you go back and unpick your work, open up the new directions for the narrative? What could those new directions look like? Where would they now lead?

You can make decisions about what to do next. It might not be easy, but you can do it. And in the process, you'll have engaged in some important work on interpreting the information that the feeling was giving you. Your feelings need interpreting, and they may not be telling you about yourself or your ability.

So, let's return to the feeling that my-writing-sucks. Where to from here? The following are a few approaches you might like to try.

Don't push the feeling away. I invite you to acknowledge the feeling, to work with it. Pema Chödrön would say to 'let the corners of your mouth rise up' to greet the feeling. Not a full smile. This is a way to start befriending it.

**Circuit Breaker:** Maybe your brain is swamped by the negative feeling, so be kind to yourself. Find a circuit breaker. This is different from a distraction. A circuit breaker helps you to recharge. What do you find nourishing? Give yourself the time for a walk; warm shower; baking shortbread; connecting with nature; clowning with your kids; phoning your aunt; bringing in your neighbour's bin; volunteering for climate action. Give yourself the gift of a renewing activity, while you're not writing.

**Call your cheer squad:** These are friends who have your back. They don't need to be writers. They just need to get you. Let them remind you that you've got this. You're awesome.

**Tiny step:** Next, promise your cheer squad some writing. Tell them that you'll do the tiniest piece of writing, a micro-slice. Promise one paragraph, four lines of script, one verse. Tell them it might be the worst writing in the world but give them a date when it's due. Then write and press SEND.

Remember Zadie Smith's quote at the start? I had the chance to ask her about the confidence trick when she visited Melbourne last

November. Zadie answered, 'There's no way around that. It is the same for everyone.'

She also explained, 'anxiety can be useful.' She argued that anxiety is an engine to help us strive. And although Zadie used the term 'anxiety', I wonder if she was pointing to the intuition that the work needs fine-tuning, further drafting. I wonder if she was talking about her writer's spidey-sense tingling, helping her to strive.

Because that's what we writers do. We stretch. We strive, even when part of us doesn't want to.

The children's writer Kate DiCamillo also said: 'Every morning, I wake up and think, "Oh, God. I don't want to write today." But I just go ahead and do it anyway... And then I start the battle over again the next morning ...I feel like I'm incredibly lucky that I found what I'm supposed to do. And just because it's hard for me doesn't mean that it's not what I'm supposed to be doing.'

Take it from Kate and Zadie. This is the confidence trick.

Yes, it's hard. It's hard for everyone, but it's what you're supposed to be doing.

You can write.

**Rosey Chang created the Mindfulness for Creative Writers course through her PhD research, and is developing a middle-grade novel. @RoseyChang**

## NITPICKER ANSWERS (from page 19)

1. metre-high
2. was
3. practise (Australian spelling for verb)
4. balance
5. whether

# Workshops and Courses

See more courses and book online at [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au), phone (03) 9094 7840 or email [program@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:program@writersvictoria.org.au). All events held at The Wheeler Centre unless stated otherwise.

## In-person (Melbourne)

### **Speculative Fiction with Claire G Coleman**

Story is bigger than the world. Speculative fiction – a broad category that can include science fiction, fantasy, horror and literary spec fic – is a powerful platform for expressing ideas. Writers can create bespoke worlds for any story, outside of the constraints of the “real” world. Learn how.

When: Saturday 1  
February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: Early, emerging

### **Bringing Larger Themes to Your Memoir with Ruth Clare**

Every person’s life is full of stories waiting to be told. But if you want to be published, you need to think of your memoir as a book first and foremost. This workshop explores ways to extend your memoir beyond the scope of your own life and bring clarity to the theme of your work. It also uses a marketing perspective to help make your memoir more appealing to publishers.

When: Sunday 2  
February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

### **Voice and Vision: Bringing Your Writing to Life**

with Kathryn Heyman

For emerging and established writers of fiction and non-fiction, this full-day workshop will help you find joy and freedom in your writing. Using unique methods developed over many years, acclaimed writer and mentor Kathryn Heyman will help you create the conditions you need to work with vigour and clear purpose. You will leave the class with a stronger sense of your writerly voice and vision, and a toolkit of techniques to discover new elements in your writing.

When: Saturday 8  
February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: Emerging, established

### **Writing Your Way Through: Plotting, Momentum and Redrafting**

with Kathryn Heyman

How do you keep going with your novel or narrative non-fiction work after the first flush of excitement has settled down? How do you find the narrative momentum and, crucially, the writerly

momentum, to get to the end? In this masterclass we’ll discover tools and techniques to overcome narrative difficulties and internal blocks. Using exercises, discussion and carefully chosen examples, you’ll learn how to rethink your manuscript to bring new energy to it. Whether you’re working on your first or second draft, you’ll leave with new ideas about structure and momentum, and the tools to continue on to the glorious end.

When: Sunday 9  
February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: Emerging, established

### **Spec Fic Focus Season Pass with Maria Lewis, Angela Meyer, Eugen Baker, Claire G Coleman and Dmetri Kakmi**

presented in partnership  
with Speculate

Join us for a special Reading for Writers series this season as we delve into the magic and the mystery of speculative fiction. A term that encompasses science fiction, fantasy, and horror, speculative fiction delves into the question of “what if” and immerses readers in fantastic scenarios to entertain, engage, and elucidate contemporary “real-world” issues. Over five months, we will meet to



discuss influential texts that enlighten our world by asking what if it were different?

When: Wednesdays 12 February, 11 March, 8 April, 6 May, 10 June, 6.30-8.30pm

Member price: \$140/\$180

Non-member price: \$240

Level: Emerging, established

### **Spec Fic Focus 1: Black Magick, volume 1**

with Maria Lewis

Witches have been a popular presence in culture for more than 100 years, often used as vessels for feminist storytelling and magic realism. Yet never have they been portrayed quite like Greg Rucka and Nicola Scott's 'Black Magick'. Graphic novels are often underrepresented as examples of literature, but have much to offer writers in terms of world-building, managing pacing and plot, and developing resonant characters. Join Maria Lewis as she discusses this accessible and suspenseful introduction to the storytelling power of graphic novels, perfect for the curious reader.

When: Wednesday 12 February, 6.30-8.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

### **Finding the Body**

with Dorothy Johnston

Finding the Body is a workshop designed for early/emerging writers with an interest in crime fiction.

Participants will be asked to write their own "finding the body" scene. While finding the body is often covered in just a few pages, how an author describes the scene has ramifications for the whole story. During the workshop, topics we will discuss include: who makes the discovery? Is it a main character, or a minor one? Does that character become a suspect? How is the character changed by the experience? How is suspense built towards the event?

When: Saturday 15 February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

### **How to Start Your Story** with Tania Chandler

Always wanted to write a novel but not sure how or where to start? Have the spark of an idea for a story but need some inspiration and help to bring it to life? In this workshop, we will examine how writers hook readers with memorable beginnings. Through discussion, activities and writing exercises, you will discover how beginnings and endings work together, tools and techniques for starting stories, building characters, and mining memories for inspiration.

When: Sunday 16 February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

### **Indigenous Storytelling**

with Kat Clarke

Whether you are an emerging or established writer it is important to understand our homeland and the diversity of the characters we develop. This includes voice, world and character development. Through her own stories and journey join Wotobaluk writer Kat Clarke as she delves into the way First Nation writers tell stories and approaches necessary to take when writing stories that reflect Australia and our First Nation Peoples.

When: Saturday 29 February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

### **Writing Emotionally Authentic Work**

with Lee Kofman

Emotional authenticity is a must-have for writers of any genre to make the work relatable and illuminating. Yet such writing can be difficult to fine tune, and sometimes even uncomfortable to create. How do we discuss human nature frankly and with depth, and where to find the courage to take the necessary risks to do so? We'll discuss all that and will learn practical strategies to hone emotional authenticity, whether in fiction or creative non-fiction.

When: Saturday 29 February, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

## **Finding the Heart in Non-fiction**

**with Santilla Chingaipe**

How can you share your point of view in a compelling way? No topic is too big or small to warrant exploration with multiple ways of doing so – articles, essays, books, documentary writing or audio storytelling. Whichever form you choose, you'll learn how to effectively grab your audience.

When: Saturday 7  
March, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

## **Maintaining Narrative Tension with JP Pomare**

It doesn't matter where you are at – whether this is your first step toward publishing a novel or you've been wrangling a troublesome manuscript for a decade, we will look closely at all the elements of fiction and how they work together to create a compelling and suspenseful narrative with contemporary examples and writing exercises.

When: Sunday 8  
March, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

## **Spec Fic Focus 2: 1984 with Angela Meyer**

George Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' was not only one of the most prescient novels of

all time, but has had relevance to various political oppressions across cultures and time. First published in 1949, it takes place in an imagined dystopian future, where war, propaganda and surveillance are the norm. What makes Winston Smith's dystopian experience so resonant and relevant, ongoing? There is so much to unpack in this undeniably powerful work.

When: Wednesday 11  
March, 6.30-8.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

## **YA Day**

**presented in partnership  
with The YA Room**

YA Day is back – and bigger than before. We'll start off the day with discussions and signings, giving you close encounters with your favourite writers. Get your book signed, get your questions answered, get to know new-to-you authors with great new books! Then, in the afternoon, we will split into two streams. Want to write your own YA? We'll have two 90-minute workshops: Will Kostakis on How to Build A Story and former publisher Kate Cuthbert on How to Get Your Story Out There. Looking to interact with other readers? We'll have four panel discussions, featuring your favourite authors talking about topics like 'My Favourite Fictional Murder', 'Trash or Treasure', and a spirited discussion about which tropes are readable – and which are not.

When: Saturday 14  
March, 10am-4pm

Reader stream: \$30  
(concession and  
under 18)/\$40

Writer stream: \$45  
(concession and  
under 18)/\$60

## **Writing Historical Fiction with Kelly Gardiner**

How do we bring history to life through fiction? We'll look at why we choose to set stories in the past and the challenges involved: how and what to research, how to investigate and interpret real people in history, and different approaches to voice and character. We'll discuss the all-important questions of how to build a world that is based in reality and also imagined, and techniques for presenting the past in a way that appeals to modern readers.

When: Saturday 21  
March, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

## **Writing Ethical True Crime-inspired Fiction and Crime Memoir**

**with Ruth Mclver**

While true crime is nothing new, over the past few years true-crime inspired fiction and true-crime memoirs such as Emma Cline's 'The Girls' (2015) and Michelle McNamara's 'I'll Be Gone in the Dark' (2016) have become a best-selling and award-winning subgenre. Fictionalising true crime



and real lives in a way that is both ethical and artful can capture the complex cultural topography surrounding sensational crime events – and this imaginative and personal response to private and collective trauma is both necessary and cathartic.

When: Sunday 22  
March, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

**Lunchtime Bites:  
Empathetic Interviewing  
with Amy Maddison**

Lead your interviewing with empathy, and you will uncover some of the greatest stories ever told. Join Amy as she shares strategies, skills and techniques that have assisted her in her own work – a writing journey of hearing stories from all perspectives of the healthcare experience. This session is ideal for anyone interested in leveraging new interviewing skills to transform the stories they tell, while also respecting the needs of the interviewee.

When: Friday 27  
March, 12-1pm

Member price: Free

Non-member price: \$25

Level: All

**Writing Place: Tips, Tools  
and Hidden Treasures  
with Meg Mundell**

Places are much more than backdrops, locations, or settings: place is a vital cornerstone of human life, a

personality-shaping force, and a potent source of narrative gold. Whatever your genre, place can help drive plot, trigger action, amplify conflict, evoke mood, stir emotion, mould character, underscore themes, and offer a valuable “way in” to stories for both writers and readers. Tapping into the subtle powers of place, we’ll explore a range of practical techniques to enrich your writing.

When: Saturday 28  
March, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

**How to End Your Story  
with Mark Smith**

So you have a great piece of short fiction, but you are unsure how to end it. How do you strike a balance between giving your reader resolution and leaving them with a sense of wonder? This workshop is all about endings and how to write them in a way that is consistent with the narrative.

When: Saturday 28  
March, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

**Psychogeography and  
the Suburbs  
with Nick Gadd**

Urban and suburban environments contain intriguing features that can be the starting points for stories. Hone your eyes to old signage,

details of architecture, traces of the past, and the poetry of the everyday. Inspired by the Situationists and the idea of psychogeography, we will investigate how ordinary places are rich source material. Whether you write fiction, non-fiction, poetry or memoir, insights from this workshop will stimulate ideas. Bring your Myki card, as this workshop incorporates a field trip!

When: Sunday 29 March,  
10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$155

Non-member price: \$215

Level: All

**In-person (regional)**

**Write That Novel  
with Anne Gracie**

Many people have an idea for a novel simmering away inside them, but the prospect of creating a publishable novel can seem intimidating. Where to start? What to consider? How do you turn an idea into a plot? What to do when you run out of steam three chapters in? And when it’s finished, what do you do? This workshop will outline some strategies and resources to make your novel the best it can be.

Where: Wodonga Library, 194  
High Street, Wodonga, VIC

When: Saturday 22  
February, 10am-4pm

Member/KYD subscriber  
price: \$25/\$30

Non-member price: \$35

Level: All

## Online

### **Memoir Mini-Class: Three Webinars**

with Amra Pajalic

Three webinars that will form mini-masterclasses on different areas of memoir writing. These sessions will be discounted for Memoir Clinic participants who want the extra development and advice from Amra, but will also be open to anyone interested in memoir.

Webinars: Thursdays  
23 January, 12 March,  
4 June, 6-7.30pm

Online Memoir Mini-Class  
participants: \$60

Member price: \$75/\$105

Non-member price: \$135

Level: All

### **Writing Memoir Clinic**

with Amra Pajalic

This online clinic will introduce the concepts required to write a successful memoir. Participants will write standalone chapters to submit for publication and receive feedback from award-winning author and memoirist Amra Pajalic. They will also learn how to adapt narrative writing techniques to memoir, and incorporate memoir writing techniques in order to develop a satisfying narrative arc.

Pieces of up to 1500  
words due Wednesdays 29  
January, 26 February, 25  
March, 22 April, 20 May

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: All

### **Emerging Short Story Clinic with Laurie Steed**

Receive direct feedback from your tutor and fellow course participants with this online writing group and develop five stories over five months. Whether you're an experienced writer working towards the completion of a manuscript or looking to maintain momentum and sharpen writing skills, this clinic provides sustained mentorship and specific feedback on the refinement of your own voice and style.

Stories of up to 1500  
words due Wednesdays 29  
January, 26 February, 25  
March, 22 April, 20 May

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Emerging

### **Writing Crime Clinic with Jock Serong**

Find and establish your crime writing voice as you work with award-winning writer Jock Serong and fellow course participants to give and receive feedback and develop your story over five months. Whether you're looking to perfect your manuscript or looking to develop a practice and momentum to finish, this clinic provides five months of mentorship and targeted feedback to help you meet your goals.

Pieces of up to 1500 words  
due Wednesdays 5 February,  
4 March, 1 April, 6 May, 3 June

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: All

### **Crime Mini-Masterclass: Three Webinars**

with Jock Serong

What is it that makes good crime writing so compelling? And how are we building up a crime writing tradition that is distinctively modern and Australian? This course aims to find your crime writing voice, and to place it within the Australian context – unique but recognisable, risky, dangerous and satisfying. We'll talk about language and ideas, find the reference points in Australian lit and classical crime, and try to push ourselves into unknown territory. These sessions will be discounted for Crime Writing Clinic participants who want the extra development and advice from Jock, but will also be open to anyone interested in crime writing.

Webinars: Thursdays  
30 January, 19 March,  
18 June, 6-7.30pm

Online Writing Crime  
clinic participants: \$60

Member price: \$75/\$105

Non-member price: \$135

Level: All



## Milestones

**Lou Faulkner's** debut novel, 'Men of War', a naval action-adventure-gay romance set in the mid-eighteenth century, has just been published by Manifold Press.

**Eugen Bacon** has been elected as board director of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA).

**Kirsten Krauth's** second novel 'Almost a Mirror', shortlisted for the Penguin Literary Prize, will be published by Transit Lounge on 1 April. Pop meets punk, the book moves between the early 80s Crystal Ballroom scene in Melbourne, in the shadow of Nick Cave and the Boys Next Door, and the bright glowing lights of 'Countdown'. Her first book was 'just\_a\_girl'.

**Francesca White's** first book titled 'Film Food & I' is now published. It's a combination cookbook, memoir, social history, films and tv series with sections on Chocolate, Popcorn and a whole lot more. Available online through Amazon, Booktopia, Angus & Robertson. Francesca has also won 'Letter of the Month' in the January edition of the 'Australian Women's Weekly'.

**Myer Bloom's** second book 'Sephardi Narratives from Australia: Ancient traditions ruptured and reshaped' will be launched on 23 February in St Kilda. The book traces a group of Australian migrants about whom little has previously been written — a collection of oral histories of Jews who originally lived in Islamic countries, were then expelled, mainly in the 1950s, and later migrated to Australia.

## Classifieds

### Editorial Services

Euan Mitchell offers editing, proofreading and rewriting services for writers of fiction and non-fiction.

For extended manuscripts (20K+ words), a free sample edit is included.

Typesetting of pages, cover design, as well as print and ebook options, can also be arranged. To discuss your project, email Euan via [euam@euanmitchell.com](mailto:euam@euanmitchell.com).

**Send your milestone or classified to [editor@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:editor@writersvictoria.org.au)**

## Comps & Opps

### The Text Prize

Submissions for the 2020 Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing are now open and will close Friday 7 February. The 2020 entry form can be downloaded [here](#).

Now in its thirteenth year, the \$10,000 Text Prize aims to discover incredible new books by exciting authors and is one of the most renowned prizes for young adult and children's writing in Australia and New Zealand.

Awarded annually to the best manuscript written for young readers, the prize has unearthed extraordinary, multi-award-winning books and launched international publishing careers. Published and unpublished writers of all ages are eligible to enter with works of fiction or non-fiction.

The winner receives a publishing contract with Text and a \$10,000 advance against royalties.

### R D Walshe Memorial Writing for the Environment Prize 2020

In 1991, Bob Walshe OAM, author and environmental activist, ran a short Writing for the Environment

course in Sutherland. In honour of its former patron, Bob Walshe, who passed away in March 2018, Sutherland Shire Environment Centre holds an annual Writing for the Environment prize.

Through the R D Walshe Memorial Writing for the Environment Prize, SSEC continues to value the role and place of writing in helping to shape a sustainable world – healthy people living on a healthy planet.

The competition is for people who are Australian citizens and 25 years or younger. The topic is 'I am Earth'.

Submissions must be received by 5pm Friday 1 May, 2020. Winners will be announced in early June.

Prize money of \$500 is allocated for the winner of each age category.

**For more details or to submit, email Phil Smith [phil@ssec.org.au](mailto:phil@ssec.org.au)**

### black&write! Writing Fellowships

Applications for the 2020 black&write! Writing Fellowships close 28 February 2020.

Manuscripts can be fiction, poetry, short stories, children's or young adult. The submitted unpublished manuscripts are assessed by a panel of expert judges with knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing. The fellowships are open to all writers (published and unpublished) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent currently living in Australia.

**Head to [slq.qld.gov.au](http://slq.qld.gov.au) for details.**

### Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Anthology

Call for submissions. Closing date 29 February 2020. Seeking works of fiction non-fiction and poetry that relate to the experience of perinatal anxiety, depression or other perinatal mental health condition. The selected pieces will be published in an awareness-raising anthology, with proceeds to benefit PANDA. Multiple submissions welcome.

**For further information or to submit, please email PNDA. [Anthology@gmail.com](mailto:Anthology@gmail.com)**

# Membership Form

Name

Organisation or writers group

Postal address

Email

Suburb

Phone

Postcode  State

Gender ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other

Date of birth (optional)  /  /

☐ Please tick if you do not wish to receive our enews\*  
\*We will not supply or sell your information to a third party.

At what stage of writing are you?

☐ Early (just begun) ☐ Emerging (some publication) ☐ Established (published a full-length work)

What do you write, or what would you like to write?

<input type="checkbox"/> Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Crime	<input type="checkbox"/> Literary fiction	<input type="checkbox"/> Radio	<input type="checkbox"/> Web content
<input type="checkbox"/> Biography/Memoir	<input type="checkbox"/> Essays/Reviews	<input type="checkbox"/> Lyrics	<input type="checkbox"/> Romance	<input type="checkbox"/> Young adult
<input type="checkbox"/> Blog	<input type="checkbox"/> Family history	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-fiction	<input type="checkbox"/> Screenwriting	<input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Business/Technical	<input type="checkbox"/> Feature writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Playwriting	<input type="checkbox"/> Short stories	
<input type="checkbox"/> Childrens	<input type="checkbox"/> Graphic novels	<input type="checkbox"/> Poetry	<input type="checkbox"/> Speculative fiction	
<input type="checkbox"/> Copywriting	<input type="checkbox"/> Journalism	<input type="checkbox"/> Popular fiction	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel	

Do you identify as:

☐ Culturally and Linguistically Diverse ☐ Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander ☐ Person with Disability

Join for two years and save

☐ Individual \$135 ☐ Writers groups and organisations \$260  
☐ Concession \$100 ☐ Regional \$90

One-year memberships

☐ Individual \$75 ☐ Writers groups and organisations \$145  
☐ Concession \$55 ☐ Overseas individual (Online, no GST) \$75  
☐ Regional \$50

How would you like to receive  
The Victorian Writer magazine?

☐ Hard copy by post  
☐ PDF by email  
(screen-reader friendly)

Payment advice (all prices include GST except overseas membership)

Membership amount \$  ☐ Cheque/Money order attached ☐ Please charge my Visa/Mastercard

Tax deductible donation \$  Card number   /

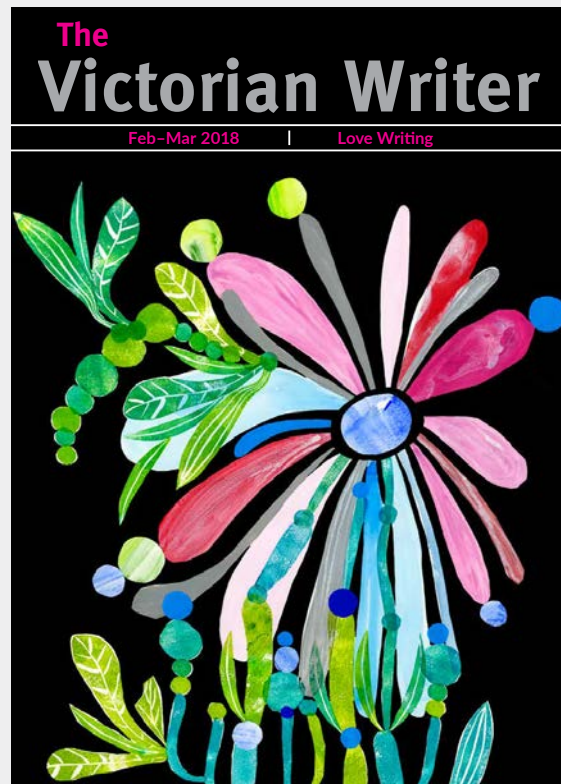
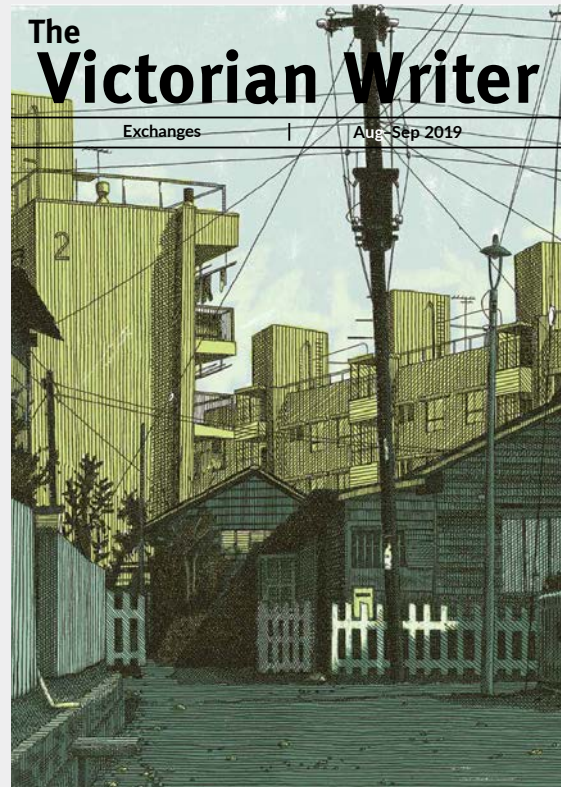
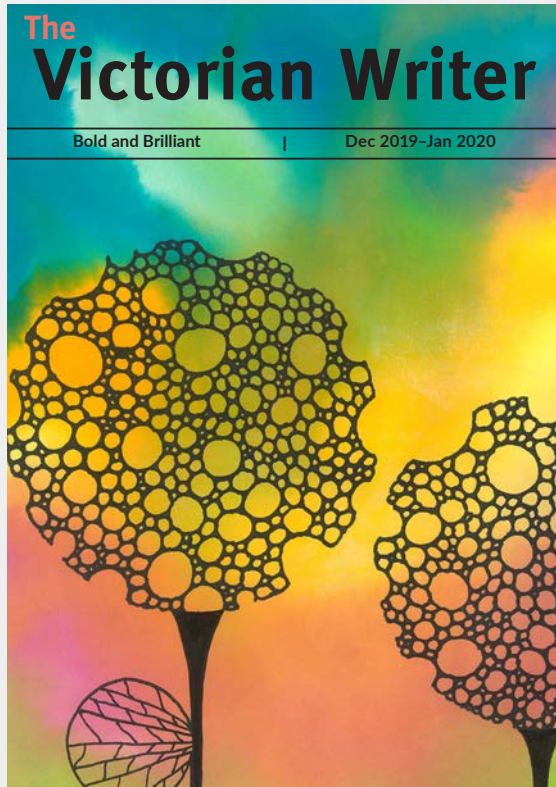
Total payable \$  Name  Signed

Find out more about what it means to be part of an association on our website at <http://bit.ly/1MQAcQt>



# The Victorian Writer

Browse our shop for individual back issues of The Victorian Writer  
<https://writersvictoria.org.au/resources/shop>



Selected back issues are also available free of charge for distribution through festivals and events. Contact the Writers Victoria office for details.



2020 Season 1 Program

Program online at [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au)



# Focus

**WRITERS**  
VICTORIA