

# The Victorian Writer

Aug-Sep 2018

| Non-fictional



# Looking Out, Looking In

Season 2 2018



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

**WRITERS**  
VICTORIA

All about writers

# Editorial

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Setting out to do justice to non-fiction with its tentacular reach in thirty-four pages is an impossible task. It is such a various and amorphous genre, encompassing forms such as reference books and educational texts, essays, biography, memoir, true crime, creative and narrative non-fiction, and poetry.

Instead, we check in with contemporary Australian non-fiction, and survey of the work and practice of writers who dance on its threshold, we also explore ways to find, capture and treat your subject and look at how to emerge as a non-fiction writer.

Maria Tumarkin talks to us about non-fiction on the edge, Lee Kofman asks how much 'I' is too much in non-fiction, Michael Green writes about the advantages of slow non-fiction, Bri Lee writes justice through memoir, Sam van Zweden confronts cultural cringe and celebrates the diversity of contemporary Australian non-fiction and Kirsten Krauth probes the connections between music and poetry.

Also in this issue, Caitlan Cooper-Trent has advice for scoring a job in publishing and we have new non-fiction by members Jo Burnell, David McLean, Donna Tsironis, and the finalists of Michelle Scott Tucker's 200-Word non-fiction competition. ❶

**Emma Cayley**  
editor@writersvictoria.org.au

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**Editorial Committee** Anna Brasier,  
Kirstie Reeve, Fabrice Wilmann, Cory Zaroni

**Proofreaders** Fiona Murphy

**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.

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### 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

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# From an ALAA Agent The Day Job

Caitlan Cooper-Trent of Curtis Brown Australia offers some advice for writers wanting to work in publishing.

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Five years ago I would never have expected to be working full-time in publishing, let alone supporting two amazing agents at Australia's largest literary agency. Every day is different and as an assistant you get to see the nuts and bolts of publishing – from reading first drafts and giving editorial feedback to being privy to overseas rights and film deals and the nitty gritty of contract negotiation and royalty statements. I feel really lucky to do the work I do and be paid for it, which means I can genuinely look forward to going to work every day.

That being said, the road to working in publishing isn't always easy! Many know they want to work in publishing or writing from the get-go, but like me many others have tried other jobs or even other careers before they set their sights on breaking into the publishing industry. For me, this 'aha!' moment was while working as a graduate in a large corporate law firm. Deciding that you will commit to working in a field that trades in longevity and heart rather than fame and riches is a big part of the equation, and the best place to start.

If deciding you're committed to working in publishing is the beginning, then making that happen and balancing it with the rest of your life are the next steps. Formal qualifications are always a good place to start – I started by enrolling in a Masters of Publishing, and there are a variety of longer and shorter qualifications in editing, publishing and English that can be pursued remotely or onsite. I knew some people who had done the course before, and made sure to talk to them about expectations and their experiences. The next step is to get involved in the writing and publishing community.

This can be in a structured or unstructured way, through internships or working at a bookstore, through talking to bookish friends, through submitting to publications, through going to events in your city, or simply on Twitter. I'm grateful my Masters program had an internship unit, through which I interned at both a scholarly publisher, Sydney University Press, and a small press, Spineless Wonders. These experiences helped me to clarify what I wanted out of publishing and what I could offer an employer in return. They also helped me to meet others interested in the same things I was, and build acquaintances in the field.

The next part many writers are more than familiar with – submit, submit, submit! Trying to break into an industry is much like trying to get a piece of work published – it's a combination of preparation and perseverance. Being well-prepared for interviews with research and rehearsal is essential, but ultimately there's a lot about the industry that comes down to fit. This means that following your nose in terms of what 'clicks' with you in terms of people, books and place will inevitably lead in the right direction.

An important practical thing to note at this point is: read books and be ready to talk about them! This is a great way for people to get a sense of who you are and what you enjoy, and a great way to feel part of a community. Also, be interested in everyone! That receptionist might also run a literary festival you would love to be a part of. I am forever indebted to the publishing assistant who passed my resume from the slush pile on to Curtis Brown.

Finally, developing a work-life balance that suits you seems like the end of the road, but it's really just the beginning. This is especially true for writers, for whom having regular work can be a either a nightmare or a dream come true. The key is finding what is important to you and having confidence in it. For me, the structure and time commitment of working full-time means I get to make the most of my free time and have the stability to pursue other things I am interested in, like writing book reviews. I recently had my first ever review published online in 'The Lifted Brow Review of Books' and couldn't have done so without the confidence and on-the-job knowledge gained through working.

But making time for other interests is just as important and pursuing one's publishing dreams. Whether it's making time for friends or housemates, partying, going to festivals or shows, or simply indulging in some skincare addiction, there's more to life than just publishing. In a competitive industry, it's sometimes hard to remember that life goes on, and to quote an ABIA's

Rising Star of the Year (2018) nominee, Lex Hirst, publishing is a 'long game'. It's key to surviving in this game to put aside time for yourself as well as for your side-hustle.

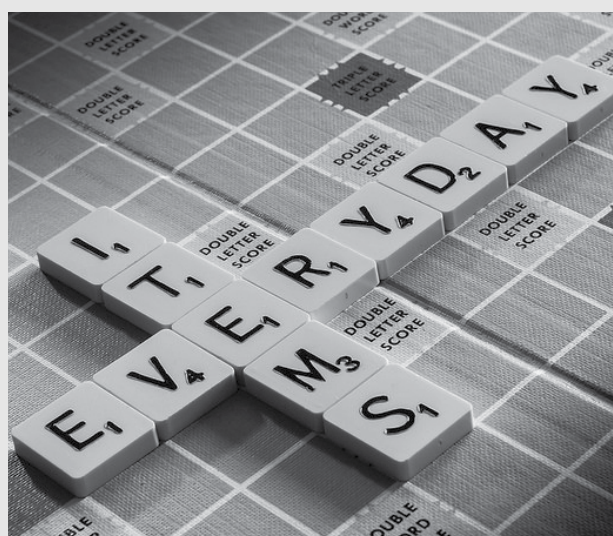
While this is all very good advice in abstract, what does it mean for the day-to-day? It means keep doing what you're doing. Talk to and learn from the people who you admire, follow the paths that feel most exciting to you and work on the projects that get your heart beating. It definitely won't lead where you thought it would, but it could be somewhere even better. ⑩

**Caitlan Cooper-Trent is an assistant at Australia's largest and oldest literary agency, Curtis Brown. She has a background in law and is studying a Masters of English at Sydney University. Caitlan assists both Pippa Masson and Tara Wynne with their fabulous lists of fiction and non-fiction clients.**

**curtisbrown.com.au  
austlitagentsassoc.com**

# Nitpicker

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



CC image courtesy of John Bugg on Flickr.

1. Of late Doris had (began/begun) to read creative non-fiction.
2. 'Writers (nowadays/now days) often present non-fictional material using fictional techniques,' she announced to her U3A writing group.
3. 'According to (who/whom)?' asked Marjorie, the stickler of the group.
4. Doris persevered: 'An increasing (number/amount) of blogs, articles and books focus on the virtues of writing dialogue, using characterisation and crafting scenes to make non-fiction sing.'
5. 'Well, if I were a non-fiction writer (',/,') said Marjorie, 'I wouldn't be taking such liberties with the truth!'

**Answers on page 34**

# Justice on the Page

Bri Lee spoke to Elle O'Brien about reporting on and seeking justice for sexual assault through memoir.

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In her powerful and candid memoir, 'Eggshell Skull', Brisbane-based writer Bri Lee recounts her year working as a judge's associate in the Queensland District Court. During this time, she witnessed numerous instances where victims of sexual offences were denied due justice. Spurred on by the courage and strength of these complainants, Lee realised she needed to report and seek justice for her own experience of sexual assault. Having seen the justice system from both sides, Lee offers a unique insight into Australia's legal system.

**Can you tell us more about the title of your memoir? Why did you choose the phrase 'Eggshell Skull'?**

The term 'Eggshell Skull' is a legal maxim that stands for the idea that you must 'take your victim as you find them'. So if person A strikes person B and person B dies, person A is not allowed to say that person B just wasn't strong enough, or didn't have the fortitude of a regular person. It's the idea that we're responsible for the entirety of the ramifications of our actions, and that you can't pick and choose parts of your victim to acknowledge. The term has always been about the weakness of a complainant though, and I wondered if it would be possible to turn the matter upside down. Could I be a strong, angry complainant who didn't back down? Could I make it unlucky for the defendant to have to take me as he found me?

**Your memoir describes a system that fails to provide justice for the people it's meant to protect. How did your experience working as a judge's associate change your view of Australia's legal system? Can you tell us more about this experience?**

It was disillusioning, for sure. I grew up with a police officer for a father, and he had a bit of a cynical view on justice, but I still believed in process and fairness. Seeing so much cruelty in the courts process was hard to reconcile with what I thought was incredible strength on the part of complainants. Starting the process of making a police complaint was where it got so much worse. The carelessness with which the system heard and dealt with my complaint was inexcusable, and I don't know how we expect people unfamiliar with legal issues, or people who don't have financial or familial stability, to go through that same process. The highest point of case attrition – where complaints are dropped or not proceeded with – is at the police stage. They're under-resourced but also critically undertrained.

**What improvements do you most want to see in Australia's legal system?**

For maximum impact we need to look at the police service in each state, then the prosecution services, and then the courts. There needs to be specialist officers who are trained to deal with sex offences – both adult and child; historical and recent – at all police stations. There is also a need for sexual assault experts who can be called at trial to inform the jury that, for example, it's normal for someone to 'freeze' rather than fight back. At every step of the process there is huge room for improvement, including at the legislative stage where places like Queensland need to follow the lead of New South Wales and review consent laws.

**What was the writing process like for this memoir? Was there a clear moment when you realised you had to write it?**

I was taking meticulous notes, almost compulsively, during my year as an associate. A big, fat folder full of contemporaneous material.



Then the Kat Muscat Fellowship was announced and I knew what I had to do. Winning that fellowship changed my entire career trajectory. I will forever be indebted to the Muscat family and Express Media.

**What effect do you think movements like #MeToo and Time's Up are having on the reporting of sexual abuse and on getting justice for victims?**

It is definitely helping. People are talking to each other about their experiences far more now than three years ago when I started writing this book. It helps that the general public are seeing how unfortunately common child sex offending is (thanks to things like the inquiry into institutional child abuse) and what an epidemic sexual harassment and sexual assault also is for adult women. The explosion of these matters being brought to public awareness also includes the conversations we're finally having about domestic and family violence. It's one big wave of previously shameful, secret things, finally being brought to light. It makes a big impact on the attitudes of survivors going to the police, the attitudes of the legal professionals themselves, and it helps to break down preconceptions that jurors might bring into the deliberation room.

**You're the founding editor of the quarterly publication 'Hot Chicks with Big Brains', which features interviews, essays, memoirs and illustrations from a diverse range of women. How did this publication come about?**

I started the project as an online-only interview series with women I admired, and I'd go interview them and take their pictures, and upload them to a website. Really I just wanted an excuse to talk to them about their work and sense of self. It has steadily grown since then and I'm so proud of it. We have always paid everyone, and each issue has so many new voices alongside big names. It's a lot of work, but I feel like it's an opportunity for me to inject opportunity and infrastructure for publishing outcomes back into the writing community.

**What one piece of advice would you give other writers undertaking a lot of research?**

Take your time to do it, and take breaks in between. Researching is such a mentally rigorous and exhausting process, and it cannot be rushed or you'll miss connections and

opportunities to expand or limit scope. In my experience, the best 'AHA!' moments come far away from the desk, once you've ingested all the information, and are just boiling it away in your mind while you eat, and shower, and jog, and drive. Then you say 'Pull over! Of course A is connected to B!'

**What was the best advice and support you were given as an emerging writer?**

At a live recording of 'Chat 10, Looks 3' recently Annabel Crabb said something that really resonated with me: as a young journalist your first day is the hardest. You don't have any connections, nobody takes your calls, you don't really know what you're doing, and you're a shit writer. (This is paraphrased, obviously.) I think it applies to all writing. I look back on how hard I worked for either no pay or very little pay five years ago, and I'm very privileged and grateful to say that I mostly don't have to do that anymore. Success breeds, and attracts, success. At the beginning you'll feel like you're slogging it out and not getting anywhere, but you are. It only gets easier.

As for support: money and mentoring. You need to pay rent and eat dinner, and you need guidance. Then you can write. I've benefited from so many amazing mentors, and I've rarely struggled with unemployment. I waitressed for years and years during university and was writing (and not showing anyone that writing) most of the time. We all start somewhere. ⑩

Sexual assault support services:  
1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732  
Lifeline: 131 114  
Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

**Bri Lee is a writer and editor whose work has been published in 'The Guardian', 'Griffith Review', and elsewhere, and she regularly appears on ABC Radio. In 2016, Bri was the recipient of the Kat Muscat Fellowship, and in 2017 was one of 'Griffith Review's Queensland writing fellows. She is the founding editor of 'Hot Chicks with Big Brains'. In 2018, Bri received a Commonwealth Government of Australia scholarship and stipend to work on her second book at the University of Queensland. She is qualified to practice law, but doesn't.**

# Writing Time

Maria Tumarkin spoke to Emma Cayley about time, convergences and the state of contemporary non-fiction.

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**T**o read Maria Tumarkin is to embark on an intellectual journey, one that covers diverse terrain – the personal and the political via philosophy, history and memoir – taking paths that seem at first to deviate, but then interweave, taking you even deeper into the subject. I spoke to Maria about her practice, her processes and the convergences of her compelling new non-fiction work, 'Axiomatic'.

**When setting out to write 'Axiomatic', did the concept come first? Or was it a compulsion to address themes, a notion of shape, structure ... or the writing itself? How did you pull the threads together?**

With this book, the concept came first, which is pretty unusual for me. I was interested in using axioms as a structure, a spine for a text that would not settle into any recognisable form. A hovering, wandering text. But beyond that, I just had a feeling about what I was after. A strange book. With each chapter being completely different and yet connected deeply to the others, with people appearing and disappearing across the book but without any signalling so their tracks are easy to miss. I was sick of the formal predictability of the majority of narrative non-fiction books I was coming across and I wanted to write something that was blind to the existing non-fiction formulas and templates.

**You've said that with this book, you were exploring the notion that 'the past is alive in the present'. How does a writer bring the past to life effectively? What is the writer's role as historian/chronicler?**

Research! Research is your ethical responsibility as a writer of non-fiction. And you know my father (who is a retired scientist and a not-fully-retired lecturer) would always say to me, 'A good teacher only shows five per cent of what

they know.' As a writer of non-fiction going into the past of your culture or the present of other cultures, you need to know much, much more than you put on the page. I think the 5:95 ratio is not that far off really.

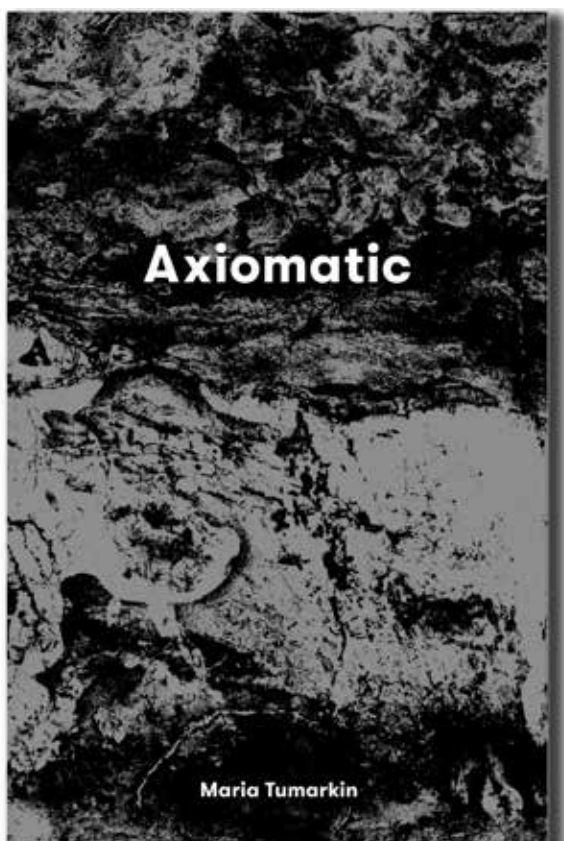
**How did the process and context of writing 'Axiomatic' compare with those of your other books, 'Traumascapes', 'Otherland' and 'Courage'?**

I am more confident in myself as a writer. With earlier works I compromised a lot and did things I did not want to do (all those expositional passages in my earlier books make my skin crawl now! Plus the ways in which I used myself as a guide, a bridge, a hand that opens doors – yik!) because I couldn't quite back myself. I had a lot of anxiety about being a non-native speaker and about my English being cumbersome and inferior. It took me over a decade to see that not being a native speaker can be a great, exhilarating thing. Writers not writing in their first language do wild things with English. English language needs them.

**Your work seems to dance on the edge – it's liminal and shapeshifting, eludes definition. Memoir, essay, reportage ... dreamscape. But it's always powerful. Why do you think there is so much power on the threshold?**

I don't think thresholds are inherently powerful. I don't think anything is inherently powerful really. I am interested in convergences – different tracks, sensibilities and lived experiences coming together for a moment and producing something that gets under our skin and for which there may be no language yet.

**Time and place shift in your work – just like memory. What is the role of time and place in your writing?**



This book is, first and foremost, about time, so time is everything in it really. It's the last word of the book. I think that ultimately all writing has only one subject – time. Not to diminish the place of place! I am a big fan of the concept of 'people-in-places' put forward decades ago by phenomenologist Edward C Casey. His idea is that the connection between people and places they inhabit is so profound that that the two things cannot be meaningfully pulled apart. I think about this a lot, particularly because we now have millions of people across the world radically and permanently displaced. Memory is definitely in the mix too, because we remember with and through places.

**According to the blurb, 'Axiomatic actively seeks to reset the non-fiction form in Australia.' Why do you think it needs resetting?**

Because a vast majority of established trade publishers in Australia (and not only) is far more conservative when it comes to non-fiction than fiction. Deep down they don't believe in readers' intelligence and their willingness to do work and to take delight in being challenged and surprised. Again, this is different when it comes to fiction. I also see

a lot of non-fiction books that should have been essays or shortish pieces – this one is on publishers too, who are looking for quick, cheap books. Don't do it! You're creating books that will die in six months and it's not fair either on the books' writers or their readers.

**What is a writer's responsibility when writing about themes such as teen suicide, drug addiction and the Holocaust?**

Firstly, to get all the facts right. I find morally objectionable people talking about 'emotional truth' when it comes to these subjects. To do justice to the specific people you're writing about. To scrutinise your every foundational belief and assumption. To resist dead, deadening or ready-made language. Not to take any shortcuts.

**For writers looking to explore the depth of narrative non-fiction, do you have some reading recommendations?**

Claudia Rankine, Anne Carson, Maggie Nelson, Eliot Weinberger – these are poets who have been revolutionising non-fiction. Essays by Zadie Smith, Meghan Daum, Mary Gaitskill. In Australia, Helen Garner, Fiona Wright (another poet!), anything by Ellena Savage, Sarah Krasnostein's 'Trauma Cleaner', Kate Rossmanith's 'Small Wrongs'. Also: Tegan Bennett Daylight's essays.

**Is there an axiom that you live by?**

Yes, but it has nothing to do with the relationship between the past and the present. Here it goes: disappointment is always preferable to regret. ⑩

**Maria Tumarkin is a writer and cultural historian. She is the author of three books of ideas: 'Traumascapes', 'Courage', and 'Otherland'. Her essays have appeared in 'The Best Australian Essays', 'Griffith Review', 'Meanjin' and 'The Monthly', among others. She is involved in collaborations with artists, theatre makers and audio designers. She is a member of Melbourne Writers Festival's programming committee and teaches creative writing at the University of Melbourne.**

# 200 Words

In our previous issue, Michelle Scott Tucker invited non-fiction writers to submit 200 words of a work in progress. Here are the finalists.

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## Winner

### Joy

by Mary Pomfret

Eons ago, one sunny Sunday afternoon in June, we sat on St Kilda Beach: a typical family outing. We were sharing fish and chips from butcher paper spread out on the coarse yellow sand and broken shells. Ricky was still our boy. Eleven and the world hadn't quite taken him into its grasp. Our world was still his world. We sat together in happy silence, eating and breathing in the sea air. A light aeroplane flew above us skywriting, spiralling, forming smoke letters in the cloudless blue sky—some meaningless advertisement. Joe was reclining on the sand and Ricky was stuffing his mouth

with chips. Ricky broke the silence. 'Wouldn't it be great if we could write in the sky for Mum's birthday, Happy Birthday Mum,' he said to Joe.

It probably sounds like nothing much, such a seemingly small thing, but for me it is one of my finest moments. A flash of pure love. I don't think I even spoke; I was so overwhelmed with my son's loving intention. Surely in everyone's life, there is such a moment. When I shared this scene with my friend, she said: 'Don't assume that. Not everyone has been so lucky.'

**Mary Pomfret lives and works in regional Victoria. Mary wrote a version of this short piece during a group memoir mentorship with Lee Kofman in 2016. Mary's novel, 'The Hard Seed', will be published later in the year.**

## Runner-up

### The Little Red Book

by Rod McLure

These words belong to my father.

'I am half way through a letter to my wife and just stopped to put a few lines in my little red book.'

Dad wrote those words on October 31st, 1941 in a little red book no bigger than a cigarette packet.

He was somewhere in Syria.

He wrote of travelling from Port Suez by train along the banks of the canal and talked of meeting several Aussies who had been fighting in the Western Desert and also in Crete.

'They were certainly up against it,' he said.

He then wrote:

'Yesterday I received a letter from my wife letting me know that my third child was born.'

The little red book contains only four pages but it tells me more about my father than I ever knew.

Dad survived the war but rarely spoke about it. He seldom expressed his feelings.

But the last entry in this little red treasure I hold in my hand says it all.

'Now I must carry on with my wife's letter. I love her a whole lot and my three little kiddies and must never miss writing if I have the opportunity to do so.'

**Rod McLure has written corporate videos, had a couple of one act plays performed and covered the footy for a local newspaper. He has worked as a copy writer, shop assistant, attendant care worker and delivery driver.**



# Fifty Shades of Self

Lee Kofman confronts the 'I' in creative non-fiction.

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One of the first questions I ask myself when I begin a new creative non-fiction work, short- or long-form, is existential in nature (and stolen from Shakespeare). To be or not to be? Am I going to appear in my work or not? Or, to what degree am I going to be present? Because in creative non-fiction, the author is always there, if not as an explicit 'I' then as the organising consciousness hovering over the work, palpable in thematic, structural and stylistic choices, with all their implicit assumptions.

Susan Griffin, for example, in her historical study of courtesans cannot fool us (nor does she wish to, I suspect) into thinking her work is dispassionate scholarship. Already the book's title, 'The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalogue of Their Virtues', implies that there is a subjectivity, a feminist subjectivity, here at work; that she is set on a mission to reclaim the dignity of her subjects. Yet authors are usually present in their creative non-fiction on deeper levels than the political. Griffin's analysis of the phenomenon of courtesans is filtered through her views on human psychology and behaviour. Take, for example, these observations in her re-telling of Veronica Franco's story: 'brilliance' is fundamentally a sensual word' or 'wit is an androgynous art ... [it] requires a delicate sense of balance, part of the diplomacy that is the soul of wit'.

When authors explore big issues, or stories of others far removed from their own lives, like Griffin has, they might think that inserting themselves explicitly into their work isn't necessary – at least the earlier stages of research and development. But sometimes the author's involvement with their subject becomes so intense that keeping one's self out completely can actually diminish the work's integrity. Consider two classics of literary reportage: 'Thy Neighbour's Wife' by Gay Talese

and 'In Cold Blood' by Truman Capote. After giving central stage to the people they spent years studying (sexual adventurers in the former case and murderers in the latter), the authors ended up writing themselves into the very last pages, albeit in the third person, to make the works feel more complete and authentic. Capote, humbly, is 'the journalist with whom he [the murderer-protagonist] corresponded and whom he periodically was allowed to visit'. Talese is 'Talese' and his more personal, even vulnerable, appearance enlivens an otherwise emotionally pared-back book.

More often, though, creative non-fiction writers are right there in their work, with their 'I's throughout, which, to my mind, is a good thing. Authorial presence is at the heart of the appeal of creative non-fiction – and the best of the genre presents us with the inner-workings of consciousness. Or, more poetically, in the words of David Shields, with the 'theatre of the brain'. While we usually don't get access to the minds of the writer's subjects as we do in fiction (although Capote and Talese subvert this convention), we can still access the writer's interior and thus become more involved in the story. Authorial presence can imbue work with emotional urgency and raise the stakes.

Helen Garner is the master of using self to make her investigative journalism feel urgent. In my favourite book of hers, 'Joe Cinque's Consolation', which explores the Canberra-based murder of a young man by his girlfriend and her accomplice friend, Garner questions her own motives for writing the story and her biases in how she interprets the case. This is how she frames the book at the start: 'I went to Canberra because the break-up of my marriage left me humiliated and angry. I wanted to look at women who were accused of murder. I wanted to ... see the shape of their bodies and how they moved and gestured, to watch

the expressions on their faces. I needed to find out if anything made them different from me: whether I could trust myself to keep the lid on the vengeful, punitive force that was in me, as it is in everyone.' Garner's clarity about her own vulnerability, her flawed humanity, provides stark contrast to the opaqueness of the murderers' motives and the disturbing complicity of some other people from their milieu. Her candour can also prompt us, the readers, to question our own motives and biases as we contemplate the ethical questions this murder raises, as well as the general complexity of human psyche.

Most frequently I, too, choose to use 'I' in my work. I then have to decide to what degree I am going to appear there. If it's a memoir or a personal essay, the answer seems easy. Memoirists and personal essayists are the heroes of their dramas. Or are they? Actually, more than a few memoirs and personal essays focus on significant relationships in authors' lives. In such works, writers might cast themselves as the Nick Carraways to their versions of the Great Gatsbys, shining the spotlight on the true heroes of their tales. A great example of this is Ann Patchett's memoir 'Truth and Beauty', which recounts the demise of her close friend, another wonderful writer, Lucy Grealy, who at the age of 39 died from an overdose, or possibly by suicide. Although Patchett is very much present in the story and, like Garner, is clear about her own motives, as a character in the story she is the sidekick. Her focus is always on understanding what happened to Lucy, as well as on the dynamics of their friendship, which is just another way of shedding light on Lucy's tale. By the end of the book we know little about Patchett's personal life outside of what is relevant to the friendship story, although we know enough to feel the magnitude of her loss.

And sometimes, questions of self and its shades cannot be dealt and done with just once. In the book I'm revising, 'Imperfect', I have had to ask myself these questions in every chapter. The central argument in the book is that the way we look, our physical appearance, shapes our lives in many ways. The book explores these ways, and also what we can do when this shaping is incompatible with our wishes. I decided not to label 'Imperfect' as a particular sub-genre of creative non-fiction, but to use whatever means I had to try and answer my questions.

So, I used a memoir component (my own story of living with disfiguring scars); I looked at academic research, art and popular culture; and I did some journalism, attending relevant conventions and interviewing people such as extreme body modifiers, whose appearance, like mine, deviates from the norm. Then, as I began writing, I had to decide what shade of myself would best serve each chapter (organised thematically). In several chapters, I ended up being the heroine, looming in the centre. In some others, I'm the sidekick, Patchett-style, to people I interviewed. In others, I'm part-journalist, part-detective, part-personal-seeker. And in possibly the chapter most central to the book, I'm a little bit memoirist, but mostly a somewhat disembodied cultural critic – a cross between a personal and more polemic essayist.

You would think that after working all this out, I would leave the question of self alone and devote myself to other problem-solving. But no. Creative non-fiction writers (or is it just me?) seem to never be properly done with their damn selves, I'm sorry to tell you. Now that I'm revising, revising and revising 'Imperfect', I'm preoccupied with the following question: what parts of myself should I present? Is it, say, relevant that I love cooking middle-eastern food, or that at fourteen, I rebelled against my religious parents? Well, not that much, even if the latter fact is one of the foundational stones of my psyche.

See, our selves are varied and complex and to try to depict myself in all my multi-dimensionality would be just as exhausting for my readers as it would be for me. It's commonly understood among creative non-fiction writers, and also dedicated readers, that the 'I' in a work doesn't equal the author, that it is a version of them shaped to fit the story. But how do you know which parts of you belong in each new work you write? And how do you write just parts of yourself without losing the essence of you? Well, that is already another story. Shall we call it 'Fifty Shades of Self Darker?' ⑩

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**Lee Kofman is an author of four books, including 'The Dangerous Bride' (Melbourne University Press) and co-editor of 'Rebellious Daughters' (Ventura Press). Her short works have been widely published and her next creative non-fiction book, 'Imperfect', will be published by Affirm Press. This commission was supported by The Australia Council for the Arts.**

# Go Slow

Journalist and producer Michael Green spoke to Writers Victoria about slowing down in the information age.

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**W**ith the pace of journalism increasing, it can be tempting to rush the writing process. But for Michael Green, journalist and producer of 'Behind the Wire' and the multi-award-winning 'The Messenger' podcast, the most compelling stories come from taking a careful, considered approach to interviewing and writing, empowering your subjects and putting ethics at the heart of your work.

## **What is the difference between journalism and oral history?**

Some oral history experts might disagree, but there is a wide scope of material that describes itself as oral history, from straight transcripts through to something more like literary non-fiction. I've always tried to work closely and respectfully with people I've written about in my long form non-fiction, but with 'Behind the Wire', our project about immigration detention, we took that even further. We worked very slowly and carefully, to empower narrators so they were in charge of the conversation, and to make sure they were comfortable and confident about what they wanted to say, and to know that they had the final say of what is published. I believe that it can sometimes be appropriate and beneficial for a feature writer to treat interviewees in that way – even though very few writers do. But, of course, if a journalist is writing a corruption exposé, it's prudent not to hand over that kind of power to their subject.

**'Behind the Wire' works across many different media, from 'The Messenger' podcast, to exhibitions and online. Why is it important to lift the stories of others off the page?**

One key reason is that not everyone wants to read a six-thousand word story – unfortunately! We want to reach a wide audience, so we've sought out opportunities on various platforms,

and with institutions like the Immigration Museum who have visitors from different demographics, like high school students. When we began the project, we intended to work with our narrators to make long form literary stories. And we did that, and compiled them into our book, 'They Cannot Take the Sky'. But as we were working on the project, other opportunities came up. I heard the warmth and enthusiasm in Aziz's voice, when I received his voice messages from Manus Island. It was immediately clear that a podcast would be the best way for people to get to know him – so we set about work on 'The Messenger' with The Wheeler Centre.

## **For you, what is it that makes a good story?**

Good stories go beyond stereotypes. They are rich and complex and surprising. As a non-fiction writer, you need to work long and hard for those kinds of insights, especially if you're working on an issue about which you don't have direct experience. Good ethics and good stories go together, because if you treat people respectfully and conduct yourself with integrity, people will return your trust with openness and honesty. ⑩

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**Michael Green is a Walkley-Award-winning journalist in Melbourne, and the co-editor of the book, 'They Cannot Take the Sky: Stories from Detention'. He is one of the producers of 'The Messenger' podcast, about Abdul Aziz Muhamat and his life in immigration detention on Manus Island. As a feature writer, Michael has covered environmental and social issues for 'The Age', 'Sydney Morning Herald', 'Nature', 'Nautilus', 'Smith Journal', 'Right Now' and 'Overland', among others.**

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

# Rethinking My Heroes

Sam van Zweden confronts cultural cringe and celebrates the wealth of contemporary Australian non-fiction.

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The tendency to look overseas for great literary works is hardly new. The notion of 'cultural cringe' (coined by AA Phillips<sup>1</sup> in 1950) describes an Australian assumption that 'the domestic cultural product will be worse than the imported article'. We suppose it's being done better internationally, and look to international markets as arbiters of taste. We measure our own successes against international works – both in terms of sales and reception – and maintain the baseline assumption that international work represents the highest level of achievement.

Emmett Stinson charts the evolution<sup>2</sup> of the cultural cringe in a more recent context, describing it as a 'national will to fail that became a self-fulfilling prophecy, stymieing Australia's attempts to forge a national culture'. It's not hard to see this at work within non-fiction. Overseas works are now more accessible than ever and are rapidly becoming global hits almost instantaneously. This exposure means many Australian readers have tastes saturated by international literature, and I recently became painfully aware that my own are no exception. On my list of non-fiction writing heroes, Australian writers had been mostly shuffled aside to make room for the hottest new thing coming out of the States, or sometimes the UK. Looking up to so many international writers as my heroes indicates some of the difficulty I have conceiving of myself as an Australian non-fiction writer.

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NonfictionNOW<sup>3</sup> is a biennial gathering that has come to sit somewhere between an academic conference and a literary festival focused solely on non-fiction. It's one of my favourite places. It's about how we write non-fiction, why we do it, the implications of having written the world, of making life the

stuff of true writing, and what 'true writing' might even mean.

At the three I've attended (Melbourne, Flagstaff and Reykjavik), I shared space (intellectual, physical) with writers whose non-fiction has shaped my writing practice – heavyweights like David Shields, Maggie Nelson, Wayne Koestenbaum and Ander Monson. I was utterly starstruck by these international authors – they were real; I could see them moving in 3D. I was given invaluable opportunities to approach these writers, and to build relationships with people practising my craft all over the world. Part of the goal of NonfictionNOW is about international cross-pollination, and this is clear in past (and future) programming of Australian, Norwegian and Icelandic keynote speakers alongside the big American names, as well as the conference's stated mission to 'facilitate international diversity'. Drawing writers, readers and academics alike, these conferences feel heated and deeply important. They are opportunities for perspective shifts.

Yet, at each of these conferences, I noted the particular reverence given to US authors. They were the pioneers of the creative and experimental non-fiction genre, and obviously the experts – right? Of course, I don't think this is unique to the conference itself. Rather, the conference is broadly representative of the wider community as a whole. It's a microcosm – a pool of international readers and writers who (roughly) embody something broader. The US is viewed as the frontline of a genre, and everything else is trickle-down.

The US is seen as the promised land for creative non-fiction. It's the birthplace of much of the experimental work stretching the genre, and has a market more commercially viable than our own. But the extent to which the US has a monopoly on the creative and



experimental non-fiction genre affects how we write, as certain authors become tropes to mimic. Mel Campbell's recent essay<sup>4</sup> on what she calls 'experimentalism' states that 'certain styles and approaches have become emblematic', and she bemoans this kind of copycatting and the normalisation of the experimental.

Certain key authors, mostly North American, recur as reference points with such frequency that I wonder if Heti, Koestenbaum, Kraus, Nelson, Als and Jamison will soon nestle into the literary canon in the same way as modernists Woolf, Joyce, Faulkner and Beckett.

The size and volume of the US non-fiction genre is impressive though. There are strong collectives discussing and sharing one another's work, supporting their community and seeking collaboration. The benefits are obvious – these communities make events like NonfictionNOW possible. In comparison to the US though, the 10-15 writers representing Australia in Flagstaff, and double-that-or-more of us in Reykjavik, seemed small. The small representation was unsurprising, as barriers to access for overseas conferences are very real. But what was more surprising was my own ignorance of the small number of Australians in attendance, compared to my knowledge of the international authors.

Seeing Australian writers alongside others from all over the globe in this context has highlighted for me the distinct flavour of the Australian voice. It becomes plainly apparent away from home – something about reflective empathy, curiosity and flexibility in source material, and comfort with a DIY aesthetic. My lack of familiarity with some of the Australian writers felt shameful, and also like both a great loss and a great opportunity – I'd missed out on so much, but had so very much to discover, too.

\*

Who has decided on this state of deference to the US is unclear – perhaps it's just the after-effects of the longer history of commercially viable creative and experimental non-fiction in the States. While important work has happened in the US with regards to the burgeoning genre, with that work both foundational and accomplished, we're now at

‘I am committing to talk loudly about the experimental, the uncomfortable, the underrepresented and the challenging Australian non-fiction.’

a point where the genre is finding its feet in international contexts. Strangely, we somehow expect it all to look the same, or adhere to the same (in this case, paradoxically amorphous) conventions, despite its newfound global reach.

As Stinson asks of cultural cringe, 'what if measuring Australian writing in the mirror of global culture means that we only get back a reflection of other already established traditions? And what if books that don't adhere to the specifications of an approved style face the prospect of being ignored by audiences altogether?'

How are Australian writers meant to carve out a national sense of the genre and have their work reach its intended audience? To do so, we must detach from the cultural cringe. We can still appreciate the amazing work being produced overseas and recognise its invaluable contributions to the history of creative non-fiction, while also making space for and celebrating the work that writers are doing at home to redefine the genre. We must be open to what this redefinition might mean in antipodean terms.

\*

David Shields' 'Reality Hunger' is both indefinite and hugely useful. It contains, among other gems, this (which he, in turn, nicked off someone else noted in the appendix as 'Paul'): 'The roominess of the term 'non-fiction': an entire dresser labelled 'non-socks'.

It's this roominess – this sloshing about in uncertainty and doubt, the incredible buoyancy of possibility in this space – that has me so deeply invested in the form. It's expansive, and due to its collaborative and associative nature, it continues to grow. It's a safe space, a kind space, a forgiving space, a space in which things break and are sometimes mended and renamed.

I'm sad that this Shields/Paul snippet is my favourite definition. I wish I had an Australian equivalent to cite here, but I am still learning.

This 'non-socks' definition of the nature of non-fiction might not be from an Australian source, but Australian non-fiction writers are embracing its message through their practice.

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Lee Kofman's 2012 survey of non-fiction in Australia<sup>5</sup> succinctly captures both pioneers and what she calls 'newcomers' at the time, providing a historical overview of 'new journalism' and creative non-fiction in Australia. The writers Kofman selects, and others writing in the same school, are free of the tall poppy syndrome that has for so long (and often still) insisted that to write one's own story, or to place oneself within a narrative, assumes too much self-importance. The first push of creative non-fiction (the time of writers like those that Kofman labels 'pioneers' and 'veterans') saw fact meet fiction (for example, Drusilla Modjeska's 'Poppy', 1990), increased presence of the mundane and fallible narrator (as in Helen Garner's 'The First Stone', 1995), and stories from women (Robyn Davidson's 'Tracks', 1980).

Kofman's newcomers, meanwhile, are skilled and accomplished writers, whose work expands upon that first push of the non-fiction genre in a new direction. The evolution of an Australian non-fiction follows in much the same pattern as shifts in non-fiction elsewhere – centring the personal; using conventions more often associated with novels: dialogue, scene, artful language, and the like; moving toward memoir over auto/biography; perspective and poetry over capital-T truth and newsworthiness.

We're now seeing the emergence of what could be described as Australia's second wave of new non-fiction. In this next push, Australian creative and experimental non-fiction has moved towards centring more marginalised voices as well as stories making more risky experiments with style, form, and source material. Work is shifting from textual to visual and multimedia (Lucinda Strahan's essay 'Soft clothes and sneakers' in 'The Lifted Brow 37', or Eloise Grills' recent self-writing and self-drawing essay<sup>6</sup>, and the

fabulous BODY LANGUAGE project from Betanarratives).

Stories are more fragmented and require deeper engagement from the reader – uncertainty features highly. These works may lean toward poetry (as in Quinn Eades' 'All the Beginnings', or Rebecca Giggs' 'Whale fall'<sup>7</sup>), or intertwine personal experience with reportage or criticism (as in Briohny Doyle's 'Adult Fantasy', or Michael Mohammed Ahmad's viral essay 'Bad writer'<sup>8</sup>). These features aren't necessarily unique to Australia – changes in technology, reading styles, the advent of globalisation and generational shifts in attitudes mean that non-fiction writing around the world is striking out in new directions. Works of Australian non-fiction writers overlap with that of writers from overseas in this sense, but also diverge from the thinking that's happening elsewhere. There are similarities, and that's a comfort. Australian non-fiction, however, also has a distinctive flavour.

In a country where we're taught that our own work is bound to be inferior to anything published internationally, where we either doubt our own work or are cut down to size by those fearing the tall poppies – in this climate, the existence of a vibrant and risky Australian non-fiction itself speaks to resilience, insistence and doggedness.

Australia is big – it's geographically and culturally disparate and diverse. Densely-populated coastal fringes contrast with sparsely-populated inland areas. The Australian experience is as wide and varied as our continent. Increasingly, Australian non-fiction becomes a topographic and psychogeographic<sup>9</sup> project, particularly of Sydney and its sprawling western suburbs.

Australians live in a climate where many struggle to own anything (housing, parliament) and inhabit a colonised land where a sense of ownership is problematic for most. It's a place where the nearness of the world's ecological peril can be suffocating. The importance of polyphonic voice and fragmented narrative, ownership of stories and cobbling together real-world detritus in meaningful ways has different significance on Australian ground than elsewhere. An Australian non-fiction is marked by all these things and more.

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Australian literary journals are increasingly willing to embrace formally risky work, and links between the academic sphere and literary culture are becoming stronger. While this can sometimes make for a denser reading experience, it also favours risk. Academia's emphasis on the production of new knowledge means that risk is encouraged, and even failure can be fruitful. The valuing of risk and chance-taking, and the embrace of potential failure, are difficult to justify within a more mainstream publishing industry, and herein lies Australia's bind with non-fiction. Works carrying that same riskiness are difficult to commercialise in this publishing landscape. Unlike America, which has its champion in Graywolf Press, we have no champion for experimental and creative non-fiction in Australia. However, independent publishing houses are leaning in that direction.

Late in 2017, Giramondo published the formally experimental and physically beautiful 'Mirror Sydney' from Vanessa Berry, comprised of observational essays and hand-drawn maps. Around the same time they also published 'Tracker', a 650-page artfully crafted compendium of transcribed stories about Indigenous activist Tracker Tilmouth. This unique book has been embraced by both readers and prizes. In its introduction, Alexis Wright notes how 'Tracker' follows 'an Aboriginal tradition of storytelling practice for crossing landscapes and boundaries, giving many voices a part in the story'. These projects are distinctly Australian.

Meanwhile, the work of Brow Books (the book publishing arm of 'The Lifted Brow') shows promise to pave this way in the future, with non-fiction from Maria Tumarkin and a recent call for non-fiction manuscripts. Journals like 'Rabbit', 'The Lifted Brow', 'The Sydney Review of Books' and 'Griffith Review' are helping to encourage readerships of this kind of work. Local prizes are seeking daring non-fiction – The Horne Prize, Calibre Essay Prize, Scribe Nonfiction Prize for Young Writers and The Lifted Brow & RMIT non/fictionLab Prize for Experimental Non-fiction are only a few of the essay prizes currently on offer.

The Stella Prize is also an important boost for work that pushes boundaries. The prize doesn't use categories and instead judges

fiction and non-fiction together, making space for hybrid forms and genre-defying works, allowing for categorically 'not-quite' works to gain the same recognition as those that fit more neatly into categories.

Visibility is on the rise for experimental and creative non-fiction in Australia, but it has a long way to go before young writers at home begin to think of their heroes first as other Australian writers, rather than those idols from overseas.

A similar problem existed in the Australian Young Adult genre, which has gained new audiences after the introduction of the #LoveOzYA hashtag. This grassroots movement mobilised its writers and readership via Twitter, boosting the profile and tapping into an already enthusiastic and supportive community around the genre. Danielle Binks, writing about the emergence of the hashtag<sup>10</sup>, cites 'a new problem facing Australian youth literature, which is being underrated in its own market by global forces' – there's that cultural cringe again. This is very much the case with Australian non-fiction, too. But as #LoveOzYA shows, readers are not a small part of the puzzle, and markets are driven by buyers.

A comparatively small publishing industry means that 'there's no market' seems like a reasonable defence for not backing newer and more challenging writers of non-fiction at home. Yes, Australia's small compared to the United States, the UK or Europe. But small is not non-existent, and overseas rights for books sell all the time. Why not make them for risky works that stand up to our international counterparts? Why not have those international audiences looking toward Australia and admiring our reformulation of the genre?

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This perfect storm of cultural cringe, patchy visibility and risk-averse publishing means that so many readers and writers miss the fact that what's happening at home is alive and compelling and fierce and important.

My writing heroes have been international for too long. I'm rethinking my heroes. What non-fiction can do now, here in Australia, is start conversations that champion our own. It's time to find local heroes – our peers, our mentors, our leaders and emerging writers. It's time to

amplify the volume of those who are working to redefine the genre locally.

It's time to speak loudly about what we've been reading – the Australian affliction of tall poppy syndrome is real, but communities exist to lift one another up. The conversation needs to be loud enough that when our young non-fiction writers think of great experimental and creative non-fiction, they think of Australian work and of people that they can recognise at events, approach for mentorship, and speak with meaningfully.

I am committing to talk loudly about the experimental, the uncomfortable, the underrepresented and the challenging Australian non-fiction that I'm reading. Because these conversations start with readers. And they get books from smaller presses into more hands and on more course reading lists. These conversations educate our publishers and our prizes. They help writers conceive of new ways forward.

The conversation starts with readers, so read loudly.

### Reading list

What follows is a short (hugely selective, utterly incomplete) list of Australian non-fiction work that has gotten me excited recently, which might help if you're interested in learning more about the current state of Australian non-fiction. It's comprised of books, websites, projects and articles which feature those conventions and trends that are being exhibited all over the world, as well as those that seem to be more localised. I'd like to acknowledge that this is skewed hugely toward Sydney and Melbourne.

- 'Mirror Sydney' by Vanessa Berry
- Quinn Eades – literally everything, but especially his books 'Rallying' and 'All the Beginnings', and his essay series 'I can't stop crying'
- 'Small Acts of Disappearance' by Fiona Wright
- Rabbit<sup>12</sup> non-fiction poetry journal
- 'Tracker' by Alexis Wright
- 'Eyes Too Dry' by Alice Chipkin and Jessica Tavassoli
- 'Things That Helped' by Jessica Friedmann
- 'Marionette' by Jessica Wilkinson

- Chart Collective<sup>13</sup>
- 'The Griffith Review': Interactive essays<sup>14</sup>
- 'The Lifted Brow' (print and online)<sup>15</sup>
- Sophie Cunningham's 'Tree of the Day'<sup>16</sup>

### Links

1. [meanjin.com.au/essays/a-a-phillips-and-the-icultural-cringe-creating-an-iaustralian-tradition/](http://meanjin.com.au/essays/a-a-phillips-and-the-icultural-cringe-creating-an-iaustralian-tradition/)
2. [sydneyreviewofbooks.com/in-the-same-boat/](http://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/in-the-same-boat/)
3. [nonfictionnow.org](http://nonfictionnow.org)
4. [overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-228/regular-mel-campbell/](http://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-228/regular-mel-campbell/)
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12. [rabbitpoetry.com](http://rabbitpoetry.com)
13. [chartcollective.org](http://chartcollective.org)
14. [griffithreview.atavist.com](http://griffithreview.atavist.com)
15. [theliftedbrow.com](http://theliftedbrow.com)
16. [instagram.com/sophtreeofday/](http://instagram.com/sophtreeofday/) 

**Sam van Zweden is a Melbourne-based writer interested in memory, food and mental health. Her writing has appeared in 'The Big Issue', 'The Lifted Brow', 'Cordite', The Wheeler Centre and others. Her work has been shortlisted for the Scribe Nonfiction Prize for Young Writers, the Lifted Brow and non-fictionLab Experimental Non-fiction Writing Prize and the Lord Mayor's Creative Writing Awards.**

This piece was originally published on [meanjin.com.au](http://meanjin.com.au)



# Hope is Subversive



Jackie Mansourian reflects on the Human Rights Oration, 'Towards a Treaty' and the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

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Professor Megan Davis recently presented the 2018 Human Rights Oration, 'Towards a Treaty', organised by the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Professor Davis is a member of the Referendum Council, appointed to talk to Australians about changing our constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, Davis was clear. It would not be the Council talking but creating safe spaces where shared meaning and new ways of understanding could flow between people, in dialogue.

The Council developed a careful process of ten First Nations dialogues across Australia. Some of the principles upon which the dialogues were based included impartiality, equal access to information by everyone and mutually-agreed outcomes. Each principle was meticulously enacted – this was not going to be yet another consultation leaving people feeling like they were used.

Davis explained that the framework which led the Council to determine the dialogue process was that of ethical loneliness\*. The immensity of the weight and meaning of this framework hangs heavy over Australia, for our past and present treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by our governments as well as by us, who are non-indigenous Australians. Ethical loneliness refers to the experience of being abandoned by humanity and in the case of First Nation Australians, it has been compounded by the injustice of not being heard. Davis witnessed the pain and powerlessness of ethical loneliness at the beginnings of the dialogues, but was also moved by the shifts that occurred in which deep insights were shared and agreements reached. She was honest, as were the people in the dialogues – First Nation Australians needed to re-learn how to make agreements with each other.

One of the strongest mutually agreed outcomes of the dialogues was the Uluru Statement of

the Heart. This statement was purposefully written to the people of Australia. It invites us with generosity and with honesty, to hear and to understand with our hearts, the experiences of the First Peoples and their calls for justice.

Will we continue to reinforce that abandonment experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders? Or is this one of the seminal moments in our shared history in which we can enact our humanity and our ethical responsibility with the First Nations?

Our government's response to the Uluru statement was to reject its recommendations. It further abandoned the courage of the people and their ideas. Again. No Voice. No Treaty. No Truth. It was shocking. In this overwhelming context of abandonment, Davis affirmed that hope is subversive. Her oration was a reminder of the significance of the process which led to the Uluru Statement and the power of the ideas contained within. But it was also a call for all Australians to hear and to act within their own spaces on these words and ideas. This pivotal moment in our shared history cannot be forsaken.

As part of this, PEN Melbourne made one of 329 submissions to the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition who are currently examining all recommendations of the Referendum Council report, the Uluru Statement, the Committee on Constitutional Recognition's report of 2015, and the Expert Panel's report in 2012. Their interim report is due now. Let us watch out and respond with the immensity of responsibility we hold. Let us hold each other and our government to account.

Hope is subversive, but only when it is enacted. ⑩

\*Based on the work of philosopher and writer Jill Stauffer, 'Ethical Loneliness – The injustice of not being heard'.

[penmelbourne.org](http://penmelbourne.org)

# Following Her Footsteps

Ann-Marie Priest travels to Tasmania to get to know Gwen Harwood.

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The distinguished English biographer Richard Holmes once described biography as 'a handshake across time'. He was trying to draw out the degree to which writing a biography is 'an act of human solidarity, and in its own way an act of recognition and of love'. This is surely true, but his analogy strikes me as somehow too cool. For me, writing a biography has been more like a big warm bear-hug across time, or maybe a wild, nose-in-the-air, nose-to-the-ground fox-hunt across time.

Of course, a hound on the hunt has murder in its heart, while the biographer has only desperate and thwarted love in hers. But the hunt was once a favourite image of lover-poets, and one my own biographical subject, Tasmanian poet Gwen Harwood, liked to use, so perhaps it's not entirely inappropriate. 'Here and everywhere,' she writes in 'Meditation on Wyatt I', 'I meet your crazy scent' – and I know what she means. Like Harwood's lover-hound on the trail, I seem to have Harwood's 'world either side of my nose'. Like her, I 'root and feast' in the 'harping grasses'.

The terrain of the hunt for me has largely been typescript and manuscript pages in library reading rooms, but recently the search was transferred to the streets and mountains and beaches of Tasmania, thanks to the 2017 Hazel Rowley Fellowship. At the end of a year that had somehow become an escalating blur of urgent work demands, I found myself all at once with nothing to do but open myself to this island and to Gwen, to wander and think and sniff and write.

Like Gwen, I came to the 'Antarctic wastes' from Queensland, but unlike her, I was enchanted by the place. Admittedly, I was there in summer, and for me, the clear, dry sunshine was a welcome relief from sub-tropical heat. What's more, I was there for only three months, whereas she was

there for fifty years – and felt trapped and immured for at least some of that time. But most importantly, I had her to settle me in. Overwhelmingly, it was the trace of her own presence that enchanted Tasmania for me: the words of her poems, letters, stories and memoirs created a nostalgic geography before I even set foot in the place.

I stayed in a weatherboard house on a hillside in Mount Stuart, and set up my desk in the front room with its sweep of windows overlooking the city. From my eyrie I had an unimpeded view of the stately red-brick edifice of Calvary Hospital, where Gwen bore her children in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and of Augusta Road sweeping gently away downhill. I could almost make out the huge cypress hedge surrounding the large family home where Gwen – ironically styling herself the Sappho of Lenah Valley – lived with her young family for some twenty-five years.

I came to know her walks, following her paths through the city. I visited her beaches, the liminal spaces so important to her, where she went to picnic with her children, to meet a lover, to fossick in rock pools, to walk with a friend, to brood over past sorrows, to push out from the shore in her dinghy, going after the flathead. I drove to Oyster Cove, where she and her husband, Bill, had spent ten years 'changing five acres of scrubby bush into a charming estate' ('The Seventh House'). Here I scrambled down a low escarpment to stand on a 'narrow ledge/of sandstone by the water's edge' and see the 'Stones rolled in lively anarchy/through centuries of water' ('Littoral').


I had not understood, before I came to Tasmania, how different these beachscapes were from the ones I – and Gwen – had known in Queensland. They took me back to an earlier time, to the windy grey beaches of my childhood in South Australia. Only there,



View over Hobart. Photo by Ann-Marie Priest.

I had never seen oyster shells flung in joyful abundance across the black rocks, or mussels crowding every stone.

On a beach on the South Arm peninsula, I squatted down to peer into a rock pool, and was thrilled to see a sprinkling of sea anemones on its rocky sides, their scarlet tentacles streaming in the current. I remembered sea anemones from the cool-water beaches of Yorke Peninsula, but they had been rings of brownish fringe in the sand, not colourful blooms like this. We children would race to be the first to press a fingertip to each velvety centre, and shiver with delight as the soft mouths closed upon us. In 'The Sea Anemone', Harwood describes them more sinisterly as 'gouts of blood', shining 'blood drop by drop among the rocks'. In her poem, the 'hungering gentleness' of the sea creature's touch is transformed into the lips of a newborn child at the breast, the motion of a lover's mouth on an outflung palm. But for her, these innocent blooms are 'Not flowers, no, animals that must eat or die'. As I reached into the water to touch one tiny, blood-red creature, I felt a sudden fear—toxins, tentacles, the lion's mouth. The red fringe brushed my flesh, sticky as a spider's web, and for a moment my fingertip was caught between velvet teeth. Eat or die. I sat back on my heels, exhilarated.

This is what I have taken away from my time in Tasmania: a knowledge of Gwen's places that is in my fingertips, in my feet, in my flesh, not just in my mind. Now, when I am writing, I see this knowledge emerge in unexpected places in my text. I feel the confidence it brings, the fillip it gives to my imagination. Not a handshake, no, but certainly an exhilarating act of love. 

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**Ann-Marie Priest is the author of 'A Free Flame: Australian Women Writers and Vocation in the Twentieth Century' and 'Great Writers, Great Loves: The Reinvention of Love in the Twentieth Century'. Her essays and reviews have appeared in 'Australian Book Review', 'Meanjin', 'Southerly', 'The Weekend Australian' and 'The Age'. In 2017, she won the Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship for a forthcoming biography of poet Gwen Harwood.**

# The Chords Between the Lines

Kirsten Krauth explores the connections between poetry and music through the work of poet Nathan Curnow and musician Geoffrey Williams.

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It's the opening night of the poetry festival in Heidelberg in Germany, one of the International Cities of Literature. Onstage stand a poet and musician who've travelled from Ballarat in regional Victoria. Nathan Curnow introduces his first poem, 'Student Kiss', about a famous Heidelberg chocolate. He's googled those things that make Heidelberg unique and written poems to deliver. But he's taking a risk; like saying 'put another shrimp on the barbie', it might not sit quite right. He gauges his audience as he shapes the delivery. When Nathan has finished, musician Geoffrey Williams starts singing into his loop machine, using sounds and notes and clicked fingers to create scaffolding that holds his song together. It's a song built from the ground up, an improvised response to 'Student Kiss'. Like the audience, Geoffrey is hearing the poem for the first time.

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While the term ekphrasis has been traditionally used to describe the process of writing a poem about a work of visual art viewed in a gallery setting (generally a painting), its definition is gradually broadening to cover all kinds of creative acts that bounce off each other. Poetry about music, music about poetry – and not just poetry. Prose fits here too. In my own fiction, I often use ekphrasis as a tool to help me get into character, to explore setting, to call up a sense of history. I'm writing a novel about the early '80s music scene in Melbourne with Nick Cave and his band, The Birthday Party, featured as

characters. In the chapter, 'Nick the Stripper', my main character enters the scene of the song's video clip and writes from the inside-out of the frame as the band wreaks havoc around him.

In Australia, ekphrasis as a writing practice is becoming more and more popular. The Queensland Poetry Festival hosts the Philip Bacon Ekphrasis Award while the recent Nillumbik Ekphrasis Poetry Award invited Australian poets to respond with poems to artworks from their collection. 'Cordite Poetry Review' had a special issue (#58) dedicated entirely to ekphrastic poems in 2017 and the Pure Poetry Project has been evolving for a decade, involving emerging regional poets from Ballarat, Shepparton and Castlemaine, celebrating the meeting point between poetry and music.

Music and poetry have always been intertwined in many cultures. With poetry starting as an oral tradition, the bards would speak accompanied by live music. In the contemporary sphere, it's everywhere: In 'M Train', Patti Smith riffs off her obsession with the French poet Arthur Rimbaud – she recently bought his home in Roche – while Antony sings Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Lake' to life. Closer to home, Natalya Vagner's recent CD, 'Explorations of Soul', includes a number of songs reflecting on the poems of Judith Wright, while musician Angie Hart has composed music around Dorothy Porter's evocative writing in a new project, 'Borrowed Verse', where musicians like Simon Munro, Ben Salter and Jessie L Warren have been



‘It’s the interconnections between various artforms where exciting possibilities are shaping up for collaboration.’

paired with Australian poets including Michael Dransfield (Paula Keogh’s beautiful memoir ‘The Green Bell’ is a wonderful meditation on the early life of this poet) and Maria Zajkowski.

Poet Nathan Curnow sees the connections between music and poetry as an exciting space to explore on stage, sharing rhythms, gaps and pregnant pauses, ‘the build of words and delivery of words’. It’s also about the audience, the reception of those rhythms. ‘There is this primal thing within us for rhythm and to hear that rhythm broken and to hear it reinstated and those expectations set up’, he says. Working with singer-songwriter Geoffrey Williams offers a new dimension to Nathan’s work because the musician uses chords to explore ‘the tone in between the lines and what we leave out. It’s the feeling that you allude to but don’t state.’

For Geoffrey, the energy comes from improvisation. As he’s listening to Nathan’s poem on stage, he homes in on the ‘tone, vibe, emotion of the piece, the rhythm and the phrasing, waiting for the pertinent ones to show themselves so I can write them down.’ But most important of all is a sense of the mood of the poem. ‘I’m aiming to express how I feel about that poem, using a cocktail of words (Nathan’s and mine), melodies and rhythm to continue telling the story.’

Both Nathan and Geoffrey agree that the key to their symbiosis is the transference of feeling, to the audience and to each other, whether it’s the silly, joyous poems that often begin and end the show, or those looking at love, grief and loss in the middle. As Nathan says, ‘Geoffrey wants to feel something and that will dictate everything that comes. That’s good for me because I’m a poet of feeling and I believe in feeling and I want to write things that make people feel.’

The dynamic works both ways now, too. Nathan has started crafting poems based on Geoffrey’s songs – his ‘Cinderella’ was a top-ten hit in Germany in the 1980s – and likes to

surprise him with them on stage. But the result is always unexpected.

Cinderella’ is a big song for Geoffrey, right. He’s got it always stuck in his head. He came up with the phrasing that made that song. It’s a kind of challenge to him because I’m saying, get the song out of your head, and do something new. But then, I want him to, you know, ‘just sing a line like you sing in the song, please’, but no, he never does.

For writers, it’s the interconnections between various artforms where exciting possibilities are shaping up for collaboration and the chance to reach new audiences. Nathan and Geoffrey’s performances and workshops were popular overseas, even in places like Poland where the poems relied on written translation, because of the transformative power of music and spoken work to use emotion, mood and atmosphere to connect artists with those listening.

How do you do what you do, so it’s for others? That’s the aspect of performance that Geoffrey and I are fascinated with. I wrote this line once, which is ‘how to fill the spotlight so the spotlight shines for all’ – that is the paradox of performance. How do I use that spotlight so it’s for everyone? ⑩

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**Kirsten Krauth is a writer and editor based in Castlemaine. Her first novel is ‘just\_a\_girl’ and she’s working on her second as part of a PhD in creative writing.**

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

# Behind the Calico Curtain

By Jo Burnell

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Five bells toll at 4.45am. The world is humid darkness and my mind, a sleep deprived fog. I'm supposed to jump out of bed in fervent prayer but my body shakes from the shock of waking up too early, even after two years practice.

'Oh Lord,' intones my sleepy Novice Mistress.

Our fifteen voices chant the regulation reply, 'I offer You my thoughts, words, prayers and actions this day.'

And so it begins.

Here in the heart of Tondo, one of the poorest suburbs of Manila, in an old building with block-thick walls, high ceilings and shuttered windows, more than one hundred women rise from their beds and offer their lives to Jesus as they dress in the dark.

We tumble off cotton-stuffed mattresses, kneel at narrow bed frames and try not to get tangled in each other's legs as we don religious habits under the cover of cotton sheets. I'd rather stand, strip and dress. It would take a fraction of the time but that's not what we Missionaries of Charity do.

'Oh Lord, let me spread your fragrance everywhere I go ...' The words to our memorised prayers flow from my mouth, but it's just background noise as I realise I've snapped the wrong press-studs together. I rush from the dormitory, pleating my sari as I go in an effort to catch up with my group sisters who glide in silence past doors that seem to creak at my approach.

As I step across the threshold from corridor to chapel, cool concrete gives way to the warmth of woven straw matting. Dropping to the floor

on one knee, I know my mind should be filled with a heartfelt mantra: something like, 'I adore You, oh Lord' would do. Instead, I jump up quickly so the sleepy sister behind doesn't trip on my toes.

A gentle breeze wafts through glass-free windows and fluorescent lights blaze as we try not to bump shoulders in our hustle for limited floor space. I want to scowl at my beloved Christ hanging on the cross behind the altar. He knows I'm not a morning person. Instead I send Him my usual pleading glance: You know I can't do this alone. Please help me through the day.

The words of our Morning Office shift and shimmer before my eyes as the numbing effect of collective prayer takes hold. In an effort to stay awake for personal meditation, I kneel up, back straight, bible balancing between open palms. Like the princess and the pea, I feel each excruciating bump where strands of woven matting intersect beneath my knees. After months of kneeling like this, tiny boils simmer below the surface of my skin and the slightest weight-shift ignites new fiery centres of pain.

I finally give in and sit, then quickly forget where I am. Humidity builds, morning brightens and onion-garlic perspiration oozes from my companions. As my head lolls forward, sensation blurs. Others might think I'm saying 'yes, Lord' with my whole self, but I'm simply slipping into oblivion. If I'm lucky, I'll be infused with light for a little while, but more often I float aimlessly, lost in nothingness, struggling to breathe.

A tap on my shoulder yanks me back to reality. My eyes burst open and with the usual gasp of shock, I marvel that my nose is so close to straw matting. I was never this flexible at home.

'You're snoring again,' my Group Mistress hisses.

The adrenaline buzz of being rudely awakened for the second time keeps me moving till breakfast, and the energy hit from morning rice sustains all the way to the washing square. But as we bend over our laundry buckets and I slam my bar of soap into sari cloth, recurring doubts assail me. As I lather up my greying habit, I pray blood won't seep from my festering fingers just this once. Otherwise, pink smudges will replace the marks I've just pounded out.

Three bells stop me mid-rinse. I've barely begun but it's housework time. Frustrated, I dump my clothes on concrete, lug my empty bucket to the toilets and offer up a wistful prayer that lingering suds might work a little miracle while I'm away.

Of course, cleaning should be another time of heartfelt meditation. 'Water from the side of Christ, wash me,' might fill a mind more focused on the Lord, but as I attack a toilet bowl with the worn out stubble of our communal scrubbing brush and consider the shit-caked bowls awaiting later in the day, I fantasise about folding a dry habit by lunchtime.

My heart lifts as I puff back to the washing square with time to rinse, wring and hang but the feel of fragile sari cloth tearing beneath my fingers is unmistakable. Holding back tears, I gently untangle my mess and pray the rip isn't noticeable. The prospect of hours stitching to repair what happened in a moment hovers over me like a darkening storm cloud. When the split is shorter than my little finger, the day seems suddenly brighter but three peals of the bell bring me back to my senses.

Christ is calling me to drop what I'm doing and obey, but I'm torn. If I leave now, I'll spend forever pondering my unfinished laundry. If I stay and wash, I'll feel guilty for doing my will instead of God's. The threads of my life are being torn asunder by a pile of greying clothes. As I struggle to decide which guilt I'll carry for the day, Sister Joy gently pulls the cloth from

‘If I stay and wash, I'll feel guilty for doing my will instead of God's. The threads of my life are being torn asunder by a pile of greying clothes.’

my hands and rinses as I watch. We grin like schoolmates playing hooky as we squeeze, wring and peg.

In this world where touch is discouraged and particular friendships frowned upon, our shared moment warms me more than the mug of coffee I crave. Yet again I see how breaking this world's rules brings me relief and I have to face the question I forever try to suppress:

What on earth am I doing here training to be one of Mother Theresa's nuns? ⑩

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**Freelance Writer and Editor, Jo Burnell is passionate about story. In between supporting fellow writers with story structure, she squirrels away time for her own projects. Excerpts from her memoir 'Behind the Calico Curtain' won entry into the 2015 ACT Hard Copy Professional Writing Program and also reached the 2018 Kore Press International Memoir Competition semi-finals, for which Cheryl Strayed was judge. You can find Jo at [joburnell.com](http://joburnell.com)**



# Prescribing Paragraphs

By David McLean

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Lost and naïve, traipsing through the wards  
I listened to a chest and heard  
A harsh rasping whisper  
Blowing between beats and breaths  
All but intangible from the outside  
Yet I hear rumbling beneath my steth.  
Behind all this was a person  
Patiently waiting while I fumble.

Writing as a form of reflective practice is a well-established custom. Those of us who write regularly are versed in the way words can be formed to express our thoughts and feelings. We shape them and utilise expression to suggest how we are feeling and to elicit an emotional response from others.

But writing of this kind can also be subversive especially in communities where creative activities are not the norm. And so it was when I ran simple writing workshops among a group of second-year medical students at the Epworth Hospital in Richmond.

The genesis of the workshops came about because of a personal contact I had with an associate professor of surgery involved in mentoring a new student cohort at the hospital. He also had a keen interest in educational delivery. Epworth HealthCare had recently established itself as a teaching facility accepting medical students from Melbourne universities on rotation. They were charged with providing a forum where students could learn through observation and direct contact with healthcare professionals. Establishing the need for reflective practice was part of what had to be imparted – critically evaluating one's experience on a regular and ongoing basis. But differentiating the Epworth experience from other institutions was also a consideration.

The suggestion that creative writing could facilitate these goals upset the standard conventions associated with medicine. For the students 'it was incredibly unscientific' and, while co-operative, some 'thought this exercise would be pointless'. The cohort were disciplined and dedicated individuals who were high academic achievers. They had to be to gain entry into what is considered an elite professional realm. Their training also required them to be methodical and meticulous. A diagnosis, after all, has to be correct and the public expect nothing less.

Typically, feedback and reflection within a profession is self-contained. Exams and grades matter. Comments about performance from professors and mentors were reassuring and peer review is about those elements of the course they have mastered or were in need of correction. Becoming a successful medical doctor is a clear and ever present goal.

So, to expect them to participate in the abstraction of a writing workshop where outcomes are uncertain and goals unclear was taking them out of their comfort zone. I set up a template to generate a piece of writing. They were not expected to be writers or produce material for assessment or grading. They could voluntarily share the pieces. And, because we wanted to evaluate the efficacy of this approach, I also asked them to write a brief paragraph at the end of the workshop about what they made of the experience.

To say the least, we were awestruck by what was produced – not because it had literary merit but because of what was made manifest to the students. There were some pieces that astonished. The example at the beginning

of this essay is a case in point. But their comments also amazed:

'It makes you aware of the impact illness can have on a patient's life.'

'The writing task allowed me to reflect about the patient's perspective.'

'It also presented the patients in a more stark fashion as they were reduced to a few sentences.'

'Being mindful of them as a person, rather than as a disease, is extremely important.'

We are in the early stages of this process with the students. The initial responses have encouraged those in charge of the Epworth student programme to continue. It has the potential to be used as a research project which would be in keeping with a teaching facility.

In some ways, writing workshops of this kind are disconcerting. They highlight a realm of the profession that has been overlooked but has proven to be essential. In layman's terms, we call it 'bed-side manner'. A crowded curriculum that has to be mastered has fostered this oversight. The medical profession is also built around accuracy as established by a clinical and scientific approach. A writing workshop tosses aside these rigid shackles. Writing is used as a form of discovery and exploration. There are no clear goals. A resulting piece of writing may or may not work for a myriad of reasons but engagement in the process, sharing what is produced and articulating what you were trying to achieve is invaluable.

Students discovered themselves and their peers as people:

'This exercise made me realise just how similar our internal thoughts are at present.'

'I enjoyed the insights it gave into how others feel about our 'journey' through medical school.'

It enabled them to explore what their studies meant to them:

'This exercise challenged me to summarise my medical learning thus far in an incredibly succinct way – extracting the core of how I feel.'

'To look at medical study from another perspective.'

What was exposed to me as the one running the workshops was the efficacy of writing within a community. The notion of writing as a form of rehabilitation amongst patients is well documented but encouraging writing as a professional activity to look beyond the constraints imposed by a profession is revelatory. The role of writing has been diminished in some quarters as there isn't enough time or the objectives aren't clear. Some may even feel intimidated by the writing process or the expectation to produce something of merit.

What is apparent is that writing is a form of discovery. Writing for writing's sake can clarify, touch emotions, build communities and help explore what has hitherto remained unexpressed. It allows us to frame our identities both professionally and personally. It is an essential ingredient in raising awareness of ourselves and others. If I were a medical professional I'd prescribe the writing of a paragraph to go with every aspirin. It may just make you feel better. ⑩

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**David McLean is an author, broadcaster and educator. He's had pieces appear in 'Overland', 'Meanjin' and 'The Age'. As the article suggests, he's currently running writing workshops for second year medical students at Epworth HealthCare. He has also run workshops for Anglicare, Monash City, and regularly provides revision lectures and workshops in schools.**



# Rekindled

By Donna Tsironis

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I absolutely love to write. I always have. I first realised this from the enjoyment that I had when writing essays in high school. It resonated with me a great deal, to create a narrative prose on a topic. Then at university, more essays and reports, culminating in a thesis. These early forays led to a job in technical writing – equipment manuals, to be exact. I was writing – I was happy. But then, many things happened in my life at once, and my love of writing was placed to the side.

I rekindled my passion for writing when I became wheelchair-bound. It was a very significant realisation for me. I was always thinking to myself, what else can I possibly do with my life, in addition to nurturing my beloved son and caring husband?

Being in a wheelchair gave me a lot of thinking and reading time. This precious time with a peaceful and non-frantic mind allowed me to bring to fruition what I was destined for – writing. So I embarked on a journey. One where I immersed myself into this wonderful world of curiosity. A writing correspondence course followed, and that allowed me to study and read all about writing. How brilliant – my writing life had formally begun – again!

Being a writer with a disability has tested my abilities, yet it fulfils me. I have Multiple Sclerosis and the following symptoms affect my writing:

- weakness in my hands that cause typing difficulties
- fatigue
- pins, needles and numbness in the hands
- problems with cognition.

This makes it difficult to engage in writing at times, but I strive to overcome these challenges and this makes me feel more confident about writing and sharing my love of the written word with other readers.

I overcome barriers in my pursuits of writing because of my disability on a daily basis. I can happily announce, however, that these barriers haven't halted my writing life. When I write about my own disability, it makes it easier to talk to people about it and share with others my experiences. Overall, my writing is very beneficial to me.

I have worked out that morning is the best time of the day for me to write/type and undertake research. My body feels stronger and my mind refreshed and clear. I also find that I take a lot of inspiration from the outside world for my writing – this helps me cognitively and my mind feels sharpened. I will often sit in my favourite room of the house, just looking out of the window. Ideas pop into my head, about how I can weave everything from what I observe, experience and feel, into my writing.

Being out and about with my carers is also absolutely wonderful. This benefits me a lot, as experiences enrich my writing life. My writing life now is more creative, inspirational, therapeutic and hence immensely rewarding.

Sure, when you're living with disability, writing can be even more challenging. But to have found another passion in life (along with my loving husband and terrific son, not to mention extended family, fashion, food and friends), makes me feel blissful. Bring on the writing workshops I say! Whoever said that being in a wheelchair was imperfect? 🍷

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**Donna Tsironis is a Melbourne freelance writer whose work has appeared in 'The Age' and 'Link-the National Disability Magazine'. She is currently writing a collection of personal stories that reflect her life with MS.**



## Milestones

**Stephen Smithyman** is having a book of his poems, 'Snapshot in the Dark', published by Ginninderra Press in August. Stephen won the Cancer Council of Victoria Award for Outstanding Poem, 2011, the Poetica Christi Prize, 2013, and the Glen Phillips Poetry Prize, 2016. The book will be launched at Buck Mulligan's Whisky Bar and Bookshop in September, date TBA.

**David Bryson** has published his latest book of poetry, 'Trace Lines'. The book is available on Amazon.com and in the North Melbourne Bookshop, 546 Queensberry Street, North Melbourne.

**Albert Trajstman's** 'Faraway Places', published by Hybrid Publishers, was reviewed nationwide in the Fairfax press on 23 June. The work, a collection of three novellas, was well received

and described as 'diverse and ambitious'. 'Faraway Places' is now available in bookshops.

**Rebecca Fraser's** junior teen adventure novel 'Curtis Creed and the Lore of the Ocean' was released on 7 June through IFWG Publishing Australia: [ifwgaustralia.com/title-curtis-creed-and-the-lore-of-the-ocean/](http://ifwgaustralia.com/title-curtis-creed-and-the-lore-of-the-ocean/)

**Sandi Wallace's** gripping third rural crime thriller 'Into the Fog' releases August. This new Harvey and Franklin thriller follows 'Tell Me Why' (winner of the Davitt Award Readers' Choice) and 'Dead Again', and it is set in the Dandenong Ranges. Available in paperback and eBook. [sandiwallace.com](http://sandiwallace.com)

**Ken Linnett's** recently published non-fiction book won the Whittaker Award for the best book on horse racing published in Australia and New Zealand in the past two years.

## Classifieds

### Manuscript Feedback

Stuck at the beginning, middle or end of your draft? Need an extra eye on your work?

Receive a thorough read-through and feedback session to get your writing moving again! All genres. SMS now for free 15-min phone consultation from writing mentor Jan Cornell: 0415921303. [writersjourney.com.au](http://writersjourney.com.au)

### Mornington Peninsula Writing Prizes

Mornington Peninsula Writing Prizes offered by Frankston Writers Block. Short Story and Poetry Comps, open now, closes Sep 30. Poetry: Up to 50 lines. Short story: Up to 3000 words. Open theme: \$5 entry. Prize: \$100 and publication in 2019 Anthology. Entry forms, send a SSAE to Angela, PO Box 8098, Burnt Bridge VIC, 3936, phone 03 9789 5496 or email [davidptk68@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:davidptk68@hotmail.co.uk)

## Comps and Opps

### Hachette Australia Manuscript Development Program

This program is a creative and professional skills development intensive that helps emerging Australian writers to refine an existing manuscript. Ten writers are selected to take part in a four-day retreat, during which Hachette Australia publishers, editors and authors provide direct feedback on their manuscripts.

Entries close 17 Aug.

[qldwriters.org.au/hachette/guidelines/](http://qldwriters.org.au/hachette/guidelines/)

### The Neilma Sidney Literary Travel Fund

Applications for Round 3 of the Neilma Sidney Literary Travel Fund will open 16 Aug at 10am.

The travel fund recognises the unique value of travel in the development of new writing and literary careers. The travel fund is open to emerging, midcareer and established Australian writers and literary sector workers. Applicants can apply for grants between \$2000 to \$10,000.

Judges include author and journalist Benjamin Law, export manager Emily Booth from Text

Publishing and community programs manager Indra Kurzeme from State Library of Victoria.

Entries close Thu 13 Sep.

[writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions/the-neilma-sidney-literary-travel-fund-round-3](http://writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions/the-neilma-sidney-literary-travel-fund-round-3)

### 2018 Deborah Cass Prize

Early career writers of migrant background are invited to apply for the 2018 Deborah Cass prize. The winner will receive a cash prize of \$3000 plus a three-month mentorship with an established writer. On completion, the winning manuscript will be presented to Black Inc. Three of Australia's leading writers, Christos Tsiolkas, Nyadol Nyuon and Tony Ayres, are the judges of the prize in 2018.

Entries close 2 Oct.

[writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions/2018-deborah-cass-prize](http://writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions/2018-deborah-cass-prize)

Find more comps and opps at:

[writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions](http://writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions)

# 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 are held at The Wheeler Centre unless stated otherwise.

## Online

### **Online: Poetry Clinic** with [Terry Jaensch](#)

Receive direct feedback from your tutor and fellow course participants with this online correspondence course for early and emerging poets.

When: Submissions due midnight on Wed 1 Aug, 5 Sep, 10 Oct, 7 Nov, 5 Dec  
Member price: \$240/\$250  
Non-member price: \$310  
Level: Early, emerging

### **Online: Advanced Short Story Clinic** with [Paul McVeigh](#)

Whether you're an experienced writer working towards the completion of a manuscript or looking to maintain momentum and sharpen your writing skills, this clinic provides specific feedback for the refinement of your own voice and style.

When: Submissions due midnight on Wed 1 Aug, 5 Sep, 10 Oct, 7 Nov  
Member price: \$270/\$290  
Non-member price: \$320  
Level: Established

### **Online: Digital Novel Intensive** with [PD Martin](#)

Tackle your project through a combination of webinars and submissions of your own work. Cover all the essential novel-writing tools, character development and a variety of plot tools to help you structure your story.

When: Submissions due midnight on Wed 15 Aug, 12 Sep, 17 Oct, 14 Nov  
Webinars: Mon 30 Jul, 6 Aug, 3 Sep, 8 Oct, 12 Nov, 3 Dec, 6-7.30pm  
Member price: \$600/620  
Non-member price: \$720  
Level: Emerging

### **Online Q&A Day** with [Writers Victoria](#)

The Writers Victoria team will be online on our Facebook and Twitter pages to answer your questions about writing and publishing.

When: Tue 11 Sep, 6-7pm  
Price: Free  
Level: All

### **Write-ability Online: Never Just Description – How Setting Can Enhance Your Story** with [Angela Savage](#)

A strong sense of place transports readers, adding to the pleasure and excitement of reading. The challenge for writers is to describe place in such a way that it adds to the story, rather than distracting from it.

When: Wed 19 Sep, 11.15-12.45pm  
Price: Free  
Level: All

## In-person

### **Writing from Life** with [Alice Pung](#)

Writing from life is tricky – how do you transform a personal narrative (your own or someone else's) into something that interests other people? How do you write from life without being too insularly specific or blandly generic? What are the things you choose to hide and the things you reveal?

When: Tue 7 Aug, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$135/\$145  
Non-member price: \$195  
Level: Early, emerging

### **Reading for Writers** with [Paddy O'Reilly](#) and [Cate Kennedy](#)

A book club for writers curated by author Paddy O'Reilly. Each month, a writer will discuss a work that has influenced their own writing, paying attention to the technical elements of the writing. The August guest will be Cate Kennedy. Participants are encouraged to read the nominated work before the session and join the discussion.

When: Wed 8 Aug, 5 Sep, 3 Oct, 7 Nov, 5 Dec  
6-8pm  
Member price: \$180/\$220  
Non-member price: \$280  
Level: All



### **Writing and Intersectionality** with Rafeif Ismail

A knowledge of intersectionality can help you write in a more inclusive way, and create more inclusive literary spaces. Voices of colour are often absent from mainstream Australian literary spaces. It is imperative to create more opportunities for writers of colour to showcase their work.

When: Sat 8 Sep, 10am-1pm  
Member price: \$80/\$90  
Non-member price: \$120  
Level: All

### **Running Writing Workshops** with Stephanie Armstrong and Misbah Khokhar

Are you a writer with an urge to teach writing? Learn all about the theory and practice of teaching creative writing in this dedicated workshop for women writers of colour and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women writers.

When: Sun 9 Sep, 10am-4pm  
Price: Free  
Level: Emerging, established

### **Reality and Fantasy in Fiction** with Leanne Hall

Explore ways to create realistic and compelling stories that are imbued with magic, fantasy, surrealism and the supernatural.

When: Sat 15 Sep, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$135/\$145  
Non-member price: \$195  
Level: Early, emerging

### **Writing the Suburbs** with Nick Gadd

The much-maligned Australian suburbs contain intriguing features that can be the starting points for stories. Hone your eyes to old signage, details of architecture, edgelands, landscapes of loss, and the poetry of the everyday.

Where: Prahran Library,  
180 Greville St, Prahran  
When: Sun 16 Sep, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$135/\$145  
Non-member price: \$195  
Level: Emerging

### **Refine Your Memoir** with Dr Sian Prior

A memoir is so much more than a description of 'what happened to me'. It requires a thoughtful excavation of the self and empathy with your imagined readers. Explore how to find the right voice for your memoir, find the story, create vivid characters, ask the right questions and prepare a persuasive publishing proposal.

When: Sun 16 Sep, 21 Oct, 18 Nov, 16 Dec, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$530/\$580  
Non-member price: \$800  
Level: Emerging

### **Ask ... About** **Creative Writing PhDs** with Writers Victoria

Thinking about diving into a writing project through university research? Find out what it's really like to write a creative work through practice-led research, with frank discussion and tips from writers who've been there.

When: Thu 20 Sep, 6-7.30pm  
Member price: \$18/\$25  
Non-member price: \$40  
Level: Emerging, established

### **How to Write and Sell True Crime** with Vikki Petraitis

Join bestselling true crime author Vikki Petraitis for a look inside the world of true-crime writing. From finding a story, to arranging interviews and accessing materials, this workshop will give crime writers an understanding of the process involved in piecing a case together and making it attractive to publishers. Vikki offers lots of practical experience as well as comprehensive, clear notes for later reference.

When: Sat 22 Sep, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$135/\$145  
Non-member price: \$195  
Level: All

### **Editing and Enhancing Your Work** with Ellen van Neerven

Rewriting, redrafting, teasing out, pulling apart, focusing, and enhancing your work. These are all valuable stages of the writing process that often get left behind as we look for the magic fix-all editor. Suitable for writers of fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry, this workshop aims to guide you on methods of turning a critical eye to your own writing as you go through the drafting process.

When: Sun 23 Sep, 10am-4pm  
Member price: \$135/\$145  
Non-member price: \$195  
Level: Emerging

## Regional

### **Murray Mallee Writers – Wide Open Road (Swan Hill)**

with Lyndel Caffrey  
and Cate Kennedy.

Over six months, Swan Hill Neighbourhood House and Library will host an author talk, masterclass and storytelling session with Cate Kennedy, and a forum and four monthly writing workshops and mentoring sessions with Lyndel Caffrey. This is a subsidised, low-cost program for writers. Participants are invited to submit up to 500 words of their writing prior to the first workshop on Thu 9 Aug.

Where: Swan Hill Neighbourhood House, 98-100 Gray St, Swan Hill

When: Jul to Nov 2018 – see online for full list of dates and times

Price: \$100, covering all sessions

Level: All

### **Tracks Young Writers Intensive (Bendigo)**

with Express Media.

As part of the 2018 Bendigo Writers Festival, in partnership with Writers Victoria, Express Media present a one-day intensive specifically designed for young writers, taking the best of Express Media right to your backyard. If you're aged 14 to 25 and have a love of writing and storytelling, Tracks: Bendigo is an exciting day-long event just for you.

Where: Bendigo Trades Hall, 34-40 View St, Bendigo

When: Sat 11 Aug, 9am-5pm  
Express Media member price: Free

Non-member price: \$25

Level: Early, emerging

### **The Humanising Power of Story (Daylesford)**

with Arnold Zable.

In this free event as part of Words in Winter, Arnold Zable will explore the inspirations, literary influences, sources of ideas, and practical lessons learnt in confronting the empty page.

Where: The Convent Gallery, 7 Daly St, Daylesford

When: Fri 17 Aug, 5.30-7pm

Price: Free

Level: All

### **The Art of Story (Daylesford)**

with Arnold Zable and Words in Winter.

You have a story to tell, but what is the best way to tell it? The borderline between fiction and non-fiction is not as distinct as some would have it. There are techniques common to both, and hybrids that cross the boundaries in daring ways.

Where: The Paddock Room, Daylesford Neighbourhood House, 13 Camp St, Daylesford

When: Sat 18 Aug, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$70/\$80

Non-member price: \$130

Level: All

### **The Salon Goes Regional (Port Fairy)**

with Demet Divaroren.

Join Premier's Literary Award winner Demet Divaroren in this intimate conversation at Blarney Books in Port Fairy. Wine and nibbles provided.

Where: Blarney Books, 37 James St, Port Fairy

When: Fri 14 Sep, 5.30-7pm

Price: Free

Level: All

### **Writing for Real (Port Fairy)**

with Demet Divaroren.

Memories are the footprints of our past and hold the answers to our present. This workshop is an interactive and supportive space to explore the elements of memoir writing: how to turn memories into stories, finding your story's shape, voice and purpose, and the elements of story that help bring your memoir to life.

When: Sat 15 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$70/\$80

Non-member price: \$130

Level: Early, emerging

# Membership Form

To renew  
online, visit  
[bit.ly/1TgVUxX](http://bit.ly/1TgVUxX)

WRITERS  
VICTORIA

Name

Organisation or writers group

Postal address

Email

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

Suburb

Phone

Postcode     State

Gender ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other

Date of birth  
(optional)   /   /

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

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



24 Aug —  
2 Sep

a [Melbourne 2018  
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**matter  
of  
life  
and  
death.**

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