

JUNE 2012

THE VICTORIAN WRITER





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Entries now open – to close July 16. Open to Victorian residents. To obtain the 2012 entry form or further information visit [www.melbourneprize.org](http://www.melbourneprize.org) or call 03 9696 4410.

Entry can be made either by the individual author or by nomination.

Supported by the State Government through Arts Victoria, the City of Melbourne and Partners & Patrons.

an initiative of the Committee for Melbourne 8

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JUNE 2012

# THE VICTORIAN WRITER

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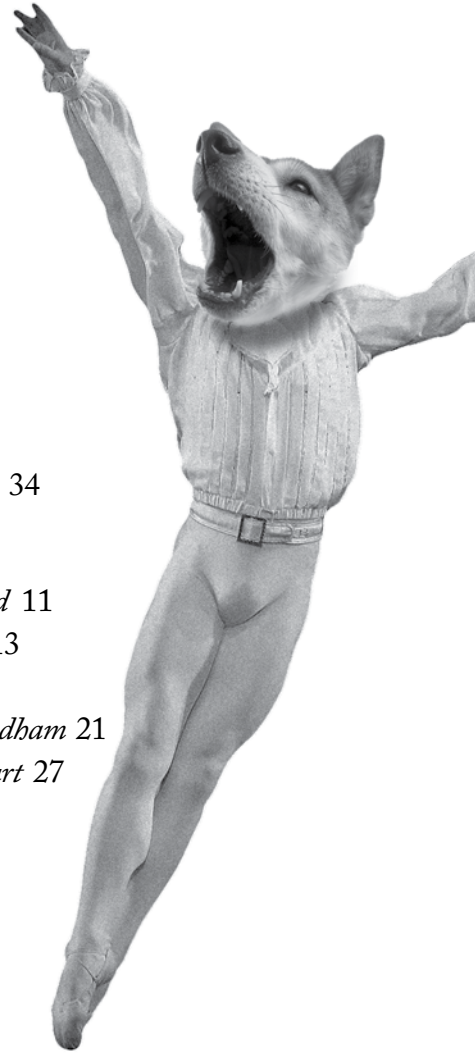
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[www.kristamas.net](http://www.kristamas.net)

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Supporting authors through the publishing process



# The opening:

*Interior. A small run-down theatre.  
The stalls are only a quarter full.*

*The curtain goes up.*

*Early morning. The Writer is at work.*

The Writer: This is hopeless!

*The novel is not progressing.  
He is seized with doubt.*

The Writer: I am seized with doubt.

*He puts his face in his hands.*

*The Inner Critic appears sitting  
upon The Writer's left shoulder.*

TI Critic: Not going so well? (laughs)  
I told you, didn't I? Give up!

The Writer: I managed to shut you out.  
I stopped listening and thought I had  
you beaten. (pause) But wait... an Inner  
Critic listened to by no one, no longer  
exists. Had you considered that?

TI Critic: There will always be  
at least a tiny piece of you that  
will listen. I'm not worried.

TIICC: Are you sure?

*A figure appears on the left shoulder of  
The Inner Critic, whispering in his ear.*

TI Critic (melodramatically):  
What? You again?

TIICC: You didn't really think  
I'd gone for good? (laughs)

TI Critic: I will make you disappear.

TIIIICC: I'd keep my own house  
in order, if I were you.

*A figure appears on the left shoulder  
of The Inner Inner Critic Critic.*

TIICC: No! Don't torment me! My work  
is going nowhere. Every time I think I  
have a great idea you belittle it.

TIIIICCCC: You may not see me, but you  
must know that I am here. Even the  
merest possibility of me being here  
is enough to bring me into being.

TIIIIICCCCC: I will pick apart your  
every word, your every idea.

The Writer (looks up, confused): What?  
What is that awful whining sound? I'll  
never be able to work like this.

*A man bursts through the theatre doors and  
demands the performance be halted. As he  
nears the stage it becomes clear it is The  
Writer. The Writer stares at The Writer.*

The Writer: Where were you before,  
when I really needed you?

The Writer: You needed me?

The Writer: Yes of course. We  
must work on this together.

The Writer: Together?

*The band strikes up. The Writers  
begin to sing and dance:*

We will write write write,

We will write write write -

*Suddenly, audience members look up to the  
theatre balcony. There is a commotion. A  
dishevelled man appears at the balcony.*

Outer Critic: I have never seen such  
self-indulgent, meaningless muck in my  
life. Thank you, but I have far better  
things with which to occupy my time.

*The Writers look up at the departing  
back of the Outer Critic.*

The Writer: Do you notice a change?

The Writer: No.

The Writer: On your shoulder.

The Writer: There's nothing there.

The Writer: Exactly.

The Writer: Oh. I see. My Inner  
Critic has disappeared. All the  
critics have disappeared!

The Writer: How does it feel?

The Writer: To be honest, it feels great!

The Writer: Yes, so it does. We're free!

*The band strikes up once again.*

*Black out. End*

RODERICK POOLE *Director, Writers Victoria*



## NEWS

### The Grace Marion Wilson Trust Writing Competition is now open!

Thanks to the support of the Grace Marion Wilson Trust, Writers Victoria is pleased to announce the fourth year of this writing competition, open to emerging or developing Victorian writers. Writers are eligible to submit one entry in either short story or creative non-fiction category. First prize is \$1000; second prize is \$250; plus first and second prize entries published in September *Victorian Writer*. Entries close 4pm Friday 29 June.

[writersvictoria.org.au/writing/competitions](http://writersvictoria.org.au/writing/competitions)

### New Indigenous Playwright's Award

The Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award is a new \$20,000 award for the creation of a new play by an Indigenous playwright. The award comprises \$7,500 prize money and a \$12,500 commission for the winning play. Applications will be accepted from writers of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. They will be assessed by a panel including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. Guidelines and application forms are on the foundation's website.

[www.belvoir.com.au/about-belvoir/balnaves-award](http://www.belvoir.com.au/about-belvoir/balnaves-award)

### International Festival of Literatures, Ideas and Translation + Antony Loewenstein

On 16 June PEN Melbourne presents FREESPEAK, part of the International Festival of Literatures, Ideas and Translation ([www.iflit.wordpress.com](http://www.iflit.wordpress.com)), during the Light in Winter festival organised by Robyn Archer.

At 2pm at Federation Square (upstairs at Beer DeLuxe) the PEN Salon will be held and brings together poets, translators and musicians including Hidayet Ceylan (Turkish), Matt Hetherington (English), Nguyen Tien Hoang (Vietnamese), Gig Ryan (English), Anne Talvez (French), Jennifer Harrison (English), Thanh Van Le (Vietnamese/English), Rochelle D'silva (Hindi/English), Lauren Williams (Spanish/English) and Ajak Mabilia (Dinka/English).

At 6pm at ACMI, Jacques Rancourt (director of the Paris-based Franco-anglais Poetry Festival) translates a group of poems by Melbourne poet Alex Skovron. Judith Rodriguez, poet and vice-president of PEN Melbourne, will interview Jacques and Alex.

Also, on Wednesday 20 June at Trades Hall (cnr Lygon Street and Victoria Street), PEN Melbourne, Sydney PEN and CAL present writer and journalist Antony Loewenstein, co-editor of *Left Turn* and author of *The Blogging Revolution*. Loewenstein will explore the meaning of PEN's cornerstone beliefs: freedom to write, freedom to read. All events are free.

[www.melbournepen.com.au](http://www.melbournepen.com.au)

### A comedy about a massacre? It's deadly

Ilbjerri Theatre Company's play *Bindjareb Pinjarra*, starting in Melbourne 12 June, is an improvised comedy about Western Australia's Pinjarra Massacre. Despite the serious context, Ilbjerri assures it's not a "grim, dour, finger wagging exercise," but a show that is "lively, entertaining and engaging". The project hopes to enhance cultural safety and promote strong Indigenous identity and pride while being funny and entertaining. Playing at the Footscray Community Arts Centre.

[ilbjerri.com.au/productions/project/bindjareb-pinjarra1](http://ilbjerri.com.au/productions/project/bindjareb-pinjarra1)

### Norwich named City of Literature

Meet our newest member of the family – Norwich, England – who joins Edinburgh, Melbourne, Iowa City, Dublin and Reykjavik as a UNESCO City of Literature.

Norwich has been a literary city for 900 years and is home to five per cent of the UK's independent publishing sector. In March, Writers' Centre Norwich was awarded £3 million to develop the International Centre for Writing – a hub for excellence in literature from around the world.

The Trust also informs that Julian of Norwich wrote the first book by a woman in the English language, in 1395.

Find out more about the Cities of Literature at [www.cityofliterature.com](http://www.cityofliterature.com)

### June is National Young Writers' Month

An Express Media initiative, National Young Writers' Month is an opportunity for young writers around Australia to get connected with a community of peers while setting themselves writing goals (and, hopefully, achieving them). This year the program includes the chance to be published in the upcoming issue of *Voice-works* as part of A Travelling Story. Online, the festival offers several resources: a list of writing organisations according to area, a daily blog covering writing tips and opportunities, daily book reviews, and also the chance to be a part of a national online chain-story.

[www.expressmedia.org.au](http://www.expressmedia.org.au)

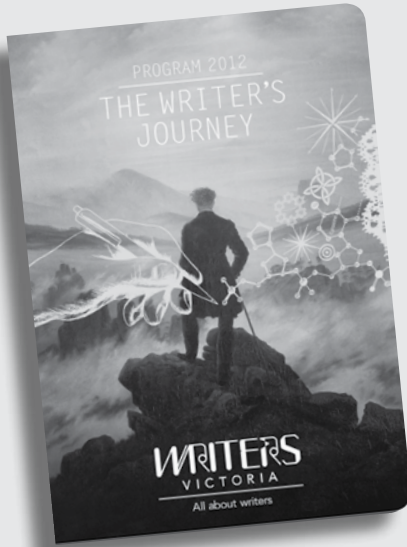
### A goal cell of one's own

Writers Victoria is proud to announce the opening of two new writing spaces right in the centre of Melbourne's CBD, at the historic Old Melbourne Gaol. Through an expanded partnership with the National Trust (Victoria), Writers Victoria is offering two uniquely situated day-time studios at subsidised rates, in two converted cells. This is a wonderful opportunity to provide writers with a secluded, dedicated and private space in which to write.

[writersvictoria.org.au/services/writers-studios](http://writersvictoria.org.au/services/writers-studios)



# THE WRITER'S JOURNEY



*Learn about words on the screen, stage and web,  
as well as novel, short fiction, editing and  
more in June and beyond at Writers Victoria.*

*Full program details at  
[writersvictoria.org.au/what-s-on](http://writersvictoria.org.au/what-s-on)*

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## BOOKING

Book and pay online at  
[writersvictoria.org.au/what-s-on](http://writersvictoria.org.au/what-s-on)  
or phone Writers Victoria on 03 9094 7855.

### *Venue details*

Unless otherwise stated, events are held  
at Writers Victoria @ the Wheeler Centre,  
alongside the State Library. We're at Level  
3, 176 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

### *Booking policy*

As places are limited, and to allow  
confirmation of Writers Victoria events,  
booking deadlines are imposed for all  
events. We strongly advise bookings at a  
minimum of one week prior to event start.

### *Cancellation policy*

Refunds will only be given where a  
cancellation is made three working  
days prior to an event or start of a  
course. Writers Victoria reserves the  
right to cancel any event due to lack  
of bookings up until two days prior.

### *Disabled access*

Writers Victoria attempts to provide  
disabled access where possible.  
Please phone prior to your visit  
if you have any special needs.

## The Writer's Journey Series

Series: Join Writers Victoria director Roderick Poole for  
an intimate, in-depth discussion with fiction authors and  
industry professionals who will recount aspects of their  
writing journeys, forming industry relationships, processes  
of developing manuscripts and getting work out there.

### WEEK 1: THE IDEA

WEDNESDAY 6.30–8.30PM, 6 JUNE

Andrea Goldsmith will reveal her sources of inspiration and  
methods of developing ideas into a polished manuscript,  
including the challenges of character, structure and plot.

*Andrea Goldsmith has published six novels. Her most recent,  
Reunion, was published by 4th Estate to wide acclaim. She  
has mentored many novelists and conducted several courses at  
universities and writers' centres throughout Australia.*

### WEEK 2: THE MENTOR

WEDNESDAY 6.30–8.30PM, 13 JUNE

Writing can be an insular process that raises questions  
of doubt. One remedy is advice from experts who give  
guidance on the writer's craft. Mentor for Writers Victoria  
Jane Routley will discuss her role in assisting the writer.

*Jane Routley's publications include the Aurealis Award  
winners Mage Heart and Fire Angels as well as Aramaya,  
and one book as Rebecca Locksley – The Three Sisters. Her  
short stories have appeared in Meanjin and on the ABC.*

### WEEK 3: THE EDITOR

WEDNESDAY 6.30–8.30PM, 20 JUNE

Aviva Tuffield discusses the author/editor relationship and  
the creative collaboration involved in honing a manuscript  
to publishable standard.

*Aviva Tuffield is associate publisher, fiction, at Scribe  
where she is building an Australian fiction list. Her prize-  
winning authors include Cate Kennedy, Fiona McGregor  
and Chris Womersley. She has worked in publishing for  
almost 15 years.*

# PROGRAM 2012

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## WEEK 4: THE SPOTLIGHT

WEDNESDAY 6.30–8.30PM, 27 JUNE

Now that your book is published, it's time to enter the spotlight in the quest to sell your book. Interviews, festival circuits, media appearances and publicists: author and illustrator Leigh Hobbs uncovers what to expect.

*Leigh Hobbs is an artist and children's author best known for his characters Old Tom, Horrible Harriet, Fiona the Pig, Mr Badger and Mr Chicken. His latest picture book, Mr Chicken Goes to Paris, was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Award and CBC Picture Book of the Year.*

RATING: ALL

COST PER SESSION: \$40, MEMBERS \$30/\$25

BOOK FOR ALL FOUR SESSIONS TO RECEIVE

PACKAGE DISCOUNT: \$140, MEMBERS \$105/\$90

## TUESDAY TUTORIALS

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Series: Guest authors impart expertise of the writing craft in a relaxed, interactive environment. Months alternate between fiction and non-fiction, and topics address the step-by-step processes of successful writing. Places limited.

## TUESDAY TUTORIAL - JUNE

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### Creative Non-fiction: The Invisible T

Alan Attwood will explore when to use a first-person technique and when not to in creative non-fiction writing.

*In a 35-year career as a journalist Alan Attwood was the New York-based correspondent for The Age and Sydney Morning Herald and won a Walkley Award for sports coverage in 1998. Alan is the author of novels Breathing Underwater and Burke's Soldier, shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. He is editor of The Big Issue.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: TUESDAY 26 JUNE, 6.30-8.30PM

COST: \$40, MEMBERS \$30/\$25

*Limited places. Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 13 June.*

## TUESDAY TUTORIAL - JULY

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### Editing Fiction for Perfection

Join Adrian Hyland as he takes you through the crucial process of redrafting; the necessary steps to transform your scribbles into a polished manuscript.

*Adrian Hyland's first book, Diamond Dove, won the Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction. Gunshot Road, his second novel, was published in 2010. Kinglake-350 (Text) is his first work of non-fiction. Adrian is a lecturer at La Trobe University.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: TUESDAY 31 JULY, 6.30–8.30PM

COST: \$40, MEMBERS \$30/\$25

*Limited places. Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 18 July.*

## COMPACT COURSE

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### Writing for the Web

with MEL CAMPBELL

Learn which blogging platform is right for you, how to get published in online-only publications and the importance of an online portfolio to impress potential editors. Discover how Facebook, Twitter and other online tools can help you expand your audience, and learn to write successful email pitches – and where to send them.

*Mel Campbell is a freelance journalist, founding editor of online magazine The Enthusiast and national film editor of the Thousands city guides. She teaches online journalism at Monash University and has blogged since 2004.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: WEDNESDAYS 6.30–8.30PM, 4–25 JULY

COST: \$220, \$180/\$165

*Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 20 June.*

## WEEKEND WRITING

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### The Play

with VAN BADHAM

This course is designed for writers wanting to learn and explore the structural techniques of writing for the stage. In-class activity will include workshop exercises as well as discussion and analysis of successful and popular play scripts from traditional, contemporary and experimental forms of stage writing. Learn the demands of writing for professional production in Australia and internationally.

*Van Badham is an internationally award-winning playwright, critic and screenwriter, currently employed as an artistic associate for Malthouse Theatre. Her plays have been staged professionally across Australia, the UK, the USA and Europe. She has also written for radio, opera, cabaret, TV and music theatre, and her first book, Burnt Snow (Pan Macmillan), was published in 2010.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: SATURDAYS, 10AM – 4PM

7 JULY, 4 AUGUST, 8 SEPT, 6 OCT & 10 NOV

COST: \$690, MEMBERS \$625/\$580

*Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 20 June.*

### Writing the Short Story

with PADDY O'REILLY

Through writing and rewriting, participants will produce one or more short stories. We will work hard. We will laugh. We will hate our stories and learn to love them again.

*Paddy O'Reilly's stories have won awards and been published nationally and internationally, as well as in her collection, The End of the World. Her latest novel is The Fine Colour of Rust (Blue Door HarperCollins, 2012).*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: SATURDAYS, 10AM – 4PM

14 JULY, 11 AUGUST, 15 SEPT, 13 OCT, 17 NOV

COST: \$690, MEMBERS \$625/\$580

*Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 27 June.*



## Writing for the Small Screen

with AMANDA BROTCHE

Participants will be guided through the stages of screen writing, from the idea to outline, treatment, scene breakdown and script development, in order to create a screenplay draft tailored for television. Examine character, dialogue, structure, plot and direction, along with the process of working with a script editor.

*Amanda Broatch is the co-creator, co-writer and director of the multi-award winning ABC comedy, Lowdown. Other credits include award-winning short film Break & Enter (director), Neighbours (director), and feature Rats and Cats (script editor). Theatre credits include The Inner Sanctum (director), and Headlock (writer-director), nominated for a Green Room Award.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: SATURDAYS, 10AM – 4PM

21 JULY, 18 AUGUST, 22 SEPTEMBER, 20 OCTOBER & 24 NOVEMBER

COST: \$690, MEMBERS \$625/\$580

Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 4 July.

## The Novel

with CARRIE TIFFANY

This course will encourage writers to work towards the completion of a novel. Lectures and discussions on voice, character, point of view, dialogue, place and plot will assist participants with the technical challenges of novel writing.

All participants must be willing to workshop their own writing as part of the course and to read the novella *Foster* by Clare Keegan as required reading prior to the course start.

*Carrie Tiffany's first novel Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin and Victorian Premier's literary awards, Orange Prize for Fiction and Guardian First Book Award, and won the WA Premier's Fiction Prize. Her second novel is Mateship with Birds.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: SATURDAYS, 10AM – 4PM

28 JULY, 18 AUGUST, 29 SEPT, 27 OCT, 24 NOV

COST: \$690, MEMBERS \$625/\$580

Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 11 July.

WEEKDAY WRITERS

## Editing Your Own Work

with JO CASE

Learn the basics of editing your work for publication and what you can do as an author to ready your work for submission to a publisher, and how to work with an editor towards publication. Also learn how to recognise common editing problems.

*Jo Case is associate editor of Kill Your Darlings and editor of Readings Monthly. She has been books editor of The Big Issue and deputy editor of Australian Book Review. Her first book, a memoir, will be published by Hardie Grant.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: THURSDAYS, 12–4PM

5 JULY, 2 AUGUST, 6 SEPTEMBER & 4 OCTOBER

COST: \$360, \$310/\$275

Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 20 June.

## Writing from History

with CHRISTINE BALINT

Have you begun researching a family history, historic episode or local event, but don't know what to do next? Learn about research process, structuring work based on history, working with source material and ethics (for novelists or non-fiction writers).

*Christine Balint is the author of two internationally acclaimed historical novels: The Salt Letters and Ophelia's Fan. She has undertaken research in many archives and libraries including Duke University and The Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Christine has a PhD in Creative Arts from the University of Melbourne. She teaches in RMIT's writing program.*

*Enrolment by application only, upon paying \$100 booking deposit. Applicants are required to complete an online submission including synopsis (one page) and writing sample (500 words).*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: THURSDAYS, 12–4PM

12 JULY, 9 AUGUST, 13 SEPT & 11 OCT

COST: \$360, \$310/\$275

*Submissions close 15 June. All applicants notified 22 June.*

*Successful applicants are advised to finalise payment before 27 June to receive a 10% discount.*

## Taming the Beast: Managing the Writing Process

with LEE KOFMAN

Learn strategies to understand and manage the turbulent time we call "writing process", find and/or maintain the voice, and stay motivated. Best suited for writers already working on fiction or creative non-fiction manuscripts.

*Lee Kofman is the author of three fiction books and recipient of various awards and fellowships. Her short fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry appeared in Australia, UK, Israel and USA. She has taught writing and mentored writers since 2003.*

RATING: EARLY AND EMERGING

WHEN: THURSDAYS, 12 – 4PM

19 JULY, 16 AUGUST, 20 SEPT & 18 OCT

COST: \$360, \$310/\$275

Early birds receive 10% discount. Offer closes 4 July.

## Ask the Publisher: Short Fiction

with MEANJIN and MELBOURNE BOOKS

Find out the process of short fiction submission, the editorial relationship and the best publishing avenue for you.

*Zora Sanders is deputy editor of Meanjin.*

*Adolfo Aranjuez is editor of Melbourne Books and its annual anthology, Award Winning Australian Writing.*

*Host Liz Steele is a freelance editor, proofreader and writer and teaches in RMIT's Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing. She is co-president of Editors Victoria.*

*Held in conjunction with Editors Victoria.*

RATING: ALL

WHEN: MONDAY 7–8PM, 23 JULY

COST: \$15, MEMBERS \$12/\$10

GROUP BOOKINGS (8+) \$10



# VOICES

## Indigenous Theatre & Great Art's Fire

*Interview with* RACHAEL MAZA

*What will the new Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award achieve for theatre in Australia?*

I am very passionate about initiatives that focus on building and growing the next generation of writers and create opportunities for the writers already out there and incentives for them to continue writing.

It is a very, very tough industry. Often writers will have one bite of the cherry and then it's very hard for them to get back in the game, yet what continues to astound me is that there is no shortage – there are a mountain of incredible stories out there in the community. Any blackfella will tell you, when they go home and sit around the kitchen table, there is a mountain of stories – you don't have to scratch very far to find them. So, why is there such a chasm between that kitchen table and around the fire, and what we're making on our stages? We need to do some serious work around closing this gap. This initiative from the Balnave family and Belvoir theatre company is a result of people who are putting their money where their mouth is. I'm very excited to see what comes out of it. I'm excited about being on the judging panel because we are only giving two awards and I know there will be more than just two incredible plays. I'll be there with a net catching the fall out.

*What specifically will you be catching? What do you want to see in submissions?*

Fire! At the core of all great art is a fire. The work is coming from a need, the basic fundamental thing that makes us great artists. It's peeling away all the rubbish of what people want to see and what you think you should be. What I want to see is that fire. I want to see that the artist is hungry to tell the story. There's going to obviously be a whole spectrum of levels of experience within that pool. It's going to be very difficult to judge someone who is writing their first script, or maybe someone who's putting pen to paper for the first time, through to those playwrights who have produced full-scale works and gone into production. We're going to have the whole range and I don't know that there are too many panels that have to deal with that extreme range. So it's going to be challenging. But the main thing is that that fire is there.

Then the writer will need to show in some capacity that we will be able to work with them through the hard yakka that will follow. Because there is no reason a great work shouldn't get more than one bite of the cherry. So after a season with Belvoir they should be able to come down here to Melbourne, go over to Perth. We are going to ensure the work gets out there at a national, if not international, reach.

*What are these plays and the work you do at Ilbijerri doing in the Australian theatre scene that other theatre/s can't?*

It comes back to that fire. I so often see work that is lacking any passion or fire, where the seed of the idea has come from your head instead of from your heart. Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander theatre has the fire. For whatever reason the works have come from a great burning need to tell it and that's heightened by how hard we have to work to get the work up. It's a tough industry for an artist as it is, let alone being a blackfella. You have to really work hard to get to that point. Our history, the history that we lived, is still very here and now. We're fiery. We've got passion. We're angry. We're tough and we've had to be to survive, and that makes for exciting work.

I am a very strong advocate for the term that was coined back in the late 60s and 70s: "if we are able to maintain control over our own stories then those are the stories that are going to make a difference".

And you're going to know this as an audience member. Only when these stories get the attention Ilbijerri is giving them, are they going to make a difference. We've come a long way, but we've still got a hell of a long way to go. There are only two Indigenous theatre companies in Australia. It's shameful. There are more than two non-Indigenous theatre companies in every other state. What this means for us is that Ilbijerri is expected to be everything for everybody. If we run a workshop or an educational program we have to do it for the entire country. It's ridiculous, but there's just nobody else to do it because of how under-represented we are as an industry. But this can be seen as exciting too, what an incredible opportunity that is still to come.

*Hopefully this new Indigenous playwrights award is a stepping stone towards better representation?*

Yes. It will be. It was so inspiring meeting the people from the Balnave Foundation and Belvoir. Just so inspiring was their commitment to Australia, to us as Australians and all Australians; I was just absolutely blown away.

*Finally, what are your all-time, top four theatre scripts?*

- *Jack Charles V the Crown* (an Ilbijerri production - it's not published yet, but should be), by Jack Charles and John Romeril
- *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, by Ray Lawler
- *Shrunken Iris*, by Kamarra Bell-Wykes
- *Equus*, by Peter Shaffer.

RACHAEL MAZA is artistic director of Ilbijerri Theatre. Find information about the Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award at [www.belvoir.com.au/about-belvoir/balnaves-award](http://www.belvoir.com.au/about-belvoir/balnaves-award)



## Women In Theatre Report

by JANE HOWARD

I speak a lot about how blogs are changing the culture around the way we speak about theatre and the arts. I think, possibly, the greatest thing theatre blogs in this country can do is speak for and create a movement with speed and with power.

When Belvoir announced their now infamous 2010 season, lining 11 men and one woman up on stage to say *this is the theatre we're making this year*, there was outrage. This physical manifestation of the gender disparity that has plagued the Australian theatre for as long as we have had one threw a new generation of theatre-makers and commenters up in arms.

I documented the main-stages of 2011 and things weren't rosy.

In 2011 two companies – the State Theatre Company of South Australia and the Queensland Theatre Company – had no women playwrights. STCSA's artistic director Adam Cook said:

*... there is no conspiracy, you just have to be talented, and the people who would hire you have to agree that you are ... And that is the blunt fact of getting a job. You just have to be good. And the same with playwrights; they think, "why aren't you doing my plays?" Well, I don't think it's very good. There's always one answer, isn't there?*

By contrast, QTC's artistic director Wesley Enoch said:

*When you look at gender, women make up more than 53 per cent of the population. How are we responding to that as artistic directors? ... When you look at the figures, then action comes about. QTC has no women playwrights in [2011's] season, no indigenous playwrights or from a non-English speaking background. What are we saying?*

Come 2012, STCSA has 54 per cent female playwrights; and QTC has 22 per cent. No one said this battle wasn't going to be confusing.

It's going to be long. And hard. And stressful. And, yes, always, always confusing.

But it has taken another huge leap forward with the publishing of the Women In Theatre paper through the Australia Council. I contributed some of quantitative data to the report, which is compiled with quantitative interviews, and together they paint a national picture across the Major Performing Arts Group companies and the Theatre Board Key Organisations.

Please, read the paper. Share it among your networks. Take its statistics and try to make it better. And when it's not better, call people out.

I like to think we're part of a movement, that something is happening, that things will get better. But I can't do it without you.

*Jane Howard is a performing arts critic, writer and blogger based in Adelaide. This article, reprinted with kind permission, was originally published at [noplain.wordpress.com](http://noplain.wordpress.com)*

*The Australia Council's "Women in Theatre Report" is available to download at [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/resources/reports\\_and\\_publications/artforms/theatre/women-in-theatre](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/resources/reports_and_publications/artforms/theatre/women-in-theatre)*

### Tweet of the month @johnbonbailey John Bailey

Second principle focuses on work that is 'distinctly Australian'. So your fantasy play should feature a cyber echidna quoting Patrick White. [In response to the National Cultural Policy Review.]

11:43pm via Twitter for Android







# The Artist's Tension

*Over a coffee, theatre historian and director JULIAN MEYRICK discusses why playwriting is such an amazing medium – and why it should be used to ruffle more feathers. By Anna Kelsey-Sugg.*

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Could this be the wrong house? On a Brunswick verandah a man in slippers and a dressing gown is fiddling with masking tape and the snapped spine of a piece of luggage.

I'm reassured when his head raises and out trot the softly English accented words, *Oh hello daabling!*

There's time to ponder the encounter while Julian Meyrick, theatre historian and director, runs family members, late for their train, to the station (I am charged with keeping an eye on the percolator). Moments later we take positions at the kitchen table in a room filled with the smell of coffee. A dog's pacing sounds from the front yard, an olive tree waves through the window and a plate of Chocolate Wheatens separates us. It's all quite relaxing until my first question – what piece of theatre has moved you recently – elicits its response.

*The Wild Duck* (Malthouse 2012, directed by Simon Stone), says Meyrick, "was a reminder that the kind of assiduous collection of knowledge I've made about how scripts work is not a substitute for an intuitive and brilliant prosecution of a dramatic action". (Some interviewees take a while to warm up, working through clunky sentences and half-executed ideas before they get to the good stuff.)

I sit up a little straighter and Meyrick sums up as if I might've missed the point (and I might've) – "I found the show overwhelming, confronting and, on the literary side, meticulous; absolutely meticulous."

Meticulousness characterises his eye for the theatre, which operates something like the eye of a clockmaker, he explains. "I'm a technician of drama in a sense. I can take a play apart and explain how it all connects. That is the result of looking at plays for many years."

This technical knowledge simultaneously impedes and enhances the simple pleasure of a piece of theatre. "It empowers it but skews it, possibly even mutes it," he says. "I'm a very analytical person and the dramaturgy of play texts is an area where I can be at my most rigorous. But there's a lot more to drama than analysis, and a lot more to the theatre experience than just words on a page."

He tightens the tie at his gown's waist and looks ahead to the front yard where his dog lays now, waiting patiently. Meyrick describes "two forces" within him that "come together to create the dramaturgical imagination – for want of a

better phrase. They look opposed but they belong together”.

“On the one hand you need a neutral, analytical, disinterested view of drama, to look at plays in an almost clinical way. On the other, you must be totally engaged, totally passionate, hungry to explore what drama can do. And these two forces jam together like the sides of an arch to create a passageway through to the theatre experience itself.”

Either one is useless without the other, he says. “There is no point in being passionate about drama unless you’re prepared to learn how it works, learn the kinds of distinctions you need to make to improve your practice. By the same token, you don’t want to be an arm’s length ‘script guru’ either – that’s a ridiculous position, and an insult to what artists do when they create a work of art. It’s not to feed a market but to create a significant experience.”

“It’s as if challenging things is no longer what artists do and I find in that a wider defeat that is weird and unsettling.”

Meyrick is ferociously opposed to the manipulation of art to fit a mould, to be more easily digested or to adhere to artistic commodification. (He describes an annual performing arts market, that allows theatre-makers 20 minutes to “pitch” a segment of their show to producers and venue owners, as “the hole in the toilet of market capitalism as it affects the arts”.)

The buying and selling of art “as if it were pounds of sweets” he believes is “the worst aspect of capitalism protruded into the middle of the culture creation process”. He sees it as part of a trend in an artistic economy crying out for reform.

“The competitive grant system has gone unchallenged. Many cultural policy processes have gone unchallenged. It’s as if challenging things is no longer what artists do and I find in that a wider defeat that is weird and unsettling.”

We consider if the “wider defeat” is a result of artists spending so much of their time filling out grant applications and acquittals. “That’s part of it,” he says, but argues it might also be attributable to a unique Australian relationship with populism – and the search for popularity – that risks artistic integrity. “In the UK and European, even the American, context, being isolated and still seeing your work as valid, even though other people don’t, is an acceptable position.”

Here, he says, it’s another story: “It’s amazing how many Australian artists – playwrights in particular – once they’ve experienced popular acceptance find it difficult to jeopardise that acceptance. Once they’ve found a successful formula or whatever, it’s hard to revert to a more critical stance. The fiery relationship that, say, a writer like David Hare has with UK audiences, where he has been loved, then hated, then loved again, then hated again and so on ... you don’t find that pattern here. I wonder if there is something about the abject state of the artist in Australia that makes popular acceptance so alluring, so necessary. Psychologically, you think, ‘I need to be accepted because if I’m not then who the fuck am I?’”



We could flip the argument to ask, if no-one sees or buys my work, how the heck am I going to pay my bills? But Meyrick sees no sense in playwrights compromising their artistic merit in order to thrive. Artistic powerbrokers – funding bodies – he says, need to step up.

“The last 10 years or 15 years have felt like a kind of lax, lazy, unscrupulous internationalism of the worst kind really. Not a genuine internationalism, but a cheap globalism where we have taken our eye off the ball of what we need to do to be a genuinely participating member of the wider cultural community. And that’s evidenced absolutely for me in Australian drama and the fact that the country will not support it – it just won’t do it. Asking people to read plays is like asking them to put a gun against their head. And I’m not talking about normal people, I’m talking about people who are supposedly in the business of developing playwrights. You’re up against all of that shit.”

But before you rip down the picture of the Bard you’ve tacked above your computer and plead with your day job boss to have you back, take solace. Meyrick says that mitigating the challenges for playwrights are their positive tendencies, like a hope for change and a genuine push towards sustainability. “A deeper awareness of those things is going to come from the writers because they’re the mouthy ones, they’re the ones who can argue and use words. Change is always possible, absolutely. Anyone who writes plays knows that.”

Before leaving him to his happy kitchen and research readings, I ask what three plays Meyrick would advise a writer to include in the bibliography of their life. He offers *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (“if you don’t read it you’re an idiot”); a Shakespeare (“any of them”) and *Sweet Pheobe* (by Michael Gow). “Pick something very modern, something that is archetypally Australian and something that is 200-plus years’ old, and be amazed you recognise them all as plays. That, for me, is the root meaning of dramaturgy, because you go, ‘well, they’re really not that different’. They’ve all got words, they’ve all got characters, they’ve all got stories, they’ve all got things happening in them. Writing a play, while it is a unique act of the imagination, engages structural regularities that have persisted for hundreds of years.”

“All the shit we’ve been talking about, all of that will become a footnote to a footnote in history, whereas the long tradition of drama will never be a footnote; that is history and it’s an amazing thing to be a part of and should give us faith and heart when we next find our audiences walking out or not coming at all or our grants are refused. It’s a historical medium and it’s an amazing one.”

As coffee cups are pushed aside and I gather up my things to leave, Meyrick seems as concerned about whether we’ve covered everything required as my not having yet taken a Wheaten. I do my best to reassure on both fronts.

“Change is always possible, absolutely. Anyone who writes plays knows that.”

Back outside we wave our chocolate biscuits at one another and I head off thinking, how I envy you not, playwrights, but how much power you hold. ❶

JULIAN MEYRICK is *Honorary Fellow, Drama and Theatre Program, at La Trobe University.*



# Script My Way

Writer **MARISSA COOKE** offers us an insight into the world of writing for the screen with an excerpt of her script for television series *Love My Way* (*Southern Star*).

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*In IKEA, JULIA'S mobile's ringing but she can't answer it. She's having something close to a panic attack in the IKEA baby care facility. It's packed, it stinks and tens of babies are crying out of sync. She's lined up next to other mothers changing stinking nappies. She's frozen – hyperventilating, trembling and sweaty as TOBY cries his head off.*

*Julia's POV of her reflection in the mirror: it's a blur, a smudge across glass.*

*The Policewoman leans in and hands Frank a ticket with a smile. Frankie smiles back – sarcastic, looks at the ticket.*

*Still no answer on Julia's mobile. Frank hangs up.*

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Fuck it, they won't mind if we let ourselves in.

INT. IKEA - DAY

JULIA, TOBY, N/S SHOPPERS

*Julia, very rattled, washed-out and hungover, pushes Toby through the IKEA crowd, spots the bedding display area, makes a detour.*

*Julia sits on one of the beds, pretends to be 'testing it' for a couple of beats, bouncing up and down.*

*Then looks around from left to right with shifty eyes, to make sure no-one's watching, then lies down. Bliss ...*

CUT TO:

*A few minutes later. Charlie, stressed, caught up in the madness is looking around for Julia. He spots her at a distance.*

*Julia, curled up on the display bed, an oasis amidst the chaos. Toby in his pram next to her.*

JULIA  
(sotto voce)

few more minutes ...

*As Charlie arrives with a sense of urgency.*



CHARLIE

There you are!

JULIA

Shhhhhhhhh!

*Julia's got a cracking headache. Charlie's full of heroic self-satisfaction, hyper.*

CHARLIE

I found your Gutenvarn! A clown tried to make me go back but I just told him to fuck off! (to julia)  
C'mon goldie locks!

*Charlie drags a reluctant Julia out of bed.*

INT. CHARLIE AND JULIA'S PLACE/  
KITCHEN - DAY

FRANKIE, DI, HOWARD

*DI and FRANK have let themselves in to Charlie and Julia's place and are examining the contents of the fridge*

*like it's a museum exhibit.*

FRANKIE

Mum, look! Posh cheese. Lots of it.

Di looks.

FRANKIE

Of course they can't afford to pay an extra fifty dollars a week for Lou.

DI

That's half the posh cheese budget, darling.  
Christ. Smoked duck's livers.

*Di slices off a big wedge of cheese. Stuffs it in her mouth.*

FRANKIE

God. Jones the Grocer must crack a stiffy  
when Jules walks through the door.

*Frankie and Di piss themselves as we hear:*

SFX: toilet flushing.

*They both freeze, Di with a mouth full of posh cheese.*

*HOWARD emerges from the bathroom with the form guide, a little embarrassed. He coughs. It's clear from his expression that he's overheard them.*

HOWARD

Hello.

FRANKIE

Hi.

DI

*(mouth full)*

Hello.

Frankie turns to Di.

FRANKIE

*(mouths)*

Fuck.

INT. IKEA/DISPLAY KITCHEN - DAY

CHARLIE, JULIA, TOBY, N/S SHOPPERS

*JULIA and CHARLIE stand in front of the Gutenvarn like it's the Holy Grail. It's a kitchen storage/shelving unit and it's set up in one of the IKEA display kitchens. Charlie measures it up with his measuring tape.*

CHARLIE

Ok, it fits, let's get it. Let's go.

*Julia flinches as she compares it against catalogue image.*

JULIA

Hang on. It's different. It's not as big...

*Charlie retracts the measuring tape emphatically.*

CHARLIE

You've gotta be fucken kidding me?

JULIA (CONT'D)

Don't start, Charlie.

*Charlie contains himself, takes a deep breath, tries a gentler approach as he slides the Gutenvarn door back and a random kid jumps out, scaring the hell out of Charlie.*

CHARLIE

Jesus christ!

RANDOM KID

I WAS HIDING IN THERE!

*Charlie gives the kid the 'I'm watching you' gesture as the kid leaves calling for his Mum.*

CHARLIE

*(to Julia)*

Look, it's perfect. You can put... lots of stuff in it... it's very... Swedish. It's very blonde... look how blonde it is? ... it's a very blonde unit...

*But Julia's still flicking through the catalogue, anxious, confused.*

JULIA

Maybe we ought to think about the Bojnark, or...?

CHARLIE

*(Snaps)*

Gutenvarn? Bojnark? Hutendorf?

I don't give a shit. I just want to get the hell out of... *(here!)*

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MARISSA COOKE has worked extensively in TV and digital entertainment as a writer, creative director and content producer. Marissa has been a scriptwriter on series including ABC's *Fat Cow Motel*, Foxtel drama series *Love My Way*, Australian-German co-production *Blue Water High*, SBSTV mockumentary series *S(truth)* and *Erky Perky*. She recently worked as a scriptwriter for *Bluebird AR*, for which she won an *AWGIE* Award. Marissa recently wrote and directed a short film, *alphamum01*, premiering at the *St Kilda Film Festival*.

## MONDAY

EVERY MONDAY

**Words and Music poetry and readings.** 98.1FM. 10.30–11am.

### Phoenix Park Writers.

Meet weekly on a Monday and Saturday afternoon. East Malvern. (9530 4397)

### Scribes Writing Group.

9.30am – 12pm, (school terms). South Barwon Community Centre, 33 Mount Pleasant Rd, Belmont. (Vivienne Worthington, 5241 9491)

FORTNIGHTLY

### Reservoir wRiters and Reciters.

1–3.30pm, Reservoir Library. (ruthvenstorygarden@yahoo.com.au / 0403 708 759)

11 JUNE

### Passionate Tongues Poetry.

8.30pm, Brunswick Hotel, Brunswick. (Michael, poetrymg@hotmail.com)

25 JUNE

### Passionate Tongues Poetry.

Details as above.

### La Mama Poetica.

8pm, La Mama, 205 Faraday Street, Carlton. \$7/5. (www.lamama.com.au)

## TUESDAY

EVERY TUESDAY

### Melbourne Writers Meet-up

**Group.** 6pm in the city. Inspired, emerging and established writers welcome. Social, not critique group. (@MelbCityWriters or melbournewriters@gmail.com)

### Book Chat.

11am–12pm, Doveton Library. Share opinions and great reads with book lovers. Free.

### Chalk and Cheese.

3WBC (94.1FM), 4–5pm. Arts news, interviews and readings.

### Delahey Writers Group.

3.30–5.30pm. During terms. Delahey Community Centre: 80 Copperfield Drive, Delahey. (9390 3977)

FORTNIGHTLY

### Mordialloc Writers' Group.

8pm, Mordialloc Neighbourhood House. (9587 8757 / mairi@ozemail.com.au)

### Wordweavers Writers' Group.

9.45am – 12pm, Waverley Community Learning Centre, 5 Fleet St, Mt Waverley. (9807 6011)

5 JUNE

### Williamstown Writers.

8pm, Williamstown. \$2. (williwriters@hotmail.com)

12 JUNE

### Poets@Watsonia.

7pm, Watsonia Library Community Room. \$5. (0404 517 881)

26 JUNE

### Docklands Writers.

5.30–7.30pm, The Hub, 80 Harbour Esplanade, Docklands. (jane.x.hutchinson@gmail.com)

## WEDNESDAY

EVERY WEDNESDAY

### Aural Text on RRR

(102.7FM), 12–2pm.

ONE WED PER MONTH

### Roarhouse music & poetry.

7–10pm, Esplanade Basement Bar, St Kilda. Free. (To perform: fi.roarhouse@gmail.com)

06 JUNE

### Coast Lines Poetry Group.

10.30am, Brighton Library, Wilson St. (Cecilia Morris, 0412 021 154)

13 JUNE

### Southern Pens.

1–3pm, Rosebud Library. (Kaye, 5985 6773 or south-ernpens@live.com.au)

27 JUNE

### Wednesday's Child Writers' Group.

6.30pm, Bartiste Lounge, Ross Smith Lane, Frankston. (francashman@msn.com)

### Southern Pens.

Details as above.

## THURSDAY

EVERY THURSDAY

### Published ... or not.

3CR (855AM), 11.30am – 12pm.

### Spoken Word poetry.

3CR (855AM), 9–9.30am.

### Write Now.

(88.3FM), 7–8pm.

Discussion and talkback.

ONE THURS PER MONTH

### Roarhouse music & poetry.

7–10pm, 303 Bar, Northcote. (fi.roarhouse@gmail.com)

7 JUNE

### Australian Society of Technical Communicators (VIC) meeting,

6.30–8.30pm, VTR Consulting, Roseneath Place, South Melbourne.

### Brunswick Poets' & Writers' Workshop ©.

7pm, Community Room, Campbell Turnbull Library, rear 220 Melville Rd, Brunswick West. (9384 1277)

### Darebin Writers' Group.

7.30pm, SPAN Community House, 298 Victoria Rd, Thornbury. (9480 1364, info@spanhouse.org)

### Upper Yarra Writers Group.

7–9pm, Wild Thyme, Main Street, Warburton. (Valissa Enever, askvalissa@valissaenever.com.au)

14 JUNE

### Caulfield Writers Group.

7.30pm, Godfrey St. Community House, 9 Godfrey St, Bentleigh. (caulfieldwriters@gmail.com)

21 JUNE

### Baw Baw Writers' Network.

6.30pm, Drouin Public Library. (bawbaw.writers-events@gmail.com)

### The Courthouse Readings.

8pm, 728 Main Rd, Eltham. \$5. (9439 9732)

28 JUNE

### Caulfield Writers Group.

Details as above.

# June 2012



## FRIDAY

EVERY FRIDAY

**Andrew Thompson on 3WBC** (94.1FM), 12.30–1pm. Short stories, poems, music.

**Mornington Community Writers Group.** 10am and 7.30pm, Mornington Community House, Albert Street, Mornington. ([www.morningtonccci.com.au/59754772](http://www.morningtonccci.com.au/59754772))

29 JUNE

**Melbourne Poets Union meeting.** 7pm, various locations, usually Wheeler Centre. \$10/\$9. ([home.vicnet.net.au/~mpuinc](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~mpuinc), 0404 517 881)

**Society of Women Writers VIC meeting.** 10.30am, meeting room, 4th floor, Wheeler Centre, City. \$5. ([www.swwvic.net.au](http://www.swwvic.net.au))

## SATURDAY

EVERY SATURDAY

**Poetica.** 3.05pm, ABC Radio National.

**Poetry Sessions.** 2pm, Dan O'Connell Hotel, 225 Canning Street, Carlton. (9387 2086 / 0412 224 655)

**poetry@fedsquare.** 2–4pm, Feb–Nov. In the Atrium. ([www.fedsquare.com](http://www.fedsquare.com))

**Phoenix Park Writers.** Meet weekly on a Monday and Saturday afternoon. East Malvern. (9530 4397)

02 JUNE

**Word Tree.** 3pm, Burrinja Cafe, 351 Glenfern Rd, Upwey. (9754 1789)

9 JUNE

**Wordsmiths of Melbourne Poetry Group.** 2–5pm, 8 Woodhouse Rd, Doncaster. \$30 yr/\$5 session, \$3 concession. (9890 5885 / [poeticachristi@netSPACE.net.au](mailto:poeticachristi@netSPACE.net.au))

16 JUNE

**Henry Lawson Society.** 1.30–4.30pm, St. Francis Church, Lonsdale St, City. (9785 7079)

## SUNDAY

3 JUNE

**West Word.** 2pm, Dancing Dog Café, 42A Albert St, Footscray. ([west\\_word@yahoo.com](mailto:west_word@yahoo.com))

10 JUNE

**FAW Mornington Peninsula Branch.** 1.45 for 2pm, Community Contact House, 9 Albert St, Mornington. (Contact Philton, 5974 4561 or Margaret, 9781 1231.)

17 JUNE

**West Word.** Details as above.

24 JUNE

**Readings by the Bay.** 2–5pm, Mordialloc Neighbourhood House. ([mairi@ozemail.com.au](mailto:mairi@ozemail.com.au) / 9587 8757)

## HIGHLIGHTS

WEDNESDAY 6 JUNE

**Careful, He Might Hear You,** film of 1963 Miles Franklin Award winning novel by Sumner Locke Elliott, screens at Nova, followed by discussion. [www.cinemanova.com.au](http://www.cinemanova.com.au)

THURSDAY 7 JUNE

**Skye Rogers' hands-on workshop** on the art of paper craft. 6.30pm, Readings Hawthorn. [readings.com.au/event](http://readings.com.au/event)

FRI 8 – MON 11 JUNE

**Woodend Winter Arts Festival.** Packed literary and arts program of comic and freelance artists, and yarns at the pub. [www.woodendwinterartsfestival.org.au](http://www.woodendwinterartsfestival.org.au)

THURSDAY 14 JUNE

**Chris Flynn and Alicia Sometimes** at Collingwood Library, 7pm. [text-publishing.com.au/events](http://text-publishing.com.au/events)

SATURDAY 26 MAY

**Christopher Paolini** at the Athenaeum Theatre, 6pm. [tickets.mwf.com.au](http://tickets.mwf.com.au)





# Flipping “Blah” Theatre On Its Side

*There is no fool-proof defence against failure or boring theatre, but VAN BADHAM shares a few good weapons. Interview and article by Allee Richards.*

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Van Badham, associate artist at Malthouse Theatre, began knocking out manuscripts at age three. At 16 she was earning a wage writing for a youth theatre company in Sydney. She later studied creative writing at Wollongong University during which time she continued to make theatre, submit scripts for competitions and apply for grants. Her “big break” was - arguably - when, on an exchange to the University of Sheffield, she stumbled into her professor’s office: “I literally fell on my face with my script in my hand and this dynamically dressed British academic said, ‘who are you?’, and I was like, ‘I’m Australian, I’m a playwright’. He said, ‘well Australian playwright, get up off the floor’.” That script, *Kitchen*, went on to be very well received at the Edinburgh festival.

For several years Badham split her time between the UK and Australia staging theatre at the Edinburgh festival and teaching creative writing at Wollongong University. Her plays have since been staged professionally across Australia, the UK, the USA, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia and Iceland and many have won awards.

“Greatness,  
that’s the motto;  
be great.  
If you’re not  
going for  
greatness,  
you suck.”

Success at Badham’s level is the bare minimum aspiring writers should aim for: “Greatness, that’s it, that’s the motto; be great. If you’re not going for greatness, you suck,” she says.

Fit to make such statements perhaps as Badham is full to the bursting with tips for aspiring writers, what she calls “an arsenal of rhetoric devices, structures and methodologies”. While her demands seem high and Badham admits herself, “anyone precious is gone within five minutes,” the advice starts with the simple and enjoyable task of going to the theatre.

It seems obvious, but according to Badham people try to write scripts without going to the theatre and she can spot it right away: “I think sometimes people have an idea of the theatre they get from TV”. So go often and go to a wide



variety of shows, she advises: "Go see Othello, go see Sarah Krane's *Crave*, go and see a Ducky show, go see some crazy American chick do a show about her vagina or whatever and develop a theatrical literacy based on exposure". If you go as often as Badham insists you will inevitably see some bad plays, but this is nothing to fear: "if you're a practitioner, seeing anything is your opportunity to learn. If it doesn't work or it doesn't appeal to your aesthetic you have learnt because now you know you're not going to take that path".

The next step is to write. Badham cites advice from Sylvia Plath in *The Bell Jar*, to write 1000 words a day, "It's a job you have to turn up and put in your hours like anything else". Badham says you must write continually, as boredom with your work is what will push you to new territory and improvement. This

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is important advice as your first work probably won't be great, but that is ok: "you learn from copying and my early work was probably copied, but I pushed myself and I got better". And this guidance is not exclusive to scriptwriting. "Any form of writing is good because it's about processing thought into words."

Badham explains it can be hard to earn money as a writer and credits her survival to her willingness to write anything, "theatre, radio, film, I've just always said yes." But even as your writing improves, there is no fool-proof defence against failure. Badham describes her own failures as "spectacular" and "on monumental levels," but legitimises failure as a part of your education.

Also essential in the education process is involvement in the theatre community, Badham explains; early collaborations are what can kick off your writing CV. "Get involved in your theatre society, hang with the kids who are going to drama school

and start making theatre. Find a bunch of people, make a set out of rubbish, use whatever you have at hand, put on a show and invite people." (For the record, Badham doesn't want to see your script, she doesn't have time to read it, but please do invite her to your show.)

Melbourne, says Badham, is a great city for "making". "In Sydney it's illegal to put on a show in your backyard, but you can do that in Melbourne." She says aspiring playwrights need to use Melbourne's resources for making to make things happen for their writing careers. An example is when one of Badham's first plays staged at the Edinburgh festival she arrived at the airport to her university friends holding a sign with the words "Famous Australian Playwright Van Badham". "I was like, 'I'm not famous'. And they said, 'everybody is here for the festival and now they think you are famous and now they will see your show, now you are famous'. They were ruthlessly ambitious. They just made what they wanted to happen, happen".

There are plenty of ways to get a foot-in, she promises. "Get into the fringe, do a show in your backyard, work in a cooperative. Learn how to put shows on, learn how this business is run, understand how actors work – so when you do get a gig you will know just how difficult this trick is."

Badham describes the industry as "a community of trust" and keeps this in mind when assessing submissions at work. "At Malthouse, we will be talking about writers and considering options and thinking, you know, life is short. We want to have engaging and worthwhile experiences with people. If a writer is notorious for tantrums ... none of us has time for that because if it's a war it's never a good show."

She refers to "making theatre," not "writing scripts," because she no longer believes they are separate entities. "It's not a literary form, it's a performance form. As a scriptwriter you are creating a text around bodies and space." She describes playwriting as being a part of a machine, "the skill is engineering because you have to be aware of how every single mechanism reacts. To every action there is an equal or opposite reaction."

She says this is especially so in Australia because what our theatre does well is more than just dialogue, Badham is inspired by the visual theatrics of Australian theatre. "We live in a visual culture and here we have these amazing directors who realise these extraordinary visions and theatre goes are interested in physicality. A play about two people sitting around a table having a conversation, it's not playing to the resources at our disposal. Australian theatre does a certain kind of thing very well and it's a great opportunity to be creative in theatre at the moment. But still I get these scripts that are just blah, blah, blah, blah..."

She also cites this Australian theatre aesthetic as the reason "the old, write a script and send it in isn't happening anymore". So what is happening? After you've "done your time in fringe," how do you get your scripts produced by prestigious theatre companies like Malthouse? Badham warns against spending a year of your life not getting paid to write a play nobody is going to put on. "Don't send us a script, that's not how we work, that's not what we want, that's not how we roll." Badham sighs exasperatedly reflecting how she says the same thing 200 times a day at Malthouse: "when you have an idea send me a two page proposal. Then we can talk about your idea and realise the best way to work with that idea, start putting a team together and make it work. It gives us something to build from, that's what we want. Two pages aren't going to kill you". And, as with any piece of writing, it must be submitted to an appropriate publication. "You have to understand the stuff that excites us. It's not as rigid as 'we want something like this', but it's about realising our vocabulary." Badham validates Malthouse is high-end artistic practice, but ensures they aren't stuck





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in old ways, they won't shy away from something new or "dangerous," but the writing must be good: "If we believe in the show we'll do it, but if we're going to take a hit, Jesus Christ we want to know it's going to be a hit".

An integral part of a hit is to be socially responsive, says Badham. Speak to the issues of your time and understand how that relates to everybody's time. Good theatre is not about your love life, for example: "I have a problem with a lot of younger writers whose work I read and it's just emo-blog shit. I don't care about people's feelings. I did some assessments for an organisation recently, I read about 80 theatre proposals and about 70 of those were almost identical. There were words I banned: identity, memory, memoir, fracture ... all of these individualised subjectivities. Seventy of those proposals were exactly the same and all of them said 'this is completely unique'. You just longed for someone to say 'this is about cats'. I am sick and tired of hearing about your love lives. You

know there are people dying in the third world? Your ex-boyfriend, not interesting! You're not interesting and I don't care about you. You're not special. You're only special if you're amazing and most people aren't."

"I have a problem with a lot of younger writers whose work I read and it's just emo-blog shit."

So how do the majority of us make our work interesting and socially responsive? Reading newspapers every day is one way: "you need to know about everything and understand sociology. That's what makes your work interesting. It's not easy. It's really hard. If you're writing about love, it has to be about the social implications of love". Badham legitimises writing as a challenging, intellectual exercise that requires a lot of brainwork. She hates romanticised mythology around writing. "You don't just sit there and it just pours out. I know writers who do 80-200 drafts of their work!"

Badham doesn't make writing a great script sound easy, but she's inspiring, praising the stability of theatre amidst frightening times for other forms of writing. "The thing about theatre is it can't be replicated. It exists in space and time. You can't get that experience anywhere else. You can't burn it and copy it. This is the great opportunity, it's a return to an authenticity and a direct contact and a social experience that you just do not get from other forms anymore."

So, please, playwrights, start making theatre. If not for your own sake, for Badham's: "I get really frustrated with people. I am telling you what to do to get a career, why aren't you doing it?" ❶

VAN BADHAM is an internationally award-winning playwright, critic and screenwriter, currently employed as an artistic associate for Malthouse Theatre. Her plays have been staged professionally across Australia, the UK, the USA, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia and Iceland. Her first book, *Burnt Snow*, was published by Pan Macmillan Australia last year.  
[www.vanbadham.com](http://www.vanbadham.com)





# Unmasking the Screen Writer

*Working on television shows can be a pure joy, says DANIEL BURT, but there are pitfalls to the job of writing for the mouths of others. By Anna Kelsey-Sugg.*

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At 27 years of age John Lennon had already resigned from one of the world's most successful bands. Daniel Burt offers this fact when put to him that, for a 28-year-old writer, he's ticked some pretty major boxes.

At 18, his Channel 31 comedy show *Raucus* had garnered the interest of Rove McManus, who came onto the show as a guest. "I remember he was about to host the ARIAs," says Burt, "and I made a gag to him and he used it at the ARIAs – then he gave me my first job, writing for *Skithouse*. It was incredibly exciting."

By 21 he had interned for David Letterman, one of his heroes, on the *Late Show with David Letterman* and he's since written for more Australian television shows than you could poke a large stick at.

But early achievements come with their downsides. Burt would like to re-experience the same excitement he felt as a teenager. He's decided that, for now at least, writing comedy for others to perform isn't going to deliver it to him.

"When you write for a panel show, you could have one idea but write it six different ways depending on the voice it was for," Burt says. "You end up constructing different opinions and, if you're not careful, you can lose your own voice, really lose your own voice."

He would find himself writing things that he didn't necessarily subscribe to. "It would take me a day or two to find out, what do I think about this? That's why I've stopped taking that work writing for others, I just write for myself."

This is not to suggest that Burt didn't – and doesn't – regard highly the comedy, reality or other shows that he's worked on, from *Glasshouse* to *The Einstein Factor* to *The Biggest Loser*. "I take those jobs very seriously," he says. "I'm a perfectionist."

He is also "unashamedly a huge fan of television". He believes that it is a "superb" medium and that – done well – has the power to teach. As a consequence, he has no time for sloppy writing, no matter the show.

He deplores some recent writing to emerge from the mouth of the host of *Australia's Got Talent*. "The copy that Grant Denyer says is just nightmarish – there's

tortured metaphors and really broken imagery and then he'll say things like, 'Our nation-wide search spread far and wide' – how does that get through? And, ok, you're abusing language, but do you have to sound so happy doing it?"

It's not a show that you'd imagine struggling to afford a top-notch writer, so how does writing like that get through? It seems that in TV-land, as in theatre-land, the work of the writer isn't always afforded the acknowledgement it deserves.

"No-one cares about the writing," says Burt. "It's bizarre how bottom of the rung writers are." But Burt resists letting this affect his work. "I take a lot of pride in slipping in something for someone like me who's watching at home, who would value a good line or a well crafted phrase – that keeps people like me interested. When something's clunky and crap, everyone can hear it; it disrupts the flow and it lets down the show."

He offers a behind-the-scenes view of shows that do take writers seriously – and hire a room full of them. There you might expect loud, riotous laughter or busy exchanges of witty repartee, but, explains Burt, it isn't always the case: "There can be nothing un-funnier than a room full of comedy writers".

He paints a picture of writers furiously scribbling to encroaching deadlines or describing the finer details of an issue until a presenter feels they have a handle on it – "funny people being serious".

"It's making the host feel safe that they'll know what they're talking about. When you get the serious stuff down and you feel like you're grounded in the facts, then you feel more comfortable making gags on the facts."

But the serious writers' room is also a sort of writerly fantasy – a space for a writer to pick apart and construct their work with like-minded wordsmiths.

"Being able to discuss a gag or work through the syntax of a line with somebody who's as interested as you are is something that is very special. They care about words as much as you do.

"When it's on in writers' rooms, it's the best place in the world. When comedy writers do let their hair down it's like international waters, you can just say anything. You would get fired in other workplaces and that's liberating. That's what I love most about show business in a way; the freedom to say whatever the hell you like is one of the absolute gifts of the writers' room."

For shows like the *Glasshouse* or *The 7pm Project*, Burt's work would entail going through news stories of the day and "finding instinctively which would be most conducive to humour" – not always the ones that make you giggle. "Sometimes the least funny story is the one that's already funny in and of itself. Finding lunacy and ridiculousness in the dry stuff is more fun and more challenging."





There isn't a show Burt is "gagging to work for" right now. So is there a dearth of Australian television comedy?

"Well, that's the thing with *Australia's Got Talent* – they'll put on amateur comedians, but then Chanel 7 doesn't commission any new comedy. It's bullshit.

"If I was growing up now I probably wouldn't be as passionate about comedy writing. I got to grow up with *The D-Gen*, Roy and HG, *Club Buggery*. I'd rush home and listen to Martin Molloy. Would I be as into Australian comedy now? Probably not, which is a shame."

He's edged away from writing for others on television; however, his love for the medium remains. "I still have a lot of respect for TV," he says. Nor has he forgotten a great benefit it carries, distinguishing it from plenty of other kinds of writing: "And TV pays".

As a freelancer he's gained the freedom to write in his own voice. But he's more susceptible to the challenges of working from home – and working alone. "Sometimes I wonder whether obsessing over syntax or grammar is just a form of procrastination dressed up as productivity. You get hung up on a comma. I don't know if it's work or if I'm wasting time."

It's a quandary that is surely common to perfectionists in any discipline – and it encompasses an attention to detail honed from a very young age. As a child, comedy was for Burt "a dirty secret" and he remembers watching panel comedy shows with his parents and, "firing off in my brain what I would say in that situation".

"I would go through the newspaper and cut out stories and will myself to write 20 jokes about that story. I didn't know that I could make a living out of it, it was just something I really loved doing, and it was a muscle I really loved.

"You've got to use that muscle," he advises budding television writers: "Do the work. Be good".

And believe in what you're doing. "Having pride in your work gives you happiness," he says. "I don't ever want to make a joke about something that I don't believe in or something I can't stand by. I'd also like to think that humour should have some kind of philosophy underlying it to make it mine – otherwise I'm just a gag man." ❷

DANIEL BURT is a Melbourne-based writer and comedian.  
<http://danielburt.tumblr.com> @trubnad





## OPPORTUNITIES

### **International Festival of Literature Ideas & Translation**

*When: 15–17 June*

The IFLIT is a celebration of literature and the arts in the broadest sense of the word; it brings together celebrated poets, authors, and translators, as well as editors, critics and publishers from across the world. There are readings, recitals, keynote presentations, workshops and performances including the Japanese women's choir Yukari Echo. Chief among the presentation is a session on Copyright Law pertaining to literature in translation. There is also a multilingual Poetry & Music salon hosted by PEN Melbourne. Free entry. Held at Federation Square. For details and bookings email: [iflitmelbourne@gmail.com](mailto:iflitmelbourne@gmail.com)

### **Visible Ink accepting submissions**

*Closing date: 22 June*

*Visible Ink* is now accepting submissions for the 24th edition of this annual Australian anthology. Poetry, short stories, non-fiction, photography and artwork welcome. \$6 per submission with a limit of three per person. Successful contributors will receive a copy of *Visible Ink* 2012, to be launched in early November. <http://visibleink.submishmash.com/submit>

### **2012 QWC/Hachette Manuscript Development Program**

*Closing date: 12 July*

Open to fiction and non-fiction writers, the program gives up to 10 lucky emerging Australian writers the unparalleled opportunity to develop their manuscript with editors from Hachette Australia. [www.qwc.asn.au/help-for-writers/manuscript-development-programs/qwc-hachette-manuscript-development-program](http://www.qwc.asn.au/help-for-writers/manuscript-development-programs/qwc-hachette-manuscript-development-program)

### **Penguin Books now accepting unsolicited manuscripts – Children's and YA**

*Closing date: 31 July*

The Books for Children and Young Adults (BCYA) division of Penguin Group (Australia) is the leading publisher of books for young people in Australia. For a short time the BCYA is accepting unsolicited manuscripts of children's and young adult works. [www.penguin.com.au/getting-published](http://www.penguin.com.au/getting-published)

### **the-green-heart writing contest**

*Closing date: 31 July*

the-green-heart is collecting the stories of people's hearts to create an art piece of thoughts, dreams and ideas. The project asks, "What is in your heart? - the world is listening." All entries will be published on the

project's website. The selected winning entry receives \$US1000 and an entry ticket to the Red Hen Press 18th Anniversary Champagne Luncheon in November. <http://thegreenheartcall.wordpress.com>

### **Margaret River Press call for submissions**

*Closing date: 31 August*

Margaret River Press invites short fiction, poetry, photo essays and creative non-fiction submissions that illuminate the theme of "fire": its destructive, creative and redemptive powers, its social impact, its cultural and ecological role, its terror, symbolism and its beauty. [www.margaret-riverpress.com/submissions/special-call-for-submissions](http://www.margaret-riverpress.com/submissions/special-call-for-submissions)

### **Kyneton-Daffodil and Arts Festival Writers Workshop**

Kyneton-Daffodil and Arts Festival is looking for authors, editors and publishers to take part in a proposed writers workshop to run in September. The workshop will take the form of writers talking and engaging festival attendees in the art and craft of writing, and the publishing and production of books. For more information contact John Condliffe on 0419 397 936, or at [ja35025@hotmail.com](mailto:ja35025@hotmail.com)

### **Dark Edifice is currently looking for submissions**

*Dark Edifice*, an online literary magazine devoted to bringing you the very best of dark speculative fiction, fantasy, science fiction and horror, is currently seeking submissions for its editions *Dark Edifice* #2 and #3.

### **Headspring Press is looking for submissions**

*Headspring Press*, a website and quarterly electronic journal celebrating new writing and art, is looking for submissions of short stories, non-fiction pieces, and comic works. Electronic submission accepted only. [www.headspringpress.com/submissions](http://www.headspringpress.com/submissions)

### **Prahran Mechanics' Institute Press accepting submissions**

PMI Press is concerned with the publication of works relating to any aspect of history within the state of Victoria, Australia. They are accepting submissions now for complete hard-copy manuscripts. [www.pmi.net.au/press\\_submission.htm](http://www.pmi.net.au/press_submission.htm)

### **PostScript with PlayWriting Australia**

Australian playwrights are invited to submit full-length, unproduced scripts to PlayWriting Australia who will solicit assessments of the work from senior readers at two of the participating theatre companies. [www.pwa.org.au/Skills/PostScript](http://www.pwa.org.au/Skills/PostScript)



## COMPETITIONS

### **The Stringybark Seven Deadly Sins Short Fiction Award 2012**

*Closing date: 10 June*

The award is given for a short story of 1500 words or less, that relates to one (or more) of the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride/vanity. [www.stringybarkstories.net/The\\_Stringybark\\_Short\\_Story\\_Award/Home.html](http://www.stringybarkstories.net/The_Stringybark_Short_Story_Award/Home.html)

### **Elyne Mitchell Rural Women's Writing Award**

*Closing Date: 30 June*

The Elyne Mitchell Rural Women's Writing Award commemorates internationally renowned Silver Brumby author Elyne's life and work, and hopes to encourage women all over Australia to write their stories and send them in. All entries must have a specific reference to an Australian rural experience. Entries may be fiction or non-fiction. The theme for 2012 is Leaping Into The Future. Entries must not exceed 2500 words. [www.elynemitchell.com](http://www.elynemitchell.com)

### **FAWNS Vibrant Verse Poetry Competition**

*Closing date: 30 June*

There are two categories. Category A – Free verse, open style, open theme. Category B – Traditional, rhymed or structured verse, open style, open theme. Maximum 60 lines. First prize \$200, second prize \$100. <http://sites.google.com/site/fawnorthshoreregional/competitions-1>

### **2012 Joseph Furphy Commemorative Literary Prize**

*Closing date: 27 July*

Short Story and Poetry writing competition. Short Story competition has three sections: open, 3500 word limit, prize \$300; youth (13–18 years), 3000 word limit, prize \$100; and junior (up to 12 years), 1500 word limit, prize \$50. Poetry competition has two sections: open, poem to 40 lines, prize \$150; and youth (up to 18 years), poem up to 20 lines, prize \$75. [www.gvrlc.vic.gov.au](http://www.gvrlc.vic.gov.au)

### **Blake Poetry Prize**

*Closing date: 27 July*

Entries now open for the 2012 Blake Poetry Prize. \$5000 in prize money for a new poem that explores the religious or spiritual. [www.blakeprize.com.au/how-to-enter](http://www.blakeprize.com.au/how-to-enter)

### **Aesthetica Magazine creative writing competition**

*Closing date: 31 August*

Hosted by *Aesthetica Magazine*, the international art and culture publication, this creative writing competition has two categories: poetry and short fiction. Prizes include cash plus the opportunity to be published in the *Aesthetica Creative Writing Annual*. [www.aestheticamagazine.com/submission\\_guide.htm](http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/submission_guide.htm)

### **Cricket Poetry Award**

*Closing date: 31 August*

The organisers invite poets to write and submit a poem that depicts life in and around the game and sport of cricket, in settings of backyard, street, beach, park, village green or social-cricket. The genre may be narrative, epic, dramatic, satirical, lyrical, elegy or verse fable. [www.cricketartprize.org/wp-content/uploads/CPP-2012-EntryForm-v1-copy.pdf](http://www.cricketartprize.org/wp-content/uploads/CPP-2012-EntryForm-v1-copy.pdf)

### **The Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award**

*Closing Date: 31 August*

The Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award is a \$20,000 award for the creation of a new play by an Indigenous playwright. This national award will be presented for the next three years. The award comprises \$7500 prize money and a \$12,500 commission for a new play each year. Applications will be accepted from writers of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. They will be assessed by a panel including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. [www.belvoir.com.au/about-belvoir/balnaves-award](http://www.belvoir.com.au/about-belvoir/balnaves-award)

### **Write-a-Book-in-a-Day Competition**

*Closing date: 31 August*

The Write-a-Book-in-a-Day is a wonderful, fun, team-building writing experience, open to people of all ages with all levels of writing, computer and graphic skills. In the past all teams have written successful books (to most of the entrants' utter amazement) and the majority say they will have another go this year. Try forming a team at your school, writing group, office or book club. [www.writeabookinaday.com](http://www.writeabookinaday.com)

### **Toolangi C.J. Dennis Poetry Competition**

*Closing Date: 7 September*

Now open for entries. The subject for the themed category this year is 'Trees are the lungs of the Earth'. Other categories include open, poems by adults for children, primary school students (preps to grade 6) and secondary school students (years 7–12). <http://toolangi.net/events/toolangi-poetry-competition>

### **FAWNS Super Short Story Competition**

*Closing date: 30 September*

There are two categories. Category A – Super Short Story. Category B – Memoir. A memoir is defined as a memory in the writer's life of an incident, or a number of incidents relating to a single theme. Maximum 700 words. First prize \$200, second prize \$100. <http://sites.google.com/site/fawnorthshoreregional/competitions-1>





## CLASSIFIEDS

### Castlemaine Writing Retreat

South of Castlemaine, old stone hotel, two bedrooms, basic but heaps of character. Peaceful surrounds, wood heater, BYO linen. \$85/night, 2 night min. \$300 a week for Writers Victoria members. 0412 158 715 / [www.yapeenpub.com.au](http://www.yapeenpub.com.au) / [yapeenpub@gmail.com](mailto:yapeenpub@gmail.com)

### Henry Handel Richardson Writing Competition

Henry Handel Richardson Centenary Writing Competition. Closing date: August 31. Judge: Helen Garner. Open section up to 5000 words, prize: \$1000 plus books. Youth Section (sponsored by Text Publishing), up to 1500 words, prize: \$350 plus books. Further information including guidelines and entry form at [www.henryhandelrichardsonociety.org.au](http://www.henryhandelrichardsonociety.org.au)

### Writer's Retreat, Hepburn Springs

Charming self-contained bungalow in peaceful setting; close to Bathhouse, cafes and bush walks. Non-holiday Mon-Thurs \$50 per night otherwise \$75. Contact Elizabeth, 0425 723 502 / [elizian@bigpond.com](mailto:elizian@bigpond.com)

### Writers Journey Creative Adventures

Offering intensive programs for writers of all genres in inspiring international locations: Desert Writers, June 23-30; Backstage Bali, July 8-15; Mekong Meditations, Nov 28 - Dec 5; Temple Writing in Burma Dec 13-20; Moroccan Caravan, Jan 10-21; Fiji Breakthrough, March 9-16. Limited places, booking now! Subscribe to Writers Journey Newsletter today and receive a free Avoidance Buster eBook - bust your procrastination habits forever! 0415921303 / [www.writersjourney.com.au](http://www.writersjourney.com.au)



## MILESTONES

AVRIL BRADLEY had two poems published in the May edition of *Tango Australis*. School students from her poetry workshop had work featured in the new colour edition of *FreeXpression*, April issue.

FRED CURTIS has won the short story section of the Eyre Writers Awards (2012) with "The Suicide Note". He also received a highly commended for the Maritime Theme with "Sea Travel" and a commended award for the Rhyming Poetry Section with "Bouzoukia".

CAROLINE HAMILTON was offered a three-week writing residency at Ledig House Omi International Arts Center, Ghent, New York, USA.

LEAH KAMINSKY had a poem commended in the Hippocrates Prize for Poetry 2012; won the Varuna/Pan MacMillan Publisher's Fellowship Award for her manuscript "The Fish Council"; and had an article published in *Huffington Post*: [www.huffingtonpost.com/leah-kaminsky/post\\_3142\\_b\\_1362394.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/leah-kaminsky/post_3142_b_1362394.html)

KYLIE LADD's second novel, *Last Summer*, published by Allen and Unwin, was Highly Commended in the Federation of Australian Writers 2011 Christina Stead award for fiction.

BEVERLEY LELLO's story, "Things That Are Found in Trees", won the Margaret River Short Story competition May 2012. Her short story "I Hear Them" was shortlisted in the Stringybark Twist Competition.

DENISE OGILVIE, writing as Isabel Ogilvie has been signed with Phoenix Yard Books in London to publish her children's fantasy series.

MARIBEL STEEL's short story "His Emerald Eyes" won a prize in the *Fifty Plus* Short Story competition.

JOYCE SUTO's second book, *Horsehair Worms and a Shark*, was recently launched. The book is divided into four sections, and includes Joyce's poems that mirror her life.

KAREN TAYLEUR recently launched her new book *Love Notes from Vinegar House*, published through Walker Books.

VIVIENNE ULMAN's short story "By Night I Swam" won second place in the 2011 Fellowship of Australian Writers Angelo B Natoli Short Story Award.

## Fiction's Best Firsts

Declan Fay – @declanf – leads us this month towards *The Guardian* and “Ten best first lines in fiction”. Here are a few to whet your appetite.



Sylvia Plath (*The Bell Jar*, 1963):  
*“It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn’t know what I was doing in New York.”*

Dodie Smith (*I Capture the Castle*, 1948): *“I write this sitting in the kitchen sink.”*

PG Wodehouse (*The Luck of the Bodkins*, 1935): *“Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.”*

James Joyce (*Ulysses*, 1922): *“Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed.”*

Donna Tartt (*The Secret History*, 1992): *“The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation.”*

[And perhaps missing from the mix is the opening of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955): *“Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.”*]

–Robert McCrum, *The Guardian* ([www.guardian.co.uk/culture/gallery/2012/apr/29/ten-best-first-lines-fiction](http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/gallery/2012/apr/29/ten-best-first-lines-fiction)), 29 April 2012.

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## THE MONTH

### Month of Viewing

by CAMERON WOODHEAD

April is the cruellest month for Melbourne's theatre reviewers. Our largest arts event, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, attracts around 500,000 people and as an uncensored affair, it gets bigger each year.

Of over 400 acts, your humble correspondent saw 28, and remained surprisingly unjaded through it all. One unexpected highlight came from mime artist and provocateur Dr. Brown (Philip Burgers), who took out the festival's top gong, the Barry Award, for an hour of bizarre silent clowning in which he stole handbags from spectators and climbed over them in his undies.

Yes, sometimes you just have to be there.

Fortunately, the fourth wall remained at least semi-erect for *Puppetry of the Penis 3D*. "Genital origami" is among our most popular comedic exports, and now you get 3D glasses with it. Woo.

There's always some idiot who claims that, just because phallic antics are funny, women can't be. That's rubbish – as two of our slickest stand-up comedians, Celia Pacquola and Zoe Coombs Marr, proved beyond doubt.

For more cerebral humour, you couldn't go past the Malthouse production of Thomas Bernhard's *The Histrionic*. If you haven't read Bernhard's fiction, you should. He is a master of the outraged rant, and crafts a form of amplified Schadenfreude, more often than not from creative intellects disintegrating in the face of cultural indifference.

*The Histrionic* is a ferocious, two-hour monologue from a disgruntled actor, performing in a benighted Austrian hamlet that fails to appreciate his genius. Bille Brown's performance was virtuosic, and drew out uncomfortable parallels between Bernhard's native Austria and contemporary Australia:

*Wherever we tour/ Jealousy/ Tiny little minds/ Xenophobia/ White-hot hatred of art/ Deep suspicion of abstraction/ Violent loathing of the intellect/ Where else in the world / Could be like this/ Hmm.*

Where else indeed?

It isn't as bad as all that. Melbourne's theatre scene is led from the bottom up. Our independent sector continues to thrive. Two outstanding companies, Four Larks and The Hayloft Project, had new productions this month: the first with *Plague Dances*, a haunting and distinc-

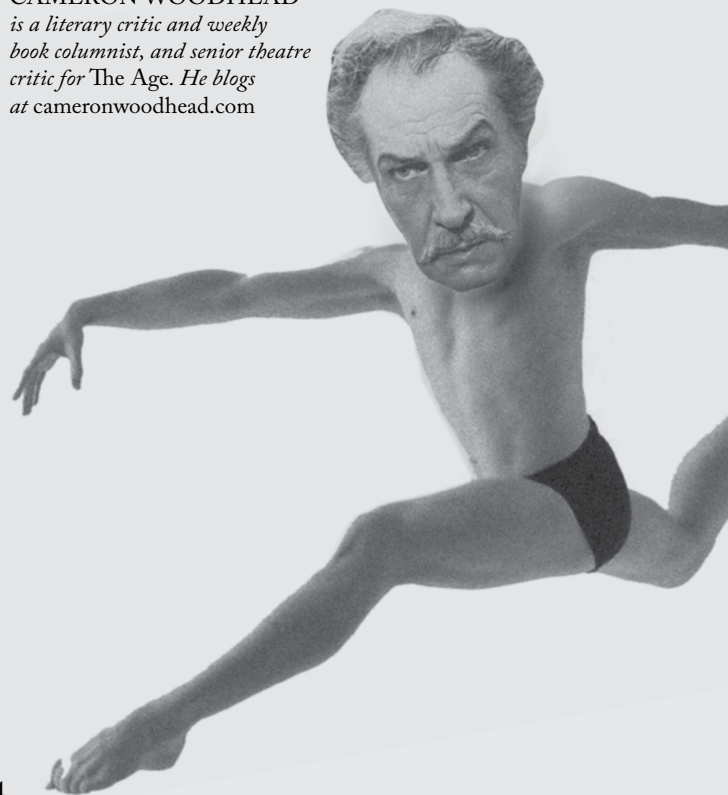
tive piece of music theatre that delved into the medieval mind, the second with *The Seizure*, an austere adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, based on the legend of the wounded archer, abandoned to his own suffering, whose rescue presaged the end of the Trojan War.

Looking ahead, I have high hopes for *The Heretic*, a climate-change play starring Noni Hazelhurst at the Melbourne Theatre Company, and Marion Potts' production of Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, performed in English and Spanish at the Malthouse.

Also of interest is Robyn Nevin playing the lead in *Queen Lear*. If she's as flinty and compelling as she was in Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* back in January, it will be a performance to remember. And I suppose gender-blind Shakespeare is timely. The Australia Council has just released its sobering Women In Theatre Report – a stimulating and somewhat controversial look at what has and has not changed in terms of gender-equity on and behind the Australian stage.

CAMERON WOODHEAD

*is a literary critic and weekly book columnist, and senior theatre critic for The Age. He blogs at cameronwoodhead.com*







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## All about writers

Writers VICTORIA Inc

ABN 18 268 487 576

Level 3, the Wheeler Centre  
176 Little Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne Vic 3000

T> 03 9094 7855

F> 03 9650 8010

E> [info@writersvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@writersvictoria.org.au)

W> [writersvictoria.org.au](http://writersvictoria.org.au)

Office Hours> 10am - 5pm weekdays

*Director Roderick Poole | Administration & Finance Manager Jacquelin Low  
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# THE VICTORIAN WRITER

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