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# Victorian Writer

Writing Each Other

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## WRITERS ON WRITING

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# Editorial

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When inspiration strikes and the words and ideas are flowing and our worlds are building and our characters are becoming, it can be hard to pull away from the page or screen and ask, 'Why am I telling this story?'

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about writing outside lived experience. The debate is complex and can be exhausting. In this issue, we endeavour to shine a light on different perspectives of the debate and look at some of the ways we can approach writing each other.

Ellen van Neervan has advice for writing white characters, Zana Fraillon writes about the importance of walking in another's shoes, Chloe Hooper talks about the ethics of writing about other people in non-fiction, Rashida Murphy on the theft of cultural knowledge, Angela Savage searches for an ethical framework for writers writing across the cultural divide, Hoa Pham addresses racism in writing and Robert Watkins, Head of Literary at Hachette, gives an industry perspective.

Also in this issue, we celebrate Own Voices with Christine Yunn-Yu Sun and Jo Walters, looking at this movement from two unique perspectives, and we have new work by Thuy On, Dawn Nguyen and Suzanne Hermanoczki. 📖

**Emma Cayley**  
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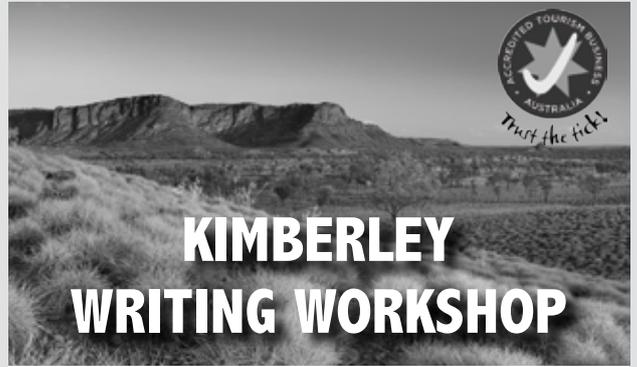
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- Dawn Barrett, Kimberley Writer's week,



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# Writing White Characters

Ellen van Neervan explores the craft of writing white characters for non-white writers.

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In recent times there have been numerous discussions on the complexities of writing non-white characters<sup>1</sup>, but little attention has been given to the craft (and politics) of writing white characters, and representation of white characters in literature and on screen. To put this simply: most of us write white characters though it is difficult to find articles on the subject.

As Dr Aileen Moreton-Robinson<sup>2</sup> says whiteness is 'not just about bodies and skin colour', it is, according to the University of Calgary, 'complex, systemic and systematic'<sup>3</sup>. Whiteness in Australia has been shaped by the invasions of Aboriginal nations and what is now known as 'The White Australia policy', which according to Benjamin T Jones was 'not a single government directive but a series of acts with a common goal: to achieve and maintain a white, British national character'<sup>4</sup>. Moreton-Robinson says in the essential 'Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism', 'the White Australia Policy made Anglocentric whiteness the definitive marker of citizenship'. Some Europeans who count as white today in Australia were not counted as white in the past; Italians, for instance.

White people in Australia are diverse and reflect a wide range of cultures, languages, religions, genders, geographies, ages and sexualities. White Australians can include recently arrived immigrants, and those who are descended from the invading British colony. To reiterate, there's not 'one' white character, or story.

In film and TV, analysts have described white character tropes: 'The White Saviour', 'White Man's Burden', 'Mighty Whitey' and 'Angry White Man'. Often the origins of these character creations do not begin in fiction; the white saviour narrative has long been used to justify colonisation. As Mya Nunnally<sup>5</sup> says 'This notion has a long, bloody history. This was the idea that many oppressors subscribed to: that it was the White Man's Burden to save the savages. It led to assimilation and colonisation across the globe.'

In my short-story collection 'Heat and Light' (UQP, 2014), which aims to centre urban Indigenous stories and identities and show forms of ongoing colonisation and oppression affecting us today and historically, I have on a rough estimate thirty white characters, albeit most of them minor characters, and about thirty-five Aboriginal characters, most of them major characters, and a few characters that belong to other ethnicities. In order to represent the reality I live in and also to respond to our ongoing conflict and survival, these white characters were essential. Lillian Holt writes 'most people of colour have endless opportunity to observe whiteness, given that most have to live in it. Whereas the opposite is not true for whitefellas.'

In this article I'd like to speak directly to non-white writers in Australia writing white characters in fiction. It is important to talk about our agency as sovereign people and how we, individually, construct white characters.

I'd like to highlight a few examples of recent white fictional characters in Australian literature and television. Also referred to as 'the Black White Woman'<sup>6</sup>, the iconic white character in ABC's 'Black Comedy', Tiffany, provided comedic gold for audiences in season 1 (2014). Created by an all-black writing team of Jon Bell, Aaron Fa'aoso, Nakkiah Lui, Steven Oliver, Bjorn Stewart, Elizabeth Wymarra, Adam Briggs and Ian Zaro, and portrayed by Brooke Satchwell, Tiffany is introduced when she starts dating John (Aaron Fa'aoso) who is thrilled that she is taking an active interest in his culture. Before long, though, things get out of hand, and it's clear that Tiffany is a womba one. She speaks an appropriated Aboriginal English and begins to think she is more Aboriginal than the real Aboriginals. 'You're not Murri,' she is gently told, and this sets off the biggest outburst, 'Buba, you don't want to talk like that to me when I belongst to you!'. Tiffany represents the trope of the delusional white person who actually

believes that through contact with Aboriginal people, they are Aboriginal too. It also shows the sense of ownership some white people have over Aboriginal identity and the urge some white people have to claim some of this for their own because they feel a sense of emptiness or dissatisfaction with their own whiteness. 'Don't go dragging me into your identity crisis!' Tiffany is told by Elizabeth Wymarra's character.

In another Black Comedy skit called 'A Dollar a Day', we are witness to a dinner party in an exclusive Sydney suburb. One of the couples has just recently 'adopted an Aboriginal' and their friends think they should too, renouncing their sponsorship of a Filipino child, 'Maybe we should get our own Aborigine, what do you think, honey?'. These characters demonstrate the rich 'charitable' whitefellas who are trying to give back and help non-white people with largely tokenistic and distanced gestures while not seeing them as human or equal to themselves, just decorative. It is easy for both white and non-white audiences alike to access the satirical representations this kind of television allows.

White characters in recent Australian literature include idealistic young writer Pippa who seeks cultural experiences to liven up her fiction in Michelle de Kretser's 'Life to Come' (2017), schoolteacher Mr James, a traumatised Vietnam War veteran who enables racism towards an Asian student, Shun Yi, in Maxine Beneba Clarke's 'Foreign Soil' (2013). The crying woman in Tony Birch's 'Common People' (2017) who weeps while bathing young Noah, an Aboriginal boy her daughter has brought home from school. The dreadlocked hippies in Gayle Kennedy's 'Me, Antman & Fleabag' (2007) who create a 'whitefulla dreamin' festival. Dan, the Christian landowner seeking to make amends with the Noongar community in Kim Scott's 'Taboo' (2017) who says 'personally, I hate the word 'massacre''. Each of these characters teaches us something about living in Australia today.

While writing my next book, I have been thinking about the complexities of writing white characters, and thinking back to Lillian Holt's important comments about what it is to live in and observe whiteness. Settler readers are not yet used to reading representations of themselves by non-white writers – it is unfamiliar terrain that raises new debates and new challenges for white readers and minority

writers. Writing from the other side that brings diverse voices to an otherwise mono-cultural canon will always be challenged but such challenges will expand existing boundaries and conventions. As new voices are heard new ways of reading will be developed. ⑩

### References:

1. For discussions about who can write whose stories, I'd recommend these two excellent articles by these deadly women: Alexis Wright's 'What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else's Story' ('Meanjin', 2016) [meanjin.com.au/essays/what-happens-when-you-tell-somebody-elses-story/](http://meanjin.com.au/essays/what-happens-when-you-tell-somebody-elses-story/) and Jeanine Leane's 'Writing Other People's Stories' ('Overland', 2016) [overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-225/feature-jeanine-lean/](http://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-225/feature-jeanine-lean/)
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### Further reading

8. A review of Kim Scott's 'Taboo': [theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/25/taboo-by-kim-scott-review-a-masterful-novel-on-the-frontier-of-truth-telling](http://theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/25/taboo-by-kim-scott-review-a-masterful-novel-on-the-frontier-of-truth-telling)
9. 'The White Savior Industrial Complex' by Teju Cole: [theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/](http://theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/)
10. 'When White Women Cry' by Mamta Motwani Accapadi <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ899418.pdf>

**Ellen van Neerven is a Yugambeh writer from south-east Queensland. She is the author of the poetry volume 'Comfort Food' and the fiction collection 'Heat and Light', which won numerous awards.**

# To Walk in Another's Shoes

Zana Fraillon shares her experience writing and researching 'The Bone Sparrow', the story of a boy born in an Australian detention centre.

---

The idea for 'The Bone Sparrow' came to me years ago. We were watching the news and debating who would get up from the couch to fetch the chocolate from the kitchen. Our baby lay asleep in my arms. It was a warm night; I think it was summer. The windows were open and I complained about the mosquitos. I looked up at the television and saw a child, maybe a year older than my own, playing in the dirt and oblivious to the camera crew beyond the wire fence, the guards in the background, or the saddened, lost faces of the adults surrounding them. I remember thinking, imagine that. Imagine growing up, not knowing that the world is any bigger than the dirt inside those razor-wire fences. Imagine our child, growing up surrounded by such sorrow and fear and uncertainty.

The next day, I started researching. From our kitchen table I searched the internet for anything I could find. I came across a huge file of redacted incident reports. And although the details were blacked out, the horror of life in a detention centre was clear. The constant violence. The lack of freedom. The frustration. The sickness. The despair. The inhumanity of being turned into a number. The shocking frequency of suicide attempts.

Reading those reports, I felt that irresistible pull – the seeds of a story starting to grow. That thirst to discover more about what was happening, what was being hidden from us. I recalled a lecture where an author had said how it was his job to shine a light in all the dark spaces, and this idea had resonated with me so strongly I put a hole in

the paper of my pad with underlines. I couldn't think then, of a darker place than the detention centres. This was a place I needed to discover.

For me, I write for the same reasons I read. I write so I can discover the world, so I can walk in another's shoes, live an existence so different to my own that it twists the way I think and makes me see the world that little bit differently. I write so I can understand. Because one of the wondrous things about reading – and writing – is that one is able to grapple with questions, prod situations and test boundaries. Reading lets us search for answers. As a reader, we can disappear into worlds totally unknown, and test our own strengths and courage and beliefs. We can walk in the darkest places imaginable, experience just a taste of someone else's reality, and we can wonder, and we can hope for the happy ending. I knew that I needed to write this book, I just had to work out how.

And then, as so often happens, life got in the way. There were reports that the children had been released from detention, and although there were still adults being held, the story didn't poke and prod at me in the same way. I let myself be sidetracked. I swallowed the government's lies that all children had been released, and moved on to other projects. By the time I realised what had happened and came back to research, those incident reports had been removed from the internet. There was a ban on reporting what went on inside the detention centres. At that time, there were no documentaries. No interviews. No podcasts or smuggled out film.

Nothing but the black hole of political rhetoric and fear-mongering. Suddenly, the detention centres were even darker than before.

I thought about going to a detention centre and interviewing people first hand. I couldn't have got a visa to visit the offshore centres, but perhaps an onshore centre? I thought of what I would ask of them, what I would say. I thought of what my actions could do to the people I spoke to. Could talking to me impact their chance of resettling in Australia? Would it affect their mental health? What could I offer someone whose hope had been deliberately and calculatedly destroyed? I decided I couldn't justify the risk. And so, I turned to what little evidence remained. There were a few old articles. A 'Guardian' piece on offshore detention. A map of Nauru. But by far the most useful to me, were the photos and pictures of life inside our detention centres. And these are the images I still recall now. I hope I never forget them.

There is a man. His lips are sewn together in silent protest at the human rights he is being denied. His eyes show only resignation. Those that see him, do nothing. Still he protests.

There is a boat stranded at sea. It has no petrol. It has no driver. There is no food onboard. There is no fresh water. And yet, this boat is full of people. People of all ages; families, friends, parents, sisters, brothers, elderly people who have seen the best and worst we humans have to offer, young children, babies. The people on this boat are completely and utterly helpless. They have no means to escape. They have no way of finding food or water. All they can do is wait and hope that someone will help. And for weeks and weeks, while the people on board slowly die, their bodies thrown overboard, the world watches, and turns away.

There is a woman. She is standing on a barren square of dirt behind a barbed wire fence. A young child, maybe three or four years old, holds her hand, his other hand gripping the wire of the fence. The woman has tears on her cheeks. She is staring directly at the camera. A guard stands in the background. The woman is pregnant.

There is a sign, a poster. In aggressive red lettering are the words 'NO WAY – YOU WILL NOT MAKE AUSTRALIA HOME' and a picture of my country with a big, bold line through the middle. A 'no entry' sign to anyone seeking asylum. A sign announcing clearly that despite the legal, human right to seek asylum, this country will not accept you. Even if you are a child. Even if you have experienced horrors too great to imagine. We are closed.

There is a video played to all new arrivals and spoken by then-immigration minister Scott Morrison. 'You have been brought to this place here because you have sought to illegally enter Australia by boat. The new Australian government will not be putting up with those sorts of arrivals. If you have a valid claim, you will not be resettled in Australia. You will never live in Australia. If you are found not to be a refugee, you will remain in this camp until you decide to go home. If you choose not to go home, then you will spend a very, very long time here.'

There is a child's drawing, titled 'My Family'. Lines have been drawn and rubbed out. Every colour of pencil has been used. One figure lays dead and bloodied, another stands weeping bright blue teardrops. A fence stretches in wobbled check almost to the top of the page, barbed wire pencilled sharp across the top. There is a small figure, labelled 'Me', crying tears of blood, staring out from the centre of the page. And a sun. The sun is an angry yellow face, hatred evident in the twisted mouth and severely angled eyes. And it stares directly at the 'Me' in the centre.

There are more images. More descriptions. More horrors. I almost didn't write. I almost couldn't. But then, in the midst of all the pain and suffering and heartbreak, there are the gems. The small, incredible wonders that kept me going. The little moments of happiness which show, despite all odds, that there is hope, for all of us. The young girls, smiling and swirling between the tents in the middle of a downpour; the two boys playing with a truck in the mud, happy in that moment of imaginary play; the drawings by children where they have drawn their dreams and hopes, instead of their past and present, and it is in these pictures

that you can see the strength and hope and resilience of these children. It is these pictures that remind us that the world we live in now, won't always be this way. As adults, we forget this. We forget that for children, they are already imagining a future greater than ours.

On a recent trip to London, I stumbled upon an exhibition in a café of pictures drawn by refugee children. Underneath one picture, a girl had said 'You world, in spite of your vastness and my littleness, I want to talk and raise my voice high.' Reading that, I realised that this was my truth also. I want to talk and raise my voice high. I want us all to turn fully and face the dark places of this world that are too often hidden. I want us all to shine a light on these places. I want us all to see and to listen to those people and those voices who have been disappeared and silenced. And I want us all to see the hope and strength and brilliance that is waiting there, waiting to be heard, waiting to raise itself high. Waiting for our future. 🕊

**Zana Fraillon was born in Melbourne but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. Her 2016 novel 'The Bone Sparrow' (Hachette) won the ABIA Book of the Year for Older Children, the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the Amnesty CILIP Honour. It was also shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Gold Inky and the CILIP Carnegie Medal. Her most recent books include 'The Ones That Disappeared', published in 2017 and 'Wisp', published in August, 2018.**

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# Singing Death



A message on a wall in Catalonia causes Isobel Hodges to question the far-reaching implications of silencing voices.

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It's 3pm; scorching. I am in El Bruc, a village 50km outside of the Barcelona city centre and home to around 2000 Catalonians; an expanse of blue sky and a colony of self-possessed street cats. I photograph the ubiquitous independence ribbons and freshly spray-painted lettering on a rendered brick wall: *Valtónyc. 3.5 anys de preso per cantar mort al borbo* (3.5 years in prison for singing death to the Borbon monarchy).

Valtónyc is a hip hop artist. In February 2018, he was handed a prison sentence for rap lyrics deemed insulting to the Spanish monarchy. Sung in Catalan and produced when the artist was 19 years old, the track 'La TuerKa' engages with political corruption, the (mis)management of public funds and the Spanish monarchy's problematic relationship with the Saudi royal family. Valtónyc's lyrics make a clear political point in context of a minority group violently suppressed by Spain for centuries. In a genre which represents marginalised voices and stylistically incorporates performance personas and a fair degree of braggadocio, the charges laid against Valtónyc for lyrics are absurd. I am conditioned to expect *lèse-majesté* of Cambodia and Thailand but I'm struggling with cognitive dissonance at the idea of modern industrialised Spain sending Valtónyc to jail for a song under Article 578, Spain's 'gag law'.

In 2016, Indigenous hip hop duo, AB Original, dropped 'January 26' and it resonated with listeners across the country. The track demanded a show of respect for Australia's Indigenous peoples by changing the date of our national celebrations. AB Original delivered a well-conceived and clear message which resonated with public sentiment, a reminder that artists are part of political change and freedom of speech is integral to democracy.

Standing near this message of outrage and support for another rapper, I feel a tingling sense of discomfort. I don't have a background in human rights law or policy and I know very little about the implications of Australia's national security and counter-terrorism laws. I understand that increasingly restrictive freedom of speech and privacy laws have been introduced by developed

nations across the world and that Australia has shown particular enthusiasm, passing 54 anti-terror laws since 11 September 2001. National security is consistently used to shut down political opposition.

I am privileged in many ways and not least because I can write without fear of being jailed. I arrived at the artist residency in Catalonia to write, just as Valtónyc was exiled to Belgium. He departed in advance of a campaign in which hundreds of fans bought plane tickets to different destinations in his name to increase the burden on airlines tasked with reporting his movements to authorities.

The 2018 Amnesty International report 'Tweet ... if you dare: how counter-terrorism laws restrict freedom of expression in Spain' shows the ways Article 578 has been invoked by the Spanish penal system. Based on the content of song lyrics, social posts and videos and even a puppet play, 70 people have been charged in two years. The impact is that artists and citizens are in jail and many more are afraid to speak out.

Within three days of arriving in Belgium, Valtónyc had secured an apartment, a job and a mobile phone, and spoken freely about Spain's crackdown on left-wing, pro-independence 'dissident' citizens. In September, a Belgian court refused to extradite Valtónyc to Spain. Amid the overwhelm of modern commitments and our differing levels of social and political power, a rapper, his fans, and a national court system demonstrated different approaches to campaigning for justice.

Australia is producing anti-terror rhetoric; human rights violations on Manus island and Nauru and against Indigenous peoples; and a foreign interference bill which the UN flagged for its 'draconian criminal penalties' and government overreach. Observing the treatment of dissident Australian voices such as Yassmin Abdel-Magied, what is Australia's trajectory? As artists and writers, what's our next move?

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**Freedom of expression is not a crime.**

# Industry Intel: Robert Watkins

Robert Watkins, Head of Literary at Hachette Australia, spoke to Emma Cayley about Own Voices, the current publishing climate and writing outside experience.

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**EC:** Hachette Australia is one of the publishers leading the way in bringing Own Voices writing to a mainstream audience, certainly in Australia. How did this progressive shift happen?

**RW:** We've had a long history of publishing a broad spectrum of Australian writers, including celebrated writers like Leah Purcell and Shaun Tan. I have loved working with the passionate and supportive team here on books by authors like Maxine Beneba Clarke, Peter Polites, Zoya Patel, Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Claire Coleman, but I also know that my colleagues have been publishing excellent works by Deng Adut and Future D Fidel, and that's just to name some of them.

Our company aim, as our Australian list grows, is to publish books that enhance Australian culture and that reflects Australian readers – so publishing people from all walks of life is very much part of that process.

**EC:** Is the shift at Hachette mirrored elsewhere in Australian publishing? And globally too?

**RW:** I think we've seen Australian publishing as a whole pursue a broad approach to publishing over the last few years – and Hachette UK are actively seeking to reflect diversity in their publishing and staff (see [thebookseller.com/insight/hachette-team-reveals-how-publisher-changing-story-876231](https://thebookseller.com/insight/hachette-team-reveals-how-publisher-changing-story-876231)).

I think we need to see the push towards an inclusive workforce as well as inclusive publishing. In Australia and I know that is a core goal for Hachette Australia and many other Australian publishers.

**EC:** How do you see the role of publisher in the current climate?

**RW:** Books should entertain, challenge and educate. I think that at the core of all publishing is the idea that books are capable of achieving all of those goals. If they can do them all at the same time, even better.

**EC:** What are the qualities that excite you in a debut manuscript?

**RW:** A GREAT STORY WELL TOLD. Anyone who is writing books that stand out as unique and challenging always excite me. Anyone writing books that sound and feel relevant to our global culture and our changing society excites me. It does however always come back to the skill of the storyteller.

**EC:** For writers that are writing from marginalised backgrounds, do you have any advice for them in developing their work for publication?

**RW:** Seek out advice and guidance from other writers and writing organisations that have proven themselves to be allies. Seek out a publisher/agent/writing group that is a safe space and has a track record of championing and nurturing writers from similar backgrounds. Believe in the importance of your unique perspective and don't be afraid of telling the stories you have to tell.

**EC:** Do you have advice for writers endeavouring to step outside their own lived experience (on the page), especially when writing characters from marginalised background?

**RW:** What a complicated question, which sounds exactly like one I've heard at every single writers' festival I've ever attended.

If you have not experienced the story you want to tell, make damn sure you research the story. Investigate the background, engage with that experience through conversations, critical feedback and interactions with those who actually have experienced the background you intend to tell.

Always ask yourself 'am I really the right person to tell this story? Am I enhancing the conversation around this lived experience by engaging with this narrative or am I pursuing this story simply because I think I am entitled to tell it?'

**EC:** What excites you about the future of publishing in Australia?

**RW:** Australia is full of passionate readers, a passionate writing community, a passionate bookselling community. I am constantly impressed with the work coming from Australian writers and am so excited to see what more there is to come.

Working with black&write! at the State Library of Qld is something I am particularly excited about. It is a wonderful program that has two active aims:

-to mentor and publish more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers

-to mentor and train Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander editors

Programs like black&write! could have a profound effect not only on the works being published but also the editors working on and (ideally) those commissioning the works being published.

I am excited to see the industry embrace not only inclusive publishing but also an inclusive workforce. 🗨️

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**Robert Watkins is Head of Literary at Hachette Australia and has worked in books for over 20 years including stints in sales, marketing and publicity. He's published fiction and non-fiction award winners and bestsellers including Sarah Schmidt's 'See What I Have Done', Maxine Beneba Clarke's 'Foregin Soil' and 'The Hate Race', Clare G Coleman's 'Terra Nullius' and Steven Amsterdam's 'The Easy Way Out' alongside others.**

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

# Nitpicker: Summer Special

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1. Fiacre and (I/myself) were assigned to a clandestine project and sworn to secrecy.
2. During the build-up before the wet in northern Australia, everyone goes a little bit (balmy/barmy).
3. Of these two summer cocktails, the pear mojito is the (tastiest/tastier).
4. I love sunbaking (,;/) however, these days I am more careful to be sun smart.
5. (Being wet/As it was wet), the excursion to the countryside was rescheduled.
6. The meat, together with the salads, (are/is) on the table ready for eating.
7. Charlie was a fan of not only cricket but (also/also of) tennis.
8. Tarquin was told to share her lollies (between/among) all her five friends.
9. Can you give Pedro and (I/me) a lift to the pool?
10. Lachlan, an unusual child, requested a model yacht, an abacus and (an/a) hourglass for Christmas.
11. If Dad (was/were) Father Christmas, he'd be too busy delivering presents to visit you.
12. (Jess's/Jesses') family celebrates Christmas with a picnic in the park.
13. The rental house (is comprised of/ comprises) three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a livingroom, a kitchen and a laundry.
14. Jan knew (fewer/less) people at Sanja's New Year's Eve party this year.
15. Despite their boasting, neither of them (are/is) likely to enter the Lorne Pier to Pub race.

Answers on page 34.

**Brought to you by Penny Johnson,  
Program Manager of Professional  
Writing and Editing at RMIT.**



# Cultural Knowledge

Rashida Murphy writes about 'well-intentioned' appropriation and the importance of keeping your stories close.

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Such a loaded term – 'cultural knowledge' – coming as it does with its own set of expectations and hints of secrets. When I try to unpack it a little, I think about how knowledge differs from appropriation and what the keepers of cultural knowledge can do to protect themselves from stealth and theft. And the answer is – very little. We live in times of exchange and borrowings and slippages and it is hard to skid to a stop, metaphorically speaking, and say, 'You have gone too far'.

My cultural knowledge is a concentric circle that extends out from family and memories of family, to the community I grew up in, the school I went to, the families I married into, the town I left and the city I adopted; and the country I settled in and everything between. Growing up Indian in India, as a member of a minority sect within a minority religion taught me about culture from the inside. Growing up female in an orthodoxy that disapproved of girls and discouraged them from forming opinions or making decisions taught me to write in secret. Raising a female child outside the confines of country and cultural knowledge allowed me to trust my judgement and own my mistakes. This came at a cost – and a loss of language, tradition and family. I never imagined interpreting this complexity for easy consumption. I still can't make dal-chawal-palida like mum does. I still shiver walking past death-scented marigolds. I still miss the drama of eid-ka-chand and diwali-ke phatake. But for more than three decades in this country, and counting, I've tried, and lost, translation.

Creative writing degrees across Australian universities have marketed the desirability of 'the other'. It is actually an advantage to write a story that falls outside the white, heterosexual

norm and 'people like me' can tell those stories, supported by research and financial aid from our institutions. And for that we are very grateful. We need to be, because it is pointed out to us frequently by seemingly disingenuous white people. The grateful immigrant is as desirable as the grateful refugee. And in the halls of education, we share our culture carefully, because, you know, we don't want to appear ungrateful, and after all, we are creative colleagues. It's what we do. We imagine other realities so we can critique patriarchy and draw attention to the plight of women and children in those theocracies and pseudo democracies we come from. We stand together, white, brown and black people, in this new country of informed debate we have fashioned together, within the halls of academia.

So, in the spirit of 'giving back' we give away our cultural knowledge. We speak of those layers within the countries we grew up in, those of us who dream and speak in several languages. We explain the differences between our people, our food and our religions. We resist the familiar tropes that seek to define us. We agree to speak at seminars and meet colleagues for coffee to unpack that tricky terrain inscribed on our bodies and in our minds. We talk, we write and sometimes we rage at the lack of self-awareness evident in the language of appropriation. We notice the namastes and salaams and references to shakti and bhakti and try not to mind when we are encouraged to attend workshops on how to write 'the other'.

Knowledge slips into appropriation so comfortably. It's a marriage made in heaven, really. Gayatri Spivak, back in 1986, well before cultural appropriation was even a 'thing,' said

‘My stories are mine to tell and cannot be bought for the price of a coffee by intersectional feminists ‘exploring the idea of difference’.’

she does not ‘make the tired nationalist claim that only a native can know the scene’, and in principle I agree. In these days of easy travel, when it is cheaper to go to Bali than Broome; when Australians regularly travel to India and Vietnam and Cambodia and come back transformed by poverty; you don’t need to be a native to know the scene. When you have experienced the country and the natives, and walked among their dusty streets, wearing their costumes, what harm can there be to sit down with one of us in Australia and ask about the things that puzzle you still, weeks after your visit, and after your tummy has settled down? And really, what harm can there be in writing about these experiences, in the interests of eliding differences or building bridges across cultures? The white gaze interprets, interrupts and translates, telling me that my cultural knowledge cannot be the sole interpretation of my reality in Australia.

I think about all I know, all that still informs my writing to this day, and realise I started writing as testimony. So I could have something for my daughter as she grew up and realised what it meant to be a young brown female in Australia. Of course, no amount of cultural knowledge and the thousands of years of ancient Eastern wisdom prepared me for the pitfalls of parenthood. Now that we are finally brown women together in a white country, one young and one not so young, the conversations with my daughter take on an urgency I did not anticipate. There is so much to tell her.

So much to show her. Culture. Knowledge. Secrets. Family. Language. Grief. Outrage. To wear a sari without falling down. To understand instinctively that the word ‘Masi’ always comes after my sister’s name but ‘Aunty’ always comes before her name.

I don’t have answers and I doubt if I ever will. Uncertainty marks the immigrant passage much more effectively than gratitude. I have been fortunate and people have been generous.

I try to give back more than I get. I am not an inexhaustible supply of cultural knowledge. Nor am I a culture hoarder. But my stories are mine to tell and cannot be bought for the price of a cup of coffee by intersectional feminists ‘exploring the idea of difference’. And I guess that I am still able to grieve over, rage at, and feel the imposition of such selective cultural exchanges. ⑩

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**Rashida Murphy is the author of ‘The Historian’s Daughter’ which is available for purchase at [uwap.uwa.edu.au/collections/rashida-murphy](http://uwap.uwa.edu.au/collections/rashida-murphy) She is currently working on her second novel.**

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# The Garret Grab

# Chloe

# Hooper

THE GARRET  
WRITERS ON WRITING

Chloe Hooper speaks to The Garret's Astrid Edwards about the ethical challenges of writing from life.

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Chloe Hooper has recently released 'The Arsonist: A Mind on Fire', an extraordinary work of non-fiction about the Black Saturday fires in Victoria. Astrid Edwards from the Garret speaks to her about the book, as well as the challenge of writing about people who are involved in traumatic events.

**Astrid Edwards:** In 'The Tall Man', you explore the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee on Palm Island. And in 'The Arsonist', you attempt to understand Brendan Sokaluk, who was convicted of starting one of the Black Saturday fires. Why?

**Chloe Hooper:** The choice is from instinct rather than any intellectual calculation. As a writer, what you're looking for is – excuse this metaphor when I've written about fire – but you're looking for heat and light, and you're looking for something that you have a strong intuitive feeling about, which you can be prepared to live with for a long time. And that has some depth to it, I suppose, and obviously both of these stories had those things.

**AE:** Can you explain what you mean by 'prepared to live with it for a long time'?

**CH:** Yes. I mean, non-fiction, certainly the kind that I'm attracted to, can take years of your life. And so, you have to pick a topic which will be sustaining, that will sustain your passion.

**AE:** What draws you to long-form non-fiction?

**CH:** I think that there's a chance to look in greater depth at some of the issues that preoccupy us today and to explore nuances that the quick sweep of the media. Unfortunately, it's a function of the genre they're working in that they can't do that. So, this gives us a chance to look more closely at the world we inhabit now.

**AE:** Can you tell me about your research process for both books?

**CH:** 'The Tall Man' was published ten years ago, so I can probably talk with more accuracy about 'The Arsonist'. But I do remember the feeling with 'The Tall Man' of just having absolutely mountains of paper, that the administrative task of this non-fiction writing was really quite burdensome. Certainly, if something's been through the court system, there is just such a deep paper trail, which offers extraordinary possibilities for a writer, and that's also the case with 'The Arsonist'. If you have access to the police brief of evidence, that sounds macabre, but it can be a trove of extraordinary detail to draw on. And I'm reading for the nuggets that will make us understand something deeper about another person's life. And you can sometimes just find, even in a sentence or two sentences, one detail that will explode open your own expectations or just show you something extraordinary.

**AE:** When you have access to this extraordinary depth of information, is there a moral or an ethical choice that you have about what you include or what you choose to highlight?

**CH:** There is a story in 'The Arsonist' which is very confronting – and this is a difficulty, because I wanted to show the true horror of what the fire can do, and in a way, you can't really write about arson without showing that. So, there's a terrible story in this book about the Churchill fire and a man who didn't realise that the fire was coming towards him or his family. He and his wife tried to leave, but they didn't manage to get away. And his wife, he watched her engulfed in flames and couldn't save her. He didn't want to speak to me, this gentleman, but he was prepared to

let me use whatever was on record and the police statements, which is a very brave and generous thing to do.

And I also spoke with another woman who had survived the fire and had lost two children. So, I tried very hard to only use information about other people who had suffered these kinds of losses that was actually already on the public record, and not details that were sort of tucked away in police documents. There's a lot of information about what people found the fire to be like. I mean, that the actual heat and noise, and some of those descriptions are really astonishing, but I've sort of disaggregated them, if you like. There are no names attached, and I've run sentences that were striking together to create a picture.

Yes, the ethics of this are really complicated. On the one hand, this is a very painful document to those who have survived this fire. And on the other hand, it's a chance for us to understand our own history and the causal factors behind a fatal inferno with better depth.

**AE:** How personally draining is this type of research?

**CH:** Well, this is the thing, if you asked yourself this question about who becomes an arsonist and why, you find yourself in this true crime genre. (I don't think of this as a true crime book, but I know that's where it is being placed in some bookshops.) And crime in Australia actually tends to be about dysfunction and disadvantage. So, certainly, I was led into areas that I didn't necessarily plan to travel through, and it is heavy. This is heavy material, and working out the how much of it to put on the page and actually still create something that a reader will pick up and keep turning the pages of is a challenge. And there are moments where suddenly I wish I had just written about beekeeping or something ... And I might do that, I might do that next time.

**AE:** What did you learn from writing and publishing 'The Tall Man' that helped or directed 'The Arsonist'?

**CH:** Oh, I wish I could say that I've learned things. The great thing about writing compared to a lot of other jobs is that you can actually get better at it. It's not like you're a sports star who the hamstring goes and that's it. You have the chance to keep evolving and improving and developing. And I'm sure that ... I suppose I think that this book is a better book just

because I've become a better writer, and that's through the experiences that you pick up actually on the ground doing this.

**AE:** I'm interested in your editing process for both fiction and non-fiction, but is there an extra layer for non-fiction of this type? Fact checking, that kind of thing?

**CH:** Yes. I think this book may be 60,000 words and I'm sure I've written 180,000 and cut. I mean it's a very live thing, and maybe at end points I've had to sort of add back, because I tend to cut it to the bone. It really felt like every sentence in especially in 'The Arsonist' had to be fact checked because there is a lot of information wedged in there.

**AE:** As a writer, was there anything that you wanted your audience to feel?

**CH:** It's hard. There's so much that happens that's just about instinct as you're writing the story. I know that there are countless decisions being made all the time with a choice of word or how you weigh a paragraph, how you structure it. So, there are lots of little things that are constantly happening, levers being pulled, but I'm not conscious necessarily from moment to moment that that's what's happening.

I guess I want the reader to feel the things I'm feeling, and often that's confusion. Certainly, this man's culpability, and horror at what he's done, and also sympathy for him on another sort of strange level. I don't know how much you can consciously try to make those things happen on the page. If it's genuine – your own curiosity and empathy – then that hopefully will read true to the reader. 📌

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**Chloe Hooper's 'The Tall Man: Death and Life on Palm Island' (2008) won the Victorian, New South Wales, West Australian and Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, as well as the John Button Prize for Political Writing, and a Ned Kelly Award for crime writing. She is also the author of two novels, 'A Child's Book of True Crime' and 'The Engagement'.**

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

# The Responsible Writer

Angela Savage searches for an ethical framework for writing across cultural boundaries.

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When Lionel Shriver ignited public debate about cultural appropriation with her 2016 Brisbane Writers Festival opening address, 'Fiction and Identity Politics'<sup>1</sup>, followed by Yassmin Abdel-Magied's swift rejoinder<sup>2</sup>, I took it personally. Not in a white privilege, why-are-they-trying-to-stop-me-from-writing-whatever-I-want? kind of way, but in a way that made me pause and reflect on my own creative practice.

At the time, I was working on my PhD in Creative Writing, a component of which was a novel about overseas commercial surrogacy between Thailand and Australia. Prior to this, I'd published three crime novels which were also set largely in Thailand. I'd been motivated to write my novels largely as a corrective to the stereotypes about Thailand and Thai people, especially women, that dominated the English-language books that were available in Bangkok, where I lived in the 1990s. I saw my writing, to paraphrase Salman Rushdie, as a means of engaging in the 'continual quarrel' to produce 'books that draw new and better maps of reality'<sup>3</sup>. All my novels are written with roving points of view, with Thai characters included in the narrative viewpoints.

I hadn't stopped to think about the ethical implications of my creative choices. That changed in light of the debate that followed Shriver's speech, and I ended up dedicating a chapter of my thesis to the issue. I am a staunch supporter of calls by advocates of Own Voices writing – that is, 'stories told by marginalised peoples about our own experiences rather than stories told

by outsiders'<sup>4</sup> – for greater diversity and representation in every aspect of the literary industry. But I can't agree with the idea that lived experience is a prerequisite for truth in fiction, and that any and all attempts to imaginatively understand each other across boundaries of identity are harmful. Many of my favourite books are written by authors who cross multiple boundaries of identity in their narratives – Tash Aw, Simone Lazaroo, Michael Ondaatje, Jock Serong and Christos Tsiolkas, just to name a few. Indeed, British writer Hari Kunzru describes the attempt 'to think one's way into other subjectivities, other experiences' as 'an act of ethical urgency'<sup>5</sup>. But how to do this responsibly and without causing harm?

What emerged from my research was an ethical framework of sorts for writing across boundaries of identity – a framework that comes with more questions than answers and no guarantees for success. But it might make a useful starting-point for thinking about the ethical implications of writing across boundaries of identity, particularly if you are, like me, a white writer attempting to represent a cultural identity other than your own.

## 1. Clarify your narrative intent

The first step in an ethical creative writing practice is probably the most important: to examine your motive for writing from the perspective of another. Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda in 'The Racial Imaginary: Writers on Race in the Life of the Mind', suggest that instead of asking, 'Can I write from another's point of view?' writers start with the first-principle question, 'Why and what for?'<sup>6</sup>

Are you motivated by a desire to support diversity in literature? In this case, would your efforts be better directed to supporting diverse authors and amplifying their work?

Do you aim to 'give a voice to the voiceless'? Is it really 'giving' voice to another or 'taking' it when you write their story? If you feel a community is 'voiceless' or under-represented, could you instead mentor or support a writer in that community to tell their own story?

Are you writing from the point of view of a person of colour because you think it's the best way to write about racism? Might you consider an alternative approach and rise to the challenge, as YA author Justine Larbalestier suggests, of writing books 'that examine white complicity in systemic racism'?

Are you writing to seek approval among readers in the community you are writing about? If so, be aware that readers in non-white communities are increasingly disinterested in white writers' takes on them. As Michael Mohammed Ahmad said candidly during the 2018 Melbourne Writers Festival episode of 'Q&A', 'I'm especially not interested in what a person from a privileged position has to say about someone who is not privileged'<sup>8</sup>.

Perhaps you have an idea for a story that won't go away, a character in your head who seems to have a life of their own, or some other compelling reason to take this step. If you decide to proceed, it is worth remembering that good intentions alone do not make for good literature, especially if you don't have an existing relationship or rapport with the community you're writing about. Rushdie again offers helpful advice in this regard, via a history professor who advised never to write history 'until you can hear the people speak'. '[I]t came to feel like a valuable guiding principle for fiction as well,' Rushdie writes. 'If you didn't have a sense of how people spoke, you didn't know them well enough, and so you couldn't – you shouldn't – tell their story.'<sup>9</sup> Which segues nicely into the second element of an ethical creative writing practice: research.

## 2. Research

While US author Malinda Lo notes that research is required to write 'any fiction ... truthfully and well'<sup>10</sup>, writing across boundaries of identity arguably requires a particular diligence. First Nations scholar and author

‘I hadn't stopped to think about the ethical implications of my creative choices. That changed in light of the debate that followed Shriver's speech.’

Jeanine Leane recommends any attempt at writing across boundaries – if it takes place at all – must stem from 'social and cultural immersion', which includes a 'conversation-through-literature' written by representatives of the community about whom you are writing<sup>11</sup>. In addition to reading books, watch films, listen to podcasts, read blogs, study the language, culture and history of the community. Meticulous research can unearth the details that are fundamental to personalising a story, to creating complex and nuanced characters that resist stereotyping and cliché and come alive on the page.

Consultation with people who are part of the culture you are writing about is also an intrinsic part of research, but raises additional ethical considerations.

## 3. Consultation and sensitivity reading

When it comes to consultation, I've heard some real horror stories. In this issue of 'The Victorian Writer', Rashida Murphy describes her grief and rage at being unwittingly mined for cultural knowledge and having her stories used with neither permission nor acknowledgment (pages 14 and 15). Another writer tells of being confronted by a stranger in the street, bent on grilling her about her life as the basis for a character in a book. While the latter was at least upfront (and thus could be directly challenged), neither approach constitutes an ethical form of consultation.

The ethical writer recognises the risk of getting things wrong and seeks advice to minimise harmful mistakes. Consultation in an ethical practice is not a shortcut to research, but about a willingness to show representatives of the community or culture you're writing about your work, to listen to their feedback and take their critical comments on board. Recognising the considerable intellectual and emotional labour involved, ethical consultation is paid or in some other way reciprocated. And it is consensual.

If you can't identify consultants in the community you're writing about (in which case, see point 1, above), you might consider hiring a 'sensitivity reader', also referred to as an 'authenticity reader'. Definitions vary in terms of what sensitivity readers do, or should do. The US-based Writing in the Margins website, which hosts a sensitivity reader database, suggests a sensitivity reader 'reviews a manuscript for internalised bias and negatively charged language'. Some sensitivity readers see their role as 'cleaning up' writing for 'racist, homophobic, transphobic, able-ist, Islamophobic material'<sup>12</sup>. Others emphasise sensitivity reading is about authenticity, not political correctness. Says Nic Stone, 'the goals of sensitivity reading actually align with those of good art – to create a layered and truthful portrait, whether or not it ruffles some sensibilities.'<sup>13</sup>

Crucially, sensitivity reading is not a 'fix' or 'stamp of approval' that provides a special defence against criticism of the finished work. Sangu Mandanna helpfully describes sensitivity readers as 'a resource, not a shield'<sup>14</sup>; and the Writing in the Margins website emphasises that sensitivity readers will help avoid mistakes but are no guarantee against them. As responsibility for the work and its reception remains with the author, a further step in an ethical writing process, then, is to remain open to criticism.

#### 4. Openness to criticism

Openness to criticism is the corollary of creative freedom. As Australian author Omar Musa puts it, 'There will be people who will tell you that maybe you didn't quite get this [writing across the cultural divide] right, and you just have to cop that flack.'<sup>15</sup> However, as Loffreda and Rankine note, 'white writers can get explosively angry when asked to recognise that their racial imaginings might not be perfect ... and in particular when confronted with that fact by a person of colour questioning something they wrote'<sup>16</sup>. When she spoke of her 'right' to write whatever she likes, Shriver was in fact responding to criticism of her depiction of African-Americans in her novel, 'The Mandibles'. As Loffreda and Rankine note:

This language of rights is as extraordinary as it is popular, and it is striking to see how many white writers in particular conceive of race and the creative imagination as the

question of whether they feel they are permitted to write a character, or a voice, or a persona, 'of colour'. This is a decoy whose lusciousness is evident in the frequency with which it is chased. The decoy itself points to the whiteness of whiteness – that to write race would be to write 'colour', to write an other.<sup>17</sup>

Kunzru suggests artists should 'go forth boldly' but 'tread with humility'<sup>18</sup>, humility being a word that surfaces regularly in discussions of what it means to be an ethical author. There is what Kunzru refers to as 'humility in the face of otherness', the admission of what the writer does not know. There is also the humility of fallibility, of accepting as inevitable some level of failure<sup>20</sup> as part of the work's reception.

There is also the humility of recognising, as Naomi Alderman puts it, 'No one has a right to be read'<sup>21</sup>. As noted, many readers, whether from marginalised groups or not, prefer to read Own Voices work, and publishers in Australia are increasing seeking to publish diverse authors. I might hope my work generates conversations with readers, particularly Asian Australian readers, but I accept that might not happen.

Moreover, to be humble means to accept that in the current climate, the very act of writing as a privileged white writer from the point of view of someone who is not privileged may be enough to offend, regardless of the quality of the writing; and further, that such offense may not necessarily result in debate or dialogue. Those who protest about cultural appropriation may do so not to persuade the unconvinced, so much as to acknowledge a 'cultural trespass'<sup>22</sup>. And as activists, their aims may be to disrupt rather than debate.

The responsible writer must be open to criticism of their work, but also to criticism of the creative choices that precede the work. In addition, they must remain open to criticism without resolution and, most humbling of all, to the prospect of not being read.

#### Ethics and art

Unlike social scientists who require ethics-committee approval to broach human subjects, writers are not accountable to external oversight of our creative practice. Publishing contracts require us to warrant that our work is original, and doesn't contain defamatory, libellous or potentially injurious material<sup>23</sup>. But

when it comes to other potential harms posed by our work, 'fiction's capacity to cause pain'<sup>24</sup>, it is left to individual writers to set our own ethical standards. I do not concur with those who imply that an ethical process can only produce 'anodyne drivel'<sup>25</sup>.

'Moral flaws are artistic flaws,' says ethicist Claudia Mills<sup>26</sup>. For Mills, fiction that causes pain because it is 'unfair', 'unkind', 'exaggerated' – in short, untruthful – undermines a work's artistic merit<sup>27</sup>. Maxine Beneba Clarke made a similar point on 'Q&A' when she suggested that what is portrayed as a debate about who can write what is really about literary criticism: 'When you hear people saying, 'I was censored', it's often just that their book is bad.' Other philosophers distinguish between 'non-distorting' instances of cultural appropriation, and harmful practices such as misrepresentation and stereotyping<sup>28</sup>. '[T]he novel doesn't much like stereotypes,' Kamila Shamsie notes<sup>29</sup>. 'They come across as bad writing.' Further to the relationship between an ethical creative writing practice and artistic merit, Shamsie suggests that work that stems from a sense of 'arrogance or entitlement' is unlikely to succeed<sup>30</sup>, because writers who

start with an attitude that fails to understand that there are very powerful reasons for people to dispute your right to tell a story ... [have] already failed to understand the place and people who you purport to want to write about.<sup>31</sup>

In cross-cultural fiction, humility, respect and an understanding of reciprocity are especially important qualities in a writer. These qualities do not quarantine a creative work from criticism, but they surely make for better starting-points for writers and readers to empathically imagine themselves into other subjectivities. 🕊

Full references at: [writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/the-responsible-writer](http://writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/the-responsible-writer)

**Angela Savage is a Melbourne writer who has lived and travelled extensively in Asia. She won the 2004 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript and the 2011 Scarlett Stiletto Award for short crime fiction. Angela holds a PhD in Creative Writing and is Director of Writers Victoria. Her novel, 'Mother of Pearl', will be published by Transit Lounge in 2019. @angsavage**

# Perspective

## By Thuy On

Can you frame yourself in third-person  
outside of this life not your choosing?  
the soundtrack of tiny violins and cymbals  
but at a remove  
theatrics muted  
outlines fuzzy  
just a slice of the whole drama  
on reveal  
like a fingernail clipping of the moon

**Thuy On is 'The Big Issue' books editor and writes for a range of publications including 'The Age', 'The Australian', 'Books + Publishing', 'The Sydney Morning Herald' and ArtsHub. She has twenty years experience in book criticism and journalism and has been a judge at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards four times.**

# The Sound of Own Voices

Christine Yunn-Yu Sun reflects on the importance of letting Own Voices be heard in an Asian-Australian context. A 'Pencilled In' Commission.

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English actor Daniel Day-Lewis once said: 'A voice is such a deep, personal reflection of character.'<sup>1</sup> The only male actor in history to have won three Academy Awards for Best Actor, Day-Lewis is famous for his devotion to and research of his roles. While playing Christy Brown, the Irish painter who was born with cerebral palsy and was able to control only his left foot, the actor practically lived in a wheelchair on the set for weeks and crew members were required to spoonfeed him. He stayed so long in his wheelchair that he damaged two ribs.<sup>2</sup>

Still, if the 1989 film 'My Left Foot' were to be re-made today, would there be anxious demand that an authentic user of wheelchair be hired to play the lead role?

Fast-forward to 2014, when English actor Eddie Redmayne won the Academy Award (and others) for Best Actor in a Leading Role for his portrayal of Stephen Hawking in 'The Theory of Everything'. In an interview, Redmayne said: 'Actors are actors, and there should be a complete fluidity for anyone to play anything.'<sup>3</sup>

Yet, some of us are more likely to favour these words from Redmayne on another occasion: 'If you are playing someone living, it is a different type of judgement. However much work you do, it is not a documentary. There will be things you can't get right, and ultimately, you have to take a leap because – you weren't there.'<sup>4</sup> Isn't this the reason why we support Own Voices as a response to the commonly criticised notion of 'cultural appropriation'?

As an Asian-Australian writer, with English being my second language, I am acutely aware that however hard I try, my writing can never be as accurate, fluent and elegant as those produced by some of the best native English writers out there. Nor can I ever imagine that my personal experience as an Asian Australian can be seen as being representative of any other Asian, Australian or Asian-Australian life – because it isn't and shouldn't be.

So, when I read complaints on social media such as 'my culture is not your goddamn prom dress',<sup>5</sup> or Yi-Fen Chou's sister saying 'Chinese names are typically unique ... the combination of characters generally means something to the family [and the name] Yi-Fen is unique to our family and given to my sister by our paternal grandfather' while using her English name 'Ellen' plus her title 'Communications Director with the US Department of Defence's Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defence for Acquisition' in her public condemnation of Michael Derrick Hudson<sup>6</sup> – what was the first thing that came to my mind?

That same thing came to my mind when I read Leah Jing's recollection of the history of the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States, as well as the discrimination suffered by her great-grandfather and grandfather, which led to her conclusion that 'when there are untold decades of racism, literally built into legislation, it's hard to dismiss a white teenager's casual appropriation of Chinese culture as nothing more than 'just a dress''.<sup>7</sup>

It was this question: What is 'my culture' to Asian Americans and, in this case, Asian Australians? More importantly: What is 'I', what is 'we', and what is 'mine' or 'ours'? Can anyone truly occupy the imagined position as the spokesperson of what they perceive to be 'their culture', while considering the action of another individual or group as being representative of an equally complex, multifaceted and ever-evolving culture?

To these questions I have no answers. However, I do remember reading about CE Morgan, who was selected as a '5 Under 35' by America's National Book Foundation in 2010 and, like our own Helen Garner (2016), Noelle Janaczewska (2014) and Ali Cobby Eckermann (2017), is a recipient of Yale University's prestigious Windham-Campbell Literature Prize (2016).<sup>8</sup> When asked 'Why write about race and what for? Why enter and inhabit race from both black and white perspectives?', Morgan's response is worthy of being quoted:

I was taught as a young person that the far political right and the far political left aren't located on a spectrum but on a circle, where they inevitably meet in their extremity. This question always reminds me of that graphic because its central irony is that it tacitly asserts a fundamental difference, an ineradicable, ontological estrangement, between the races. It establishes race as such a special category of difference that the writer needs to approach it apologetically, even deferentially, without the real agency, power, and passion that define mature artistry. That approach is servile, cowardly, anti-artistic. It's also anti-novelistic, because the project of the novel is founded on the inhabitation and depiction of the Other. And the Other is everywhere and every thing, including the so-called self.<sup>9</sup>

As one Asian Australian who is still exploring the nature and significance of cultural identity, I keep Morgan's words in mind as I continue to write, read and review. I believe that all of us see our world only through our personal experiences of it, which is and continues to be everything that we have learned from our family, community, school and the mass media (including but not limited to books and the Internet). And that is all. We cannot see beyond this, hence our understanding of our world is always limited and, unavoidably, full of stereotypes.

As American science fiction author Nancy Kress warns: 'A stereotype may be negative or positive, but even positive stereotypes present two problems: they are cliches, and they present a human being as far more simple and uniform than any human being actually is.'<sup>10</sup> Worse, if we continue to rely on cliches that reduce individuals and communities as 'simple and uniform', then it is highly likely that our stereotypes will turn into prejudices.

It also remains my belief that Asian Australians are unique precisely because we are Australians. As perhaps the most multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation in the world, we can do better than labelling those around us with colours. Unlike many of my fellow Asian-Australian writers who are native English speakers, I am constantly seeing different types of Asian, Australian and Asian-Australian identities being formed, standardised and widely circulated in both English and Chinese worlds, by those who insist their voices deserve to be heard because they are speaking on behalf of those whom they consider to be without a voice. All sorts of walls are being constructed everyday, but we can choose to build bridges.

Here is for you something else I was recently privileged to learn: 'Perceiving your own voice means perceiving your true self or true nature. Then you and the sound are never separate, which means that you and the whole universe are never separate. Thus, to perceive our true nature is to perceive universal substance.'<sup>11</sup> I hope these words from Korean Seon master Seung Sahn could be of some value to you, whether you are Asian, Australian or Asian Australian. 🙏

Full references at:  
[writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/the-sound-own-voices](http://writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/the-sound-own-voices)

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# Finding Ways to Belong

For Jo Walters, Own Voices has been a way of coming to terms with chronic illness and, perhaps more importantly, finding community.

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There was a period when I was very sick, only able to leave the house for an hour or two at a time. I would go for days with my wife being the only other person I saw. I was isolated. An invisible barrier of fatigue and pain kept me separated from the rest of the world. One of my main activities throughout the week was attending appointments to manage my health. I felt largely unheard. Sitting with doctors and health professionals, it was as if my words and experiences were misunderstood. I filled out forms, I answered questions. They took their notes. Now, when I read through my medical records I don't read about me. Not as I know me, and not as I know my experience of chronic illness. Their words are the voices which leave me feeling disempowered, frustrated and exposed. Their words leave me feeling like I don't really exist.

Likewise if I read about my illness online I read about genetic mutations and chromosomal abnormalities. I read about symptoms of weakness, paralysis, aphasia, ataxia. I read about pain and migraine about memory loss and fatigue. I read about medications, treatments and testing. But these words too often leave me disappointed, and feeling more misunderstood and alone than ever.

Among the words of the professionals and clinicians, I started to find other words. Words that reminded me that I was not alone. I found others, working from their lounge rooms, writing in bed, snatching moments of clarity from among the murk of living with chronic illness. I found writers and activists, people with disability, people who are like me. We

exist, we matter and we can be heard. Through the world of chronic illness and disability blogging I found #ownvoices. I found voices to counter the words of the professionals and clinicians. And I found a way to write myself onto the page.

I am a queer, disabled writer with chronic illness. I am finding my voice, discovering its qualities and tone, uncovering its depth, and passion. I am practicing at giving it space, giving it room to grow, to become. Giving myself room to be a writer. I am learning through practice just what Own Voices is all about. I came to tell my story by reading the work of others. Others like me, and unlike me. People whose voices are too often unheard. Voices which exist on the margins, the edges. But it is here on the edge and at the margins where our voices resound strongly, passionately with fervour, with hope, with frustration, with the weight of truth, and with the weight of experience. This is where I am nourished, this is where I have found my courage and my voice. Here with the voices of others.

I wanted to write about my experience of living with chronic illness. For years I had thought about it, it was my intention, an aim, but I was unsure of the value of what I had to say. And unsure of my right to say it. Unable to work, unable to get better. I often felt that I was unable to contribute to the wider world at all. I was measuring myself according to the narrow and prejudicial attitudes of a society drowning in ableism. A society which sees me as flawed, as less than. An attitude which I try hard to shake off.

I doubted myself. I felt isolated and ashamed. But it was as I looked for solace, and company on the internet that I found others. I found #ownvoices, I found our voices. People who are sharing their story, who are opening up the conversations and are letting the world know of their experiences. People who are using their voice. I read blog after blog, articles and opinion pieces, non-fiction, memoir. And I realised that I don't need an invitation from anyone to get started, I don't need permission to be a writer. I just have to write.

Now I am writing. I am finding ways to boldly and openly share my words and by extension share myself. Leading to the question what do I stand for. Finding my voice has paralleled an uncovering of my identity and a discovery of who I am at this point in time. It was only by reading the works of others living with chronic illness that I even came to realise that that I was living with chronic illness. I knew very well that I was sick, and that I had been for years, but I had been so affected by shame and discomfort with my ongoing illness that I tried to keep it as far away from me as possible. But now by identifying as a disabled writer with chronic illness I have been able to connect with others with lived experience of disability or chronic illness. Through coming out I have been able to confront my internalised shame, and I have been able to acknowledge my vulnerability. Through coming out I have also been able to be present and real in my writing. I am no longer talking hypotheticals, or talking from a position of observer, I am centering myself in the work I create. I am acknowledging my whole self. My sick, unwell, frustrated, isolated, hopeful, loved, loving, vulnerable, engaged, and engaging self. I write about sickness and discomfort and about the physical and emotional experiences that I have. I do this for myself and for others like me. I am an activist.

I am not alone. I feel us working together, I can picture myself alongside fellow writers, people I may never meet in person, yet whose work I can read and connect with. We are pushing against the tide of judgement, misunderstanding and bias directed to those living with chronic illness. The world of the healthy and well pass judgement of those of us who are not. Those of us who are sick and whose bodies do not recover, do not heal

or bounce back. Bodies that are different, inside or out. I feel a sense of solidarity, even though our experiences are diverse, or perhaps because of this. In this space, as a writer I am discovering the richness and value of peers.

A year ago I joined up with Writers Victoria's Write-ability Goes Regional and Online (WGRO) program in Bendigo. I found myself as a part of a group. Present in a physical space, around a table for the first time with other writers with disability. It was my first ever experience of a writers group. Attending monthly sessions with a group mentor I was sharing space and words, with openness and vulnerability with my peers. Together a shared experience, an understanding. A space where I didn't need to explain, or ease someone else's concern about my wellbeing. A place where I wasn't asked what was wrong with me. A place where I could be me.

Through the WGRO program and now through the Write-ability Fellowship program, I have been given support and encouragement to continue. To persist with and enjoy the art of writing. The lonely life of a writer is less so when you know other writers. Reaching out through occasional workshops, connecting through online spaces. Finding ways to belong. To relate. This is how I find myself a part of the Own Voices movement, contributing to the growing tide of works created by writers who are from marginalised communities, writers who operate on the edges. We are diverse voices with diverse experiences presenting authentically embodied writing. We are the voices we need. 🗣️

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# Racism in a Word

Though progress has been made, racism still blights the Australian literary scene, writes Hoa Pham.

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**B**efore writing this article, I was boggled by what I could write about. The media had proven again and again that Australia was a racist place, in commentary and cartoon. What could I write about that had not already been said a thousand times, and needs to be said a thousand times more?

Even in the last decade, there have been shifts in the literary world in regards to dealing with racism. (I wrote about some of these in the article 'All Sorts of Asians' published in the June-July 2018 issue of this magazine). In 2017, Maxine Beneba Clarke's 'Hate Race', an autobiography about growing up in a racist Australia, is shortlisted for the Stella Prize. Hachette, her mainstream publisher, has 'The Lebs' By Michael Mohammed Ahmad and 'Terra Nullius', an Aboriginal speculative-fiction work by Claire G Coleman in their list - award-winning authors writing about race front and centre. The titles of their books say it all. There is a renaissance of Asian-Australian writing, after Alice Pung and Nam Le, with Michelle de Kretser winning the Miles Franklin Award for the second time. There are anthologies such as 'Growing up Aboriginal in Australia', 'Growing Up African in Australia' and 'Meet Me at the Intersection'. Racism is now accepted as part of lived experience and is sold as part of the current literary reality.

Literature is able to tackle racism by transporting the reader into the other's shoes. Good writing and good storytelling create empathy for the other, and can make a difference in changing perceptions. In Australia, we have cognitive dissonance in the nation's psyche, when at the height of the 'turn back the boats' campaign, Anh Do's 'The Happiest Refugee' was the number one non-fiction bestseller in 2011. Commentators like

Maria Tumarkin have observed that Do's story succeeds because it is a happy story with a happy ending, no one wants to know about the suffering refugee, the miserable refugee. Hung Le wrote a parody 'The Crappiest Refugee' in 2017, and it appears not many wanted to know about that either. Books written by refugees such as Behrouz Boochani's 'No Friends But the Mountains' give voice to the voiceless, although his translator Omid Tofighian wonders whether empathy is possible. He places Boochani's work as transnational literature, moving beyond the label of refugee literature. It is too soon to know how well Boochani's book has gone, it was the bestseller at the Melbourne Writers Festival and its publication by Picador ensures a broader audience.

But there has been backlash, most notably comments made by Lionel Shriver insinuating that people with minority demographics can write rubbish and get published. Her continued failure to recognise her white privilege is breathtaking. The controversial Horne Prize guidelines on the other hand provoked discussion in Australia about what constitutes acceptable fiction. The guidelines included that one could not write about minorities that one does not identify with. Though it appears to be trying to prevent cultural and other appropriations by mainstream writers writing about minorities, it has backfired from over prescription. Both David Marr and Anna Funder resigned from judging because they felt their work had breached the guidelines. It may have been better to positively discriminate and encourage minority writers to enter the prize with their stories rather than to gatekeep with such broad strokes.

Writers of colour still need spaces without white presence. White privilege is very real, your experience of the world is filtered by your skin colour and how people react to you. The bamboo ceiling may have been smashed by Asian-Australian authors but there still is systemic structural racism in the literary world which is predominantly white. The white gatekeepers are still there and microaggressions occur everyday. What stories get to be published and heard can be influenced by structural racism, commercial publishers publish only what they know and think will sell, and stories from minorities may not be it, as noted by Michelle Cahill from 'Mascara Literary Review'. For instance when I shared a draft of a novella about refugees in Maribrynong Detention Centre I was challenged by a white author that not all migrants had a hard time and some had it easy. Racism in the form of literary feedback seemed to be the go. But this is a reflection of some in the community, the literary world is not exempt from it.

One exemplar of writing programs is Sweatshop in Western Sydney, a writing group for women of colour who meet once a month with a guest woman author of colour. I was privileged to be one of the guest authors and I saw women there that are not often represented in writers' festivals like Turkish Muslim women together with Indigenous women. We could talk about white privilege, about cultural appropriation and representation, without anyone getting defensive.

The Diversity Checklist as promoted by the Stella Prize has lifted awareness of the paucity of non-white authors being published. The Next Chapter, a Wheeler Centre funding and mentoring ten diverse emerging writers, is a positive seeding initiative that will increase the number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) published authors. In NSW, the Boundless writing festival is specifically for Indigenous and writers of colour and is the first of its kind. There was a panel of Indigenous writers and CALD writers talking to each other with no white intermediary for the first time. This festival was successful and opened up talking points about diversity in a safe space for people of colour. Conversations about white dominance in publishing could be had

without needing to overcome defensiveness from white participants.

Even though gains have been made, racism in its insidious forms is still present in the literary world. To counter this, we need to create opportunities for people of colour to be respected and heard. To be respectful is not difficult and being sensitive can only lead to better work, and being a better human being. 🙏

## Links

Boundless Festival:  
[boundlessfestival.org.au/program/](http://boundlessfestival.org.au/program/)

Michelle Cahill talks to Chris Ringrose:  
[arts.monash.edu/news/sadirn-creative-lives-project-michelle-cahill-talks-chris-ringrose-august-2018/](http://arts.monash.edu/news/sadirn-creative-lives-project-michelle-cahill-talks-chris-ringrose-august-2018/)

Maria Tumarkin: 'Stories without Borders':  
[meanjin.com.au/essays/stories-without-borders/](http://meanjin.com.au/essays/stories-without-borders/)

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**Hoa Pham is the author of six books and two plays. Her most recent novel, 'Wave', was published in 2015. 'The Other Shore' won the Viva La Novella Prize in 2014. Hoa's most recent piece is 'The Lady of the Realm', in the 'Review of Australian Fiction'. Her play 'Silence' was on the VCE Drama list in 2010. She is also the founder of 'Peril Magazine', an Asian-Australian online arts and culture magazine. She lives in Melbourne with her partner, their two children, and a Shiba Inu who tolerates their company. She can be found at [hoapham.net](http://hoapham.net), on Facebook and Twitter (@hoap).**

# The Milk Can

By Dawn Nguyen. A 'Pencilled In' Commission.

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Thoan walked into the local council's medical centre with her three-month-old daughter on her arm. She was nervous but relieved to get out of the tropical summer sun. The centre looked bare but had the sharp smell of penicillin liquid, the antibiotic to be injected for almost all medical conditions presented. The nurse looked up from her desk, after hearing Thoan greeted, and motioned for her to sit down in the tattered wooden chair in front of her desk. Thoan sat down, slightly dismayed from seeing the nurse's emotionless face. After being in this little town for more than two years, she found locals here unfriendly towards her still. Maybe it was because of her countryside accent.

'What do you need?' the nurse asked, without a greeting.

'Dear sister,' Thoan began softly, earnestly pointing to her baby. 'She is three months old and I have run out of milk. I'm here for some milk for her.'

'Can you try harder? You know our country is rebuilding after the war. The Party is very clear about minimising unnecessary use of scarce resources.'

'Yes, I've tried but there is no hope.'

'Let me check then.'

The nurse stood up and walked around the desk. Thoan stood up and unbuttoned her blouse. The nurse unhooked Thoan's bra at the back and moved around and flipped it up. Her hands started squeezing hard Thoan's right and then left breast. Thoan moved her daughter around to be out of the nurse's way while watching her dark nipples for a sign of the milk. Her sagging breasts didn't produce a drop. She looked down to her body, feeling sad for

how it had changed after two years of meagre food and two babies. Then she heard the nurse conceding 'Right' while twisting around to get back to her chair.

Thoan left the centre a little while later, after all the necessary forms were filled and signed. She was relieved; her daughter had been given three precious cans of condensed milk. The nurse, however, had made it clear to her that they were all that her daughter was entitled to.

When Thoan got home, her husband was sitting on the family's wooden bench in the middle of the house. He asked where she had been, and she explained about the milk cans. He was surprised at first. Then he brightened. 'Brother Co is sick. A milk can will be very good for his recovery.' Thoan choked inside. Brother Co was her husband's boss. She wanted to say something, but two years of married life had taught her to be silent.

Thoan nodded silently, hastily put her daughter down next to him and went to the kitchen. With the training gained from performing house chores since the age of twelve, she swiftly created two small holes opposite each other on top of the milk can, using the tip of the kitchen knife and the force from her palm. She then carefully poured out a small drop of milk onto a spoon.

To re-seal the can, Thoan made two small hard paper rolls out of the scrap papers she found among the fire wood and stuffed them tightly into the holes of the milk can. Still not satisfied, Thoan fetched a small bowl and poured some water into it. She placed the milk can within it; a trick she had learned to prevent the ants getting onto the can. She then placed the bowl on the top of the kitchen cabinet, to be out

of the reach of the mice, and her inquisitive toddler son.

Now confident the can was in its safest place, Thoan diluted the milk with some hot water from the family's flash in a small bowl. She knew she had to be careful with her daughter's young guts. She brought the milk up to the house and waited for it to cool before spooning and slowly dripping it onto one corner of her daughter's mouth. The little girl pulled a face upon tasting the sweetened milk, but she eagerly received the two small spoons Thoan had rationed for her.

Having placed one of the remaining cans on top of the little bench next to the family's bed for Brother Co, she waited for her husband to leave the house then buried the remaining can deep in the bottom left corner of the family's clothes trunk, the only space in the house she could call her own.

That night, as Thoan and her husband drank tea after dinner, Thoan's husband talked at length about the difficulties he was having with the police station next to the town's cinema that he managed. Suddenly he asked her 'How many milk cans did you get?'

'Three' said Thoan reluctantly; lying was not her strength.

'I only saw one next to the bed.'

'I put the other one away.'

'Are you sure that you can't produce any more milk?'

She didn't look at him as she shook her head. Wanting to be out of his sight, she stood up and walked down to the kitchen.

It had been nearly a month and Thoan's baby had been receiving a small portion of milk twice a day. Thoan was disheartened when seeing the can on top of the cabinet now floated and rested to the side in its bowl of water. She went into the bedroom for the remaining can. She felt a sudden tug in her heart when her fingers didn't feel the hard lump she expected in the corner of the clothes trunk. She kept pulling and piling clothes up to one side and then the other but there was no sign of the can. She closed the trunk, fell over it and cried hard, but as silently as she could. Her brother-in-law's family lived on the other side of the wall.

Soon Thoan remembered her baby girl and gathered her resolve. She went back down to the kitchen and fetched the empty milk can. She pulled the two paper rolls out of their holes and carefully poured in some water she had just boiled. She swilled the can lightly for a few moments and tipped it to pour the milk out into a clean serving bowl. The milk looked thick enough. But then something else suddenly stuck out of the hole. She stared numbly at it. She knew what it was. She was also certain that she had never failed to put the paper rolls back into the holes after use, and the only other person who could access the can was her husband. She put the can down, the cockroach leg disappeared from the hole. She sat down on her heels, folding her arms tight around her carves. She couldn't cry. She squeezed the muscles on her arms and fingers hard. She wanted to pull something inside her apart. How silly she was to think that the milk can would be safe in the trunk. What wicked luck she had to be chosen by her husband to be his wife. Cruelty is for the weak and the helpless, and her baby girl was both. ⑩

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**Dawn Nguyen was born in Vietnam soon after the Vietnam War ended. She came to Australia at the age of 19. She is a principal data analyst for a government department. Her professional attention has focused on econometrics and analytics. However, she finds English beautiful, more than her mother tongue.**

**'The Milk Can' is a fiction, based on Dawn's memories of the sufferings born by people, especially women and children, during her childhood in post-War Vietnam.**

# Hangin' With Speedy Gonzales

By Suzanne Hermanoczki

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As a kid, I watched a lot of TV. And I mean a lot a lot. One of my happiest and earliest memories from back then was waking up on Saturday mornings and rushing to be the first to turn the telly on.<sup>1</sup> The TV was down the hall, in the living room. It was one of those TVs you turned on by pushing a button and changed the channel by turning a dial. There was this weird hissing sound that came on when you pressed the button, and then a white square appeared in the middle of the screen that slowly grew bigger and clearer as the set warmed up.<sup>2</sup> Soon as my brother heard that hiss, he'd rush out of his room in his pyjamas to join me in front of the set. As Pa, Ma and my older sister had to work Saturday mornings, it was just us two. Alone for hours and hours, we sat with our faces a foot away from the screen watching cartoon after cartoon, eating cold leftover homemade pizza Ma made the night before or a handful of Arnott's Family Assorted biscuits or tostadas with paté that we'd wash back with cold Milo or cordial for breakfast.

When we had our fill of cartoons, I turned the telly off and called my brother away to do the household chores Ma had left for us (cooking, cleaning, washing up, dusting, vacuuming, hanging up the laundry, ironing, making the beds) – but this was not before we'd gorged on Elmer Fudd hunting wabbits, Bugs Bunny chewing on his carrot and answering back with his, 'Eh, What's up Doc?', or blind Mr Magoo crashing into something or someone, or Daffy Duck smart-mouthing Granny, or The Road Runner beeping off. Our mornings usually ended with Porky Pig, the only cartoon with a speech impediment saying, 'Ba de ba de badee. That's all folks!'. Of all these dibujitos, our favourite of all time was little

Speedy Gonzalez, the fastest mouse in all of Mexico, with his cries of, '¡Ándale, ¡Ándale! ¡Arriba! ¡Arriba!' ('Come on! Hurry up! Let's go!') because he sounded just like us (especially before Ma came home).

Sunday night was the only time everyone was at home. After a sit-down cena at the table, as a familia we'd all gather around the televisión to watch Sunday Disney. For a time, we three chicos even had these little cane chairs that we'd sit on specially to watch TV. Ma even took a photo of us like that; me, my brother and sister, sitting in our special chairs wearing Mickey Mouse ears. My sister and I also have on these blue matching velvet sweaters with Donald Duck's face cross-stitched on the front. Those Sunday nights were extra special for us, because not only was everyone home, our evenings were filled with Disney and that meant, even more cartoons: Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, or a Walt Disney movie. Of course, we loved anything with Herbie in it, either 'Riding Again' or 'Going to Monte Carlo' or just 'Going Bananas'.

See, this is how it was back then for us migrantes. Ma was from Buenos Aires, Argentina and Pa from a small village in Hungary, but he'd escaped his country in 1956, and somehow ended up in Argentina. There, he met my mother and they married. Before things went real bad in Argentina, they migrated to Australia. In the late 60s, they found themselves stuck, in the south western suburbs of Brisbane. Neither of them was skilled. Neither could speak English. Because of their poor English skills, neither would ever work in an oficina, department store or supermercado, though Pa did work for a time

as a night cleaner in a shopping arcade. Ma, after a few years, picked up some English. She learned enough 'to defenderse' and find work. She became the TV Latina stereotype, cleaning rich people's houses (sometimes as a kid I'd come along and help vacuum or dust especially if the houses were too big). Later, Ma became a nanny and looked after other people's chicos during the week. Pa on the other hand was plagued with bad luck; losing the job he'd just picked up because of his broken-almost-non-existent English. It didn't help that in those pre-multicultural days, Pa spoke a strange mangled Hungarian accented Spanglish that no-one in Australia seemed to tolerate much less understand.

Throughout my childhood and adolescencia, I have memories of Pa leaving home in the morning dressed in his King Gee work clothes, only to come back at the end of the day as another job fell through. The many reasons given over the years were – last one on last one off, didn't fill the form in properly, not being able to do the job because he couldn't understand/speak/read the instructions English, not joining the union etc etc etc. Happy Days did not follow. No Fonzy to the rescue. You get the picture.

TV became our saviour, our Dios, our escape from the relentless days of our lives.

Broken English. It broke Pa. Caused a rupture. A language split. Ma said that when they first heard the news that they were coming to Australia, they took English lessons. While she picked up phrases here and there, Pa fought with el maestro about the rules. Maybe if he tried. Maybe that was him trying. But the more he fought, the more stuck he got. Till he gave up on the language altogether. After lots of unemployment, Pa got real sick. Before he died, he spent the last of his days housebound, watching shit loads of TV, flicking channels (we had a remote by then). His favourite part of the newspaper was the TV lift-out guide. He studied it like a gambler studies the odds in horse racing. Movies. Sports. SBS soccer with Les Murray (aka László Üрге – a Hungarian!). News. Game shows. They were sure winners.

Pa's favourite genres over the years were TV shows that featured, to quote Elvis, 'a little less conversation and a little more action', oh, and foreign people. He enjoyed 'Mind Your Language' (1972-76) a show about migrants in a

classroom learning English (go figure). He loved it even more when the Hungarian student Zoltán Szabó turned up, even if he only appeared in Season 2. Pa watched it religiously, because how many Hungarians were featured on TV, except for Béla Ferenc Dezső Blaskó otherwise known as Bela Lugosi who played Count Dracula, or Zsa Zsa Gabor? What he also loved (or maybe it was us chicos) but he didn't quite get was, 'Love Thy Neighbour' (1977-79). The show featured a black man, Bill 'nig-nog' or 'sambo' Reynolds, who moves in next door to a white 'honky' man, Eddie Booth, who must come to terms with having 'different' neighbours. Despite the show's overt racism and stereotyping of race relations, we felt it (then) to be pretty close to our everyday experience in Australia, minus the canned laughter.

See, when we first moved into our house in the western suburbs of Brisbane (our first house in Sherwood got flooded), our white Aussie neighbours' kids greeted us (cue the episode 'New Neighbours' the title show from Series 1, episode 1, broadcast 13 April 1972) by shouting over the fence, laughing at us and yelling 'Bloody wogs!' (yes, it does sound a bit like 'nig-nogs'). Each new day here in our new barrio was like another comedic episode of the series with the rascally neighbour's kids continuing 'The Housewarming Party' (title from Series 2, episode 1, broadcast 11 September 1972) long after we moved in. The party involved the neighbour's son throwing rocks, mud, wild lemons or cricket balls at us, whenever we went out into the backyard. But the 'All Star Comedy Carnival' finale, (title from the Christmas Special, broadcast 25 December 1972) and highlight of the series, came to air on Christmas Day (IRL a few years later), when we were having our asado (bbq) para navidad (Christmas). Our episode featured our neighbour's now teenage son getting drunk, pissing on the fence with his footy mates, and laughing at my Pa to his face when he tried to tell them off in his broken English.

Maybe it was the combo of full-time TV and part-time school, (as chicos we were just shoved into a class based on our ages and that was that; forced language immersion I guess) that we eventually learned the language. We didn't 'get' our teachers at school, but we did get our TV. Our TV wasn't the best and brightest of teachers. It wasn't even Mr Kotter

but more like Vinny Barbarino explaining the French Fry Phantom to us (geez, we loved Vinny almost as much as we loved the Fonz).<sup>3</sup> Our TV was street smart, cool, and helped us understand a lot of things in life that weren't particularly intellectual. It didn't read books. It didn't care if we did our homework. Even when we did study, it was always a last-minute deal or no deal. No surprises that we never won any academic prizes.

It was no surprise either that my brother and I became hard core TV addicts as we grew up. Our TV addiction got to the stage where we would sneak it in before we left for school and would turn it on as soon as we got home. We binged on it, like we did junk food. Alone, we sat there glued in front of the screen for hours, reshaping our eyes into little squares, until Ma came home or shooed us outside or Pa switched the channel over to the news. As addicts, the more TV we watched, the worse our grades got. TV rotted our brains just like the crap we ate rotted our teeth and turned us little spuds into full blown couch potatoes. Life. Be in it (yeah, great jingle), was sure wasted on us.<sup>4</sup>

We were home alone most of the time anyway.<sup>5</sup> Plus, we didn't know any better. We were wog kids before multicultural-'ism' and all those other 'isms' and terminology. Like 'sexism', 'racism', 'feminism' or 'homophobia'. Ours was a TV golden gaytime of viewing, when Paul Hogan was PC and Benny Hill's hilarious 'closing chases' ruled, (ah, the days when a white man's sneeze could make a woman's dress fly off! Hello, Señor Weinstein?), or before we understood how derogatory it was to paint one's face black and do a musical number like in 'The Black and White Minstrel Show' (1978) or 'Hey Hey It's Saturday' (1971-1999).<sup>6</sup>

Not being able to speak the language or speaking with un acento, we became 2D, like cartoons. Unlike Speedy, Spiderman, Batman, Superman, He-Man, She-Ra, Scooby Doo, and even the lame-ass Smurfs, who were all in some way freaks or different or considered others, their existence came with some compensation like a superpower or magic or size or skill or speed. We were flat. Not fully realised. Not fully there. We were more like the stereotyped sidekick characters of the comedies we watched. We became the butt

of others' jokes; we were the ones always being laughed at or being made fun of. Yet, still we craved seeing ourselves represented in some way. We still gravitated towards shows or anyone speaking with our accent. Like Basil talking to Manuel from Barcelona in this scene from 'Fawlty Towers': 'The Hotel Inspectors' (1979):

Basil Fawlty: Come here.

Manuel: ¿Qué?

Basil Fawlty: You're a waste of space. [Basil thwacks him on the forehead with a spoon].

Somehow, it was always funnier when it happened to others on screen. Somehow, when it was directed at us, it was a whole different telenovela.

At school, as wog kids we had a pretty rough time. There is nothing to describe the feeling that comes from not being able to speak the language, or when you do find the courage to open your mouth, your words are met with laughter, racist insultos, incessant bullying, or name calling from other chicos, even from our teachers. Isolated, no-one really spoke to us at school. Our teachers did nothing. Our neighbours taunted us. No-one helped. People on the streets, people we didn't even know, insulted us, said stuff about us, near us, behind our backs and to our faces. TV was not just our friend when no-one else wanted to be, but the best goddamn amigo, who'd always be there, make you laugh, and would always hang out with you - no matter what.

When I was at uni, a friend's mum went out for a while with Eric Summons, the guy who played Boris the Black Knight. Eric was our ultimate childhood hero. He appeared on kids' TV shows like 'Wombat' (1979-1990), and as Boris in 'Boris' Breakfast Club' along with his sidekick puppets 'Agro' (Vation) and later O'Toole the toy monkey who spoke with a British accent.<sup>7</sup> When I told my brother about this, he begged me that he had to meet Eric/Boris. I don't know how it happened, but one evening my friend, her mum and Eric/Boris turned up at our house. I'd never seen my brother so star-struck. And Eric ah ... Boris, he was great. We mentioned how much we loved him as kids, and all night long he told us stories of pranks he did on TV, like when they burnt down the Channel Seven TV studio.<sup>8</sup> The best thing was hearing him admit to us,

that because of the early morning time slot, he often told jokes that were 'not for kids' – we had picked up on this early on and loved it. Ma took a photo of us with him. It's still around.

As chicos and later young adultos, there was so much TV, so little time. Soon, we memorised all the timeslots of our all-time favourite TV shows. As time went by, it seemed as if every other kid was watching these shows too (it helped that there were only four television channels). Somehow hearing others talk about people-slash-characters we knew, it felt like we were part of one big TV gang all following 'Skippy', 'Monkey Magic', 'The Goodies', 'The Brady Bunch', 'The Monkees', 'The Partridge Family', 'The Henderson Kids', 'Round the Twist', 'Family Ties', 'It's Punky Brewster', 'Diff'rent Strokes', 'Webster', 'Happy Days', 'Hey Dad!' (I know!), 'The Cosby Show' (Yup ...), 'The Muppet Show' and 'The Wonder Years'.

It's no wonder (to me) where all those years went. 🍷

#### Notes:

1. The TV had an antenna you had to move around to get reception. Sometimes, if it was windy or raining, the picture would get strange lines in it or jump or disappear. Sometimes if the TV wasn't working, this happened when our set got old, you had to bash it real hard on the top for the picture to come back on. After a while, the TV stopped working altogether and all you got was sound. Or a strange burning smell like the incense burnt in church during lent, that tingled your nostrils. We were lucky the TV never blew up; we could've really burnt the house down!

2. When the TV warmed up, I'd sometimes stand there rubbing my arms on the screen. The static from the electricity would make all my hairs on my arms stand up. I had (and still have) hairy arms. My brother, always a show-off, would go one step further and rub his head on it (that was until he got told off or walloped a good one by Pa).

3. 'Vinnie' Barbarino was played by a young John Travolta. In 'Welcome Back Kotter', 'student troublemakers are led by Vinnie ... who has a knack for rhyming insults' (IMDb, 2008). We loved these insults; 'up your nose with a rubber hose' was our favourite one. The Fonz or 'Fonzie' aka Arthur Fonzarelli from Happy Days, was for all kids back then, the epitome of 'cool'.

4. We loved the 'Life. Be in it' ads. In one ad, it featured fat-gutted Norm sitting in front of the telly and drinking a tinnie (that looked a lot like the XXXX beer our Aussie neighbour's dad drank). In another ad, it featured a song listing all these activities you could do if you got up off the couch. It ended with the lines: 'Life. Be in it today live more of your life ... be in it yeah!'. We loved singing the jingle, but unfortunately the ad didn't convince us to go outside or do any sport.

5. We were not latchkey kids. Latchkey kids' parents went to work and left their 'kids' a set of 'keys' (usually worn around the neck). Those kids would let themselves in and out their house. Ma never gave us a key; reason being that without one, we couldn't leave home. We weren't allowed to answer the door to anyone. Didn't matter, no-one came over anyway.

6. In the 2009, like everyone else, we watched the 'Hey Hey It's Saturday' reboot. The American actor Harry Connick Jr was a judge on Red Faces, the shonky talent segment, when five guys wearing blackfaces and wigs did a skit called 'The Jackson Jive'. Connick Jr scored them a zero and called everyone out on how the 'blackface' was racist. You could clearly see Daryl Somer's shock (he later apologised) because I don't think he saw (like many of viewers in Australia) that there was anything wrong with it.

7. Agro (Jamie Dunn), the talking puppet, is still around. Agro was for many years Jill Ray's co-host on the kids' show, 'Seven's Super Saturday' – another favourite.

8. Relive this moment yourself with Eric Summons talking about his Boris the Black Knight and 'Wombat' days on 4KQ 693: [soundcloud.com/4kqbrisbane/find-your-favourites-eric-summons](https://soundcloud.com/4kqbrisbane/find-your-favourites-eric-summons)

**Suzanne Hermanoczki is a writer and teacher of creative writing. Her critical and creative writing on death and photography, memory and postmemories, trauma and the immigrant journey, code-switching and multiculturalism, have been published in local and international publications. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne, where she currently teaches.**

# Milestones

**Bala Mudaly** is happy to report that his collection of short stories and poems, 'Colours of Hope and Despair' (published by Tale Publishing) was launched in September in Oakleigh to coincide with his 80th birthday. Part of the sale of books was donated to Amnesty International.

**Liz Low's** 'Eaglehawk Girl. A Free Range Child', has been published by Brolga. The memoir talks of a 1950s childhood in a small ex-goldmining town. Issues of control, freedom and childhood risk-taking underlie the social and personal history. Available in bookshops and Booktopia.

**Goldie Alexander** announces a Five Senses Publication, aimed at Young Adult readers and adults, launched in late September: 'Shakespeare Now! A Trilogy.' These three modern adaptations of well-known plays include: 'The Tryptich Chronicles', ('The Tempest'), 'Gap Year Nanny' ('Macbeth'), 'Changing History?' ('Romeo and Juliet'). 'Shakespeare Now! An Anthology' includes all three novels.

**Alison Stuart** has signed a two book print contract with Harlequin Australia (MIRA imprint) for a historical romance series set in the Victorian goldfields in the 1870s AND a two book contract with Berkley Publishing (Penguin, USA) for the first two books in a historical mystery series set in Singapore in 1910 ('The Harriet Gordon Mysteries'). The first books in both series will be out in July and August 2019 respectively. For more information, visit Alison's website [alisonstuart.com](http://alisonstuart.com).

**Jill-Louise Dawson** has recently released 'Rockpoolia', a self-published children's chapter book, replete with colour illustrations to appeal to visual learners.

The book is available for curriculum use in a number of bayside primary schools. To date, the major retail outlet for 'Rockpoolia' is via Melbourne Museum's shop in Carlton. There is scope, and hope, for a sequel.

**Matt Davies** released his debut contemporary YA novel 'This Thing of Darkness' (Scholastic) in November. For more info visit [mattdavies.com.au](http://mattdavies.com.au).

# Classifieds

## Arabic Literature and Culture in English (Australia)

'Welcome to our blog. Our blog aims to introduce a broader, richer and more diverse range of Arabic literature, and culture in Translation, to help build the integration and the understanding between different cultures. It also aims to open a dialogue between Arab and Australian authors, speakers, thinkers, readers and more, and to reach Arab Australian authors to create networks of support.'

[arablitaustralia.wordpress.com](http://arablitaustralia.wordpress.com)

## Writing Group for YA/Children's Writers

An established group writing for children and young adults has an opening for new members. The group meets once a month in Belgrave. For more information contact [pmhosking45@gmail.com](mailto:pmhosking45@gmail.com)

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

### Nitpicker [from page 13]:

- |     |      |     |        |     |           |     |       |     |               |
|-----|------|-----|--------|-----|-----------|-----|-------|-----|---------------|
| 1.  | l    | 2.  | barmy  | 3.  | tastier   | 4.  | ;     | 5.  | As it was wet |
| 6.  | is   | 7.  | also   | 8.  | among     | 9.  | me    | 10. | an            |
| 11. | were | 12. | Jess's | 13. | comprises | 14. | fewer | 15. | is            |

# 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.

## In-person

### Reading for Writers

with [Paddy O'Reilly](#) and [Bella Li](#)

Join Bella Li for a discussion of Michael Ondaatje's 'The Collected Works of Billy the Kid', the final session in our Reading for Writers book club, curated by Paddy O'Reilly. First published in 1970, 'The Collected Works of Billy the Kid' is a genre-mixing text that draws upon a range of disparate sources – contemporary accounts, photographs, dime novels – to re-animate and re-imagine the figure of the American outlaw Billy the Kid.

When: Wednesday 5 December, 6-8pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

### Book launch: 'Blue in the Red House'

with [Sarah Madden](#)

Join debut author Sarah Madden to celebrate the launch of her magic realist memoir 'Blue in the Red House' at the Writers Victoria Library. This story recreates Sarah's experience of being diagnosed with autism at the age of 34; a journey through the inner workings of the mind that exposes more truth than strict facts can manage. Sarah, a former Write-ability Fellow, will be in conversation with writer and director Fiona Tuomy, who was also Write-ability's founding Mentor-in-Residence.

When: Tuesday 11 December, 6.15-7.30pm

Price: FREE

Level: All

### Reviewing and Literary Journalism

with [Thuy On](#)

This workshop is a toolkit for emerging or intermediate book reviewers and arts writers that covers a range of topics including tone, unconscious bias, ethics, responsibilities and pitfalls.

When: Monday 14 January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$80/\$90

Non-member price: \$120

Level: Early and Emerging

### Speculative Fiction

with [Claire G Coleman](#)

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

When: Tuesday 15 January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and Emerging

### Writing the Body

with [Lee Kofman](#)

Often we writers forget that our characters have bodies. In this workshop we'll not only pay attention to this central fact of human existence, but also learn to use the body as a source of inspiration. We'll look at the body as a multidimensional entity – physical, cultural, and a singular marker of an individual. We'll learn how to describe sensory experiences, appearance and gestures in a way that deepens characterisation. The workshop incorporates theory, discussion and exercises.

When: Wednesday 16 January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging

### Show, Don't Tell

with [Nicole Hayes](#)

So often we're told to 'show, don't tell' in our writing, but what exactly does that mean, and is it always true? In this course, we will break down what is meant by 'show, don't tell': what it looks like, how to apply it, and when, including when not to. Nicole will draw on examples of when it works, when it doesn't, and offer guided exercises and tips on how to apply 'show, don't tell' to construct dynamic scenes that serve your story.

When: Thursday 17 January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and Emerging

**Experimental Writing**  
with Dave Drayton

This workshop will explore the ways rules are present in all our writing, and how a better understanding of these rules allows us to bend them, break them, or create our own to replace them. Through a brief overview of constrained and experimental writing, participants in the workshop will be guided through a number of experimental techniques that can help to combat writers' block or find a new perspective on a piece. Suitable for writers of poetry, fiction or non-fiction – anyone who wants to push their craft in unexpected directions.

When: Saturday 19  
January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging

**Micro-Fiction Intensive:  
Making Every Word Count**  
with Richard Holt

This workshop investigates micro-fiction as a distinct form which makes peculiar demands of its writers. Over the course of the day participants will explore the requirements of very short fiction and strategies for creating great stories within a constrained word count. As well as looking at a range of approaches taken by well-known authors, writers will be provided with opportunities to write and share their own micro-fiction.

When: Sunday 20  
January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging

**Deep Dive Interviews**  
with Michael Green

If an interview soars, even for a minute, it's exhilarating. As Studs Terkel said, 'Interviewing? Easy? Ask me another one! ... Is it exciting? I'll say it is, yes!' But it's fraught too. In this course we'll delve into the art and craft of asking a lot of questions. We'll interrogate our assumptions, identities and tendencies, and pin down what they mean for us as interviewers. Come prepared to ask and answer questions as we practise in class.

When: Monday 21  
January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

**Poetry as Presence  
(Poetry Masterclass with  
Australian Poetry)**  
with Claire Gaskin

If language is the house of being, poetry is the home. This workshop will encourage interaction and discussion. Bring in a poem or a line of poetry you do not understand but that attracts or intrigues you in some way. We will use this as a starting point to discuss the unknown as potential for the new, free from encoding. Come and be inspired and motivated with some writing exercises and readings in a friendly and supportive environment. We will discuss process, how to keep a creative life alive and crafting and drafting.

When: Tuesday 22  
January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Established

**Verse Novel**  
with Sharon Kernot

Verse novels are a hybrid form using elements of both fiction and poetry. In this workshop we'll discuss a variety of verse novels. We'll explore what they are and how they work. We'll talk about the origins of the verse novel and look at some award-winning contemporary examples. We'll do exercises to get you started on your own story in verse and look at strategies to keep it moving along.

When: Wednesday 23  
January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Established

**The Resilient Writer**  
with Hoa Pham

Sometimes as a writer you get stuck. Or you can't start. To continue writing, all writers must have resilience to deal with the obstacles that get in the way, particularly those that come from our own minds. This workshop will explore our sense of what being a writer can be, and ways to encourage creativity. Taking mindfulness exercises as practised by Thich Nhat Hanh and adapted by Maxine Hong Kingston and Deena Metzger for writing, the workshop will explore the self in relation to one's writing and creativity.

When: Thursday 24  
January, 10am-1pm

Member price: \$80/\$90

Non-member price: \$120

Level: All

**Write-ability - 'Say Hello'**  
with Carly Findlay.

Please join us in The Performance Space at The Wheeler Centre to help launch 'Say Hello', both a moving memoir and a proud manifesto on disability and appearance diversity by former Write-ability Fellow and tutor Carly Findlay.

When: Thursday 24  
January, 6.15-8pm

Price: This is a free event. However, online registration is required.

Level: All

**Short Story Method and Art**  
with AS Patric.

This workshop will take writers through the study of the craft and technique essential for writing unique and vital short stories. Explore character development, narrative function, voice and tone, ideas and aesthetics specific to short stories, with a focus on how to deploy these skills practically. Our discussion will be warm and inclusive, exploring a range of genres and styles, but always with a focus on the art of fiction.

When: Friday 25  
January, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging

**Ask ... About Writing for Children**

with Jane Godwin and Ailsa Wild

You want to write a children's book and already have an idea for a story. But is it best suited to 3- to 5-year-old Picture Book readers, 5- to 8-year-old Chapter Book readers, or 8- to 12-year-old Middle Grade readers? Overall word count of your text helps to define your readership, but complexity of theme counts too. Our two panellists will help you understand the nuances of the broad genre that is Children's Books.

When: Thursday 31  
January, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$18/\$25

Non-member price: \$45

Level: All

# Comps and Opps

## Tom Collins Poetry Prize 2018

The Tom Collins Poetry Prize is an annual competition inaugurated by FAWWA in 1975 in memory of Australian author Joseph Furphy (1843 - 1912). Under the name Tom Collins, he wrote the Australian classic, 'Such is Life', as well as many poems.

1st prize: \$1000, 2nd prize: \$300, 3rd prize: \$100.

Poem length: up to 60 lines. Open theme.

\$10 for each entry (\$10 per poem so five poems at \$10 each will be \$50)

Entries close 15 December.

[fawwa.org/competitions](http://fawwa.org/competitions)

## The Calibre Essay Prize

Entry is now open for 2019 Calibre Essay Prize. Founded in 2007 and now worth a total of AU\$7500 the Calibre Prize is one of the world's leading prizes for a new non-fiction essay.

Entry is open to all essayists writing in English. We are seeking essays of between 2000 and 5000 words on any subject. We welcome essays of all kinds: personal or political, literary or speculative, traditional or experimental.

This year the Calibre Essay Prize will be judged by J.M. Coetzee, Anna Funder and ABR Editor Peter Rose.

Entries close 14 January.

[australianbookreview.com.au/prizes-programs/calibre-prize/5086-2019-calibre-essay-prize](http://australianbookreview.com.au/prizes-programs/calibre-prize/5086-2019-calibre-essay-prize)

## The Fantastica Prize

Fantastica invites Australian and New Zealand writers to submit science fiction manuscripts for consideration.

What are we after: Science fiction, not fantasy. Anything high-tech, low-tech or even a no-tech post-apoc setting. Stories set on a generation ship, on a futuristic terra firma or on a planet a million light years away.

Manuscripts of 30,000 words or more.

Works that start with a bang, blow our minds and subvert our expectations.

What's the prize? \$2000 + print and digital publication through Fantastica.

Submissions close February.

[briobooks.com.au/blog/2018/5/8/fantastica-sf-prize](http://briobooks.com.au/blog/2018/5/8/fantastica-sf-prize)

## The Text Prize

Submissions for the 2019 Text Prize will open Monday 7 January. The entry form is available for download now.

The Text Prize aims to discover incredible new books for young adults and children by Australian and New Zealand writers. Awarded annually to the best manuscript written for young readers, the prize has unearthed extraordinary, multi-award-winning books and launched international publishing careers.

Published and unpublished writers of all ages are eligible to enter with works of fiction or non-fiction.

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

Submissions close 8 February.

[textpublishing.com.au/text-prize](http://textpublishing.com.au/text-prize)

**Find more comps and opps at:**  
[writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions](http://writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/opportunities-competitions)

# 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?

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

Do you identify as:

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

Join for two years and save

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

One-year memberships

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

How would you like to receive  
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(screen-reader friendly)

Payment advice (all prices include GST except overseas membership)

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

Tax deductible donation \$  Card number    /

Total payable \$  Name  Signed

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

2019 Season 1



# True Grit

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

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All about writers

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