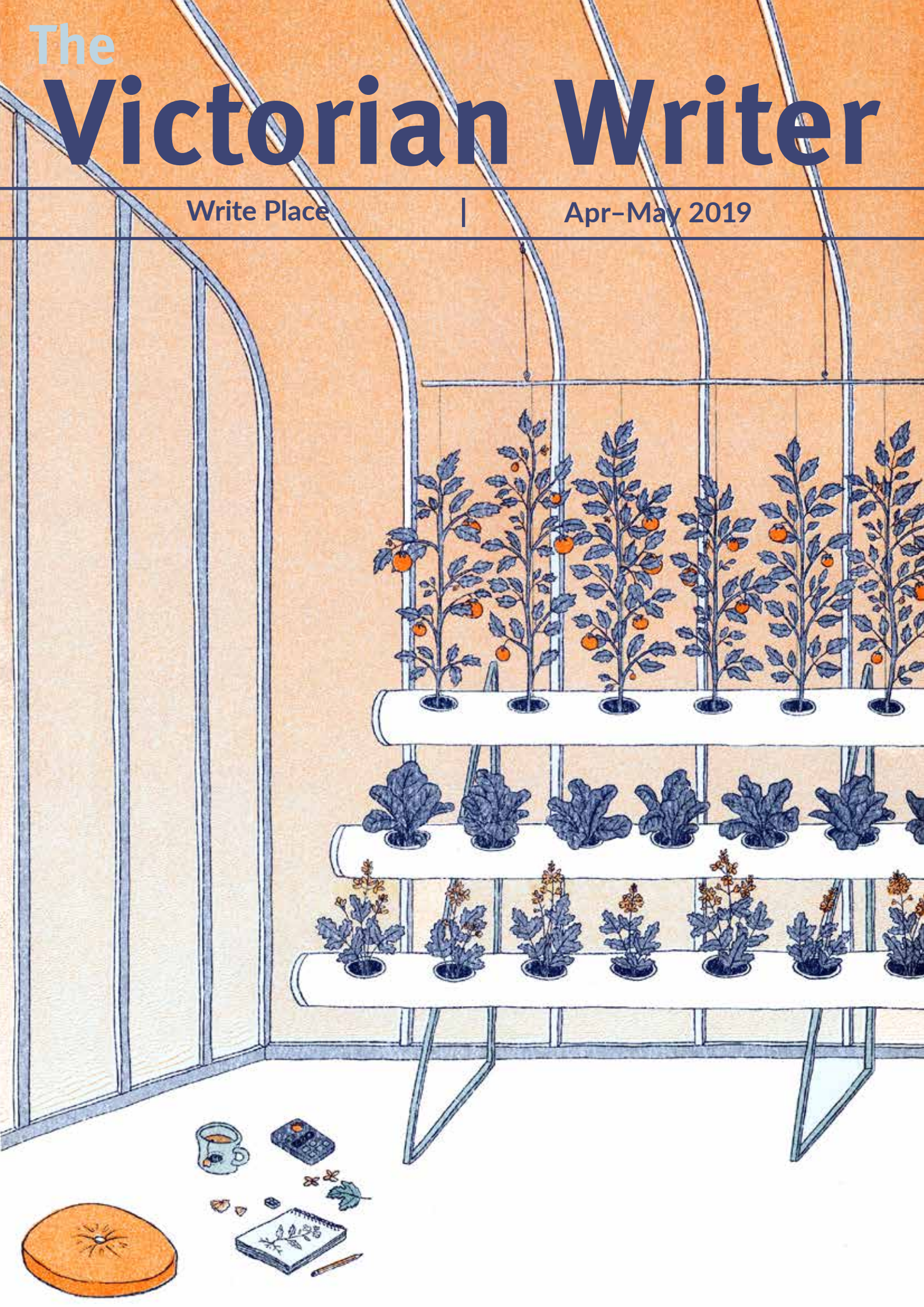


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Authors

Editorial

Place in writing is much more than a stage for characters and action. Place is the point at which politics, history and memory meet – and sometimes it *is* character and action as well.

In creating a sense of place, how much detail do writers need to put on the page? Not enough and the reader is untethered; too much and the reader may disengage. How do we as writers walk this line?

In this issue, we look at some of the different ways to write place.

Cate Kennedy establishes place and setting as prime elements in creating a world that feels visceral, palpable and substantive; Claire G Coleman explores the effect that moving through Country has on her writing; David Sornig recreates Melbourne's Blue Lake through archive and on foot; Jamie Marina Lau writes place from the inside-out; Jock Serong finds the intersection of memory and place in Melbourne's suburbs; and Nancy Langham-Hooper reflects on street art and the importance of seeing things differently.

Also in this issue, we have poetry by Penny Smits and Allan Lake, and new fiction by Andrew Trounson, Barry Revill and Mary Howley. ❶

Emma Cayley
editor@writersvictoria.org.au

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Contact

Writers Victoria Inc,
Level 3, The Wheeler Centre,
176 Little Lonsdale St
Melbourne VIC 3000
03 9094 7855 | writersvictoria.org.au
Email info@writersvictoria.org.au

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First, Picture The Forest

Cate Kennedy on writing place so your reader will go anywhere with you.

Several years ago, I sent a draft of a new story to an editor for feedback. It opened with a ding-dong argument between two characters, who I had fully imagined in all their stand-up head-to-head fury. Back came the story with just one small and pointed comment in the lower right margin: 'Where are we?'

Well, we weren't in John Gardner's 'vivid and continuous dream' of good fiction, that was for sure. The reader was unable to buy into the dream I was conjuring for her simply because it was taking place in a vacuum, and therefore impossible to visualise. That fundamental question of where you are asking the reader to be in a story clarifies the essential task of establishing place and setting as prime elements in creating a world that feels visceral, palpable and substantive.

The more skillfully you are able to render this, the more the story feels, for the reader, like a real experience rather than an abstract set of concepts. What makes a dream vivid, after all, is that you experience it in 'sensaround'.

I had this in mind last year when I gave a light-hearted talk at Melbourne Writers Festival in 'The Story Hospital', asking the audience to imagine their reader as someone in a hospital, coming out of a coma. Everyone was clear about the series of questions a waking disoriented coma patient would ask: 'Where am I?' 'What happened?' 'What time is it?' 'Who are these other people with me?' 'What's going to happen to me now?' Once those questions are answered, a relieved sense of orientation follows, and each provides a crucial element of unfolding narrative be addressed if a story is to be compelling, but that primary question, 'Where am I?', the audience members agreed, is always going to come first. A story can't get started until we know where we are, and why it matters.

There is a huge range of ways to do this beyond simple description, and all work to create the mysteriously amalgamated thing which is a memorable story. Where ARE we? And how can I integrate it into a coherent, compelling sequence – into the particular, startling, strange universe of my story?

Eudora Welty had much to say about how integral a precise sense of place is in fiction, and how much hinges on rendering it well. 'Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced, in the novel's progress,' she wrote. 'Every story would be another story, and unrecognisable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else.'*

Establishing place, setting and timeframe early in a story provides, then, exactly what a reader needs to feel immersed and engaged. They give context and a sense of purposeful momentum by anchoring your characters in particularity. This specificity creates a potent opportunity to being crystallising your story's meaning in scenes, rather than generic exposition.

'Two people go shopping' is vague, generic and hard to engage with, while 'A couple get stuck in the traffic on the way to a bed sale at Slumberland' is not only a clear and potent scenario for your reader, it's much, much easier to plunge into as a visceral and sensory opening scene for you, the writer, to start inventing.

Now place can not only anchor and orient your reader but also start to open up some of the subtextual layers waiting to be explored and embodied. Like the establishing shot in a movie's opening images, choosing a specific and potent place directs your reader's attention towards what is causal and integrated, not random, general, or accidental.



Image by Robert Waghorn from Pixabay.

A story needs to take place in ‘real time’, and when a writer delays situating a story in a specific time and place, it can feel amorphous and abstract, with passages of summarised information (‘I grew up on a farm in a big family. Over the years we experienced many hardships including a few bushfires’) which start to feel like a delay in ‘the real story’ starting. When the significant dramatised action the reader is waiting for fails to materialise, they disengage.

Placing them into a deliberately specific time and place creates immediacy and momentum. (‘The year I turned twelve, we kept a pile of hessian sacks ready by the water tank, for the fire my father was sure was going to come that year. 7pm, on the sweltering night of the summer lightning storm, it started.’)

Speaking of the weather, see how specificity helps the author out here, too. Potent and specific locations add to the reader’s understanding of characters, building the atmosphere and providing an arena in which the story pushes itself forward. ‘That makes it ... the responsibility of the writer,’ Eudora Welty maintained, ‘to disentangle the significant – in character, incident, setting, mood, everything – from the random and meaningless and irrelevant.’

The reader only has what is on the page. If they sense the physical or psychic world you are

conjuring is not serving and enriching the story but is merely gratuitous or filler, they will stop reading. As Elmore Leonard famously advised in his ‘10 Rules for Writing’*. ‘Never open a book with weather. If it’s only to create atmosphere, and not a character’s reaction to the weather, you don’t want to go on too long. The reader is apt to leaf ahead looking for people.’

If you don’t want them to leaf ahead, place, time and setting must be more than a mere generic backdoor abstraction. Great authors commandeer our attention with a verve that makes us sit up and see and hear what’s happening. I defy any reader to leaf ahead of the opening passages of Barbara Kingsolver’s ‘The Poisonwood Bible’, in which she takes the unusual and highly authoritative step of addressing the reader directly and positioning them alongside an unwavering, omniscient ‘voice’ which roves through a jungle like an all-seeing eye:

‘Imagine a ruin so strange it must never have happened. First, picture the forest. I want you to be its conscience, the eyes in the trees. The trees are columns of slick, brindled bark like muscular animals overgrown beyond all reason ...’

The mesmerising pull of Kingsolver’s evocation of place is literally ‘cinematic’, right down to the way she directs our attention, finally, to the cast of characters entering the frame: ‘Away down below

now, single file on the path, comes a woman with four girls in tow, all of them in shirtwaist dresses.'

Or the crisp, urgent voice which opens Tim Winton's 'Breath', which hooks us with immediacy and momentum as the characters 'come sweeping up a tree-lined boulevard with siren and lights' and see a house incongruously 'lit like a cruise ship.'

We are avidly attentive of cinematic art onscreen, teeming with visual and auditory detail which is carefully composed and codified, quickly established, and causal to story. We are primed to understand that nothing we are being shown, in Welty's words, is random, meaningless or irrelevant.

When an author can render a similar effect on the page, we are effortlessly transported into that longed-for 'vivid and continuous dream'. We're oriented, immersed, hypnotised. Now we'll go anywhere, into whatever place they direct us. ⑩

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Cate Kennedy is the author of three poetry collections, a novel, a memoir and two collections of short stories. She is the recipient of several awards for her work including the Queensland Literary Prize for her collection 'Like a House on Fire', the NSW Premier's People's Choice Award for her novel 'The World Beneath' and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for her most recent poetry collection, 'The Taste of River Water'.

The Bitter Lie

By Penny Smits

Let us sing our praise of the bitter lie,
Dismiss the stolen children's cry.
Favour fallacies and fairy tales,
Worship thieves blown in by hearty gales.

Let us sing our praise of the bitter lie,
Deny bloodshed under deathly skies.
Reject sovereign clans of noble grace,
Elect foolish pawns of a 'higher race'.

Let us sing our praise of the bitter lie,
Watch glibly as democracy dies.
The traumatic scars of colonial lore,
Weep on now and forevermore. ⑩

Penny Smits is a Melbourne-based writer who shares Māori (Ngāpuhi) and Aboriginal (Bindjali) heritage.

I Must Act



PEN Melbourne update by Isobel Hodges.

In 2018 Banksy collaborated with street artist Borf on a 21-metre mural. The New York protest piece was hatched with evenly-spaced tally marks on a plain background, a pattern disrupted just once by a woman's face and hands. 'Free Zehra Doğan' was painted in the bottom right corner. With this the lines were given context; became prison bars and a record of the number of days spent by Doğan in a Turkish jail.

In 2016 Kurdish artist and journalist Zehra Doğan painted a watercolour from a photograph which had been distributed on social media by Turkish state officials. The military propaganda photograph documented the 2015 destruction of the predominantly Kurdish city of Nusaybin by Turkish Armed Forces. Doğan's painting, as in the widely-circulated military image, shows the ruined city of Nusaybin dotted with Turkish flags.

Doğan's watercolour is faithful to the original image in layout, lighting and mood. Where the composition diverges from realism is in the foreground of Doğan's version – some of the parked military vehicles have morphed into scorpion-like machines and one of them is devouring humans. In March 2017 Doğan was imprisoned for two years and ten months for 'propagandising for a terrorist organisation' for this painting; a news article covering the military attacks; and her social media posts.

Adding to the Kafkaesque performance of power, in sentencing Doğan, the Turkish government took umbrage at the depiction of red Turkish victory flags strung from the ruins of a Kurdish city. 'They gave me a prison penalty for taking the photo of destroyed houses and putting Turkish flags on them, but it wasn't me who did it, it was them. I just painted it,' commented Doğan in a now-deleted tweet.

Doğan's all-female news agency was one of 150 news outlets forcibly closed by state decree in a government media crackdown following Turkey's 2016 state of emergency. The usual 'subversives'

targeted by violent dictatorships – academics, lawyers, judges, teachers and journalists – have been imprisoned, tortured and 'disappeared'. And Turkey's violation of the rights to liberty, security and life, extend to a majority of Kurdish victims. PEN International advocates for several writers oppressed by Turkey and has been advocating for freedom of expression in Turkey for decades.

Kurdish journalist Behrouz Boochani has been illegally detained by Australia on Manus Island in appalling conditions since 2013. Fleeing persecution and oppression led him to seek refuge in Australia. Instead Boochani was catapulted into an ongoing horror engineered by Australians, financed by Australians and supported by successive Australian governments.

In addition to his journalism and filmmaking, Boochani wrote the multi-award-winning 'No Friend But the Mountains', reflecting on power and the relationship between colonialism, forced migration and economic exploitation. We are reminded that Australia's human rights record encompasses the inhumane and brutal conditions on Manus Island and Nauru and ongoing violence and genocide against Indigenous peoples in Australia.

On 24 February, Zehra Doğan was released from prison. In the video published just after her release she said, 'I do not have the right nor the pretext to do nothing, I must act.' On 31 January, Boochani was awarded the Victorian Prize for Literature and the Prize for Non-Fiction at a ceremony he couldn't attend because he remains imprisoned by the Australian government on Manus Island. ⑩

Behrouz Boochani @BehrouzBoochani
Zehra Doğan: @zehradoganjinha

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Freedom of expression is not a crime.

Putting Players in their Place

Claire G Coleman explores the effect that moving through Country has on her writing.

I have been told on more than one occasion that I write about place and landscape beautifully, that my visceral writing about Australia helps my readers feel like they are travelling in those places. It's challenging to unpack how I do it, though, as I am not aware of learning or consciously studying how to write places. You can imagine, I am sure, how hard it is to explain something I was not aware of ever knowing.

It's no secret that I wrote my debut novel 'Terra Nullius' while travelling around Australia; my caravan only just liveable, my car barely roadworthy. Every fresh vista, every dryly beautiful part of Country was an inspiration. Perhaps it was my own movement that drove the story, that created the characters, that made them who they were.

A question comes up from time to time, perhaps more than any other, on radio on panels: 'do you think your own movement was why the characters had such a high tendency to move around themselves?' My characters moved constantly, perhaps proving, in that way, the theory that all characters are mere reflections of their writers. If it is genuinely true, I worry deeply who I actually am, with my villains the mirror must be dark indeed.

Every day, every one- or two-thousand words, we moved, towing the caravan, praying it would not break apart and the car would not break down, finding a new home for the van so we could have a new dwelling within. I barely found time to catch my breath, my eyes ate everything, my mind digested it and my hands typed it out on the Bluetooth keyboard slaved to my iPad.

Why did it appear my personal movement was fundamental to 'Terra Nullius'? I believe that place is a part of story, place is a character as

pivotal as any other. Place can be a villain, the environmental risks that plague your characters, or it can be the hero, saving them at a pivotal moment. Like any other personage, everybody reacts and interacts with setting differently; those interactions help to define them.

My travels drove the characters forward and gave their static colleague, the landscape, momentum. Dynamic characters are more powerful; the easiest way to create that dynamism in landscape is to have the players move through it.

*

Where I sit writing this, on the banks of a river, tall poplars, planted by colonisers, fight majestic indigenous river red-gums for space and sun. The river, once powerful, is low and thin; global warming and water theft has stolen it from us. Yet it feels to me like the country is fighting back.

There's a road close by, bringing the smell of country highway, rotting meat, dead wallaby. It is not cars that country roads smell of but corpses. The arteries of the colonial project, all roads bring is death.

Only by being in Country, by experiencing the landscape, can it truly be understood and not one of us is capable of writing a place we do not understand. Perhaps that is why Indigenous writers are so good at writing about our homes. Country is part of our identities, understanding Country is part of self-understanding. Knowing a friend's place is part of knowing them better.

I cannot tell you how to write about places better, only those landscapes can teach you that. Get out there in place, feel, see, hear, smell them, live within them and understand them. The beauty, the pleasant things in the environment are no more important than the things that make you

feel ill. Your understanding of those places might not be the same as the way someone else sees them: what you find unpleasant someone else might believe paradisiacal. Again, how your characters see the landscape they are in tells you more about them than about the places themselves.

*

It's not hard to get into landscape, not physically. Short-distance travel can take you somewhere – you might even find a place you have never seen in a book before. The challenge is getting into those places mentally and spiritually to better understand them. It's well known, now, that early 'explorers' in Australia, who considered themselves mostly to be Europeans in an alien, hostile environment, could only see our landscapes with European eyes.

“Landscape is a person; it has a personality and relationships, it has friends, family and enemies.”

To truly occupy landscape mentally and spiritually, eyes and mind must be retrained; landscape must be understood in its own right. A colonial, prejudicial eye that sees Australia as a too-bright place Through the Looking Glass from Europe can never treat these landscapes as beautiful in themselves. If you cannot love your home, you cannot write about it compellingly. Sometimes even the hate some of my characters feel for places is driven by my own deep love of them. I have to see them clearly to understand why others might not.

The Australian 'desert', which was once defined as a place unsuitable for sheep, is not an ugly lifeless place to the people who have lived there for tens of thousands of years. To all Indigenous Australians, nowhere is more beautiful, more perfect, than home. Home is Country. Country is a relative, a member of the family who is missed when away.

Every part of the continent is someone's sacred Country; even the city, that most changed of environments was someone's place once. It still is.

Landscape is a person; it has a personality and relationships, it has friends, family and enemies. When I write about places I think about them as people, their relationships with other people and people's relationship with that place. Your place cannot speak for itself, it's in a character's point of view that the author shows us what a place is like. All people are unreliable judges of place, it's important that unreliability is written into their interactions with and thoughts about landscape.

*

The weather where I am can't quite decide what it's doing, the wind direction keeps changing, every shift carrying the risk that the smell of corpse will assault me again. The sun is quite hot but the wind from most directions is cooler, if I stay outside in the stink the temperature is more bearable. I know that eventually I will acclimatise to the smell of death; it's a bit like garlic, a bit like truffle but somehow sickly sweet.

Decades ago I read a Fritz Lieber novel that identified the 'sweet smell of death'; it's a sickening idea that rotting corpses smell sweet. It is nevertheless true. I ponder how one of the characters in my work in progress would react to that smell and realise that relationship was in flux. In the beginning she would have run from that stench, eventually though she would have no choice but to acclimatise to it. That understanding helps me understand her better.

There is only one solution to writing place better. Get out from behind your desk and get out there in the world. If you understood this continent like Indigenous people do, if you loved it like we do, you might respect it and then maybe you would stop hurting it and the people who belong to it.

I can still have hope about that. ①

Claire G Coleman is a Wirlomin Noongar woman whose ancestral country is in the South Coast of Western Australia. Her debut speculative fiction novel 'Terra Nullius', written while travelling in a caravan, won a Black&Write! Fellowship and a Norma K Hemming award and has been shortlisted for the Stella Prize and an Aurealis Award. Her second novel 'The Old Lie' is slated for publication in the second half of 2019.

A Ladder to the Ground

David Sornig reflects on the writing and naming of Melbourne's Blue Lake.

I recently wrote a book called 'Blue Lake: Finding Dudley Flats and the West Melbourne Swamp'. The book centres on telling the fragmentary history of a large blind spot in the west of Melbourne. The site, which takes in the entire area between the city's CBD and Footscray, was once a lush wetland but has since become a labyrinth of industrialised discontinuity that has no particular name. European settlement reduced it to a muddy swamp, dredged it to make the city's docks and ports, and infilled it with refuse. Its rubbish tips became host to a shanty town where the down-and-outs of the economic depression of the 1930s found precarious refuge. The book recovers the biographies of three of the shanty town's residents.

I came to know this site, or to find how I could feel my way through it, by walking it. Walking gave me an experience of directly meeting the points at which its present-day topography resisted and revealed itself to me at the most human of scales. I dodged traffic on busy roads; thought over the legal consequences of climbing fences or entering restricted zones; ignored or obeyed signs; crossed or was defeated by ditches, waterways and other dangers; was confronted by security forces; dug my fingers into the dirt to pick out the material traces of the past that are literally scattered across its surface; and was held in wonder by its magenta blooms of saltmarsh flora.

It was from these experiences that I was led back, to seek out its remaining fragments in the memories of those who had encountered it over the years, by listening to those whose business it was to still be there now, and reading about and seeing it in various archives, maps, photographs and art. From the work of thinking over these fragments I pieced together an account that I've (insufficiently) condensed into the paragraph above.

As you might be able to guess from its long title, the book is very much concerned with the problem of naming places.

I was reminded of this problem on a recent road trip up and down the Hume and Barton highways between Canberra and Melbourne. On this trip, I noticed the tension that holds between the way place dynamically shapes language (particular stony outcrops, rivers and mountains ask to be named in particular ways) and the tendency of language to hold place to uniform account. From the driver's seat of the car, I saw that traditional ways of working and living on the land have not only had laid over them the scouring effects of tree-felling, grazing, drainage and urban development, but of course and also the names given to things. I noticed, for example, the preponderance of creeks named by their length or their primary geographical feature. One Mile Creek, Eight Mile Creek, Stony Creek. I recognised that these were names that can be found uniformly around the country. I also noticed another obvious uniformity of names that are experienced at this high velocity: road, service station, rest stop, Motorway, Freeway. They all have in common the English language. They form part of a functional national-colonial network of making place.

Some of these same tensions around naming were apparent to me as I came to write and then to find a title for the book.

The 'Blue Lake' of its title describes the pre-European saltwater tidal lagoon that once dominated the area. It was made blue by the acid sulfate chemical composition of the blue-grey silt that lay at its bottom and hung in suspension in the water. The silt and its acidity inhibited algal and bacterial growth and gave the water its striking appearance.

While the lake was the last and largest of the Moonee Moonee Chain of Ponds, it is telling that I don't know whether the Wurundjeri, the traditional owners of the land, had a particular name for it. The designation of the area on settler maps and records shifted over the decades from 'Swamp' to 'Batman's Lagoon' to 'Batman's Swamp' to the 'North Melbourne Swamp'. 'Blue Lake' was never its proper name. This was only ever the descriptive term used for it by an early settler, George Gordon McCrae, who referred to it in an essay, long after it was drained and filled in. The name arrived as the book's title via my having borrowed it from The Orbweavers' song of the same name, which was itself a borrowing of that descriptive term of McCrae's.

“The Blue Lake has taught me something about that conundrum of place, which is to know that while place must be encountered, it cannot be known.”

The two proper names in the subtitle, 'West Melbourne Swamp' and 'Dudley Flats', appear out of historical order. 'West Melbourne Swamp' became the near-official and most-commonly used name for the entire area from the late 19th century onwards, and 'Dudley Flats' was the name that became attached to the 1930s shanty town owing to its proximity to the mudflats at the end of Dudley Street. These names disappeared as later industrial development retired them and their physical existence from the already-reclaimed wetland.

So, the title of the book is a place name that never was, and the subtitle is composed of names that once were but are no longer. Hence the arrival at the hinge of anxiety in the book and in its title, which rests on the verb: finding.

'Finding' suggests something both complete and ongoing. It reflects a conundrum about being in a place and knowing that it can't be known. In that conundrum is the experience of something like an imperative to continue to explore the possibility of transcending that gulf of knowing. Having found, I continue to find.

The book, in its account of the forgotten and fragmentary history of the site and of the people who lived there, is the very enactment of finding the places called 'Dudley Flats' and

the 'West Melbourne Swamp'. Giving this act of finding the title, 'Blue Lake' stakes a counterclaim to the discontinuous territory of the present, to the resistance it puts up to the human encounter with it and attests to my having witnessed the fragments of its history. The book submits this testimony to the reader, offering it up as a place where the intersubjective (if asynchronous) encounter between writer and reader might become possible.

Now, while I am no longer writing this particular book, I still find myself feeling compelled to return to the site, walking and witnessing, fossicking and finding. But rather than being engaged in a solitary act, I find myself re-encountering and coming to further know the place as a social location. I discuss it with people; I have collaborated with some wonderful artists on a radio documentary about it; and I walk around it with readers and friends.

While it will soon be time for me to walk away from it for a while, the Blue Lake has taught me something about that conundrum of place, which is to know that while place must be encountered, it cannot be known. I have learned to take from it a modest instruction both as a person and as a writer (two selves who are, I hope, mostly overlapping). It is that the first experience of place is feeling. It reminds me of the intimate sensory and emotional origins of writing. Feeling is the ladder to thought which is the ladder to words and to the phenomenon of art's leap of faith into shared intersubjectivity, into the abstract place Julio Cortázar in 'Hopscotch' calls the 'kibbutz of desire'. This is the place I'm really pursuing in writing. As in the game of hopscotch, the journey towards it, towards writing, begins with two feet on the ground, on the earth. In place. ⑩

David Sornig's books are the novel 'Spiel' (UWAP, 2009) and the non-fiction 'Blue Lake: finding Dudley Flats and the West Melbourne Swamp' (Scribe, 2018). His short stories and essays have appeared in journals, newspapers and magazines including 'Kill Your Darlings', 'Harvard Review', 'Griffith Review', 'Island' and 'The Age'. An audio documentary based on 'Blue Lake' will be available on ABC Radio National's 'The History Listen' in April 2019.

These Differing Frames

Jamie Marina Lau on writing place from the inside-out.

1. Something familiar: convincing ourselves we are not 'something' enough.

As writers, before or after we put something to a page we are likely to question whether or not we're close enough to the subject in order to fully capture it. In writing class, the most common question the class asks our lecturer is: can we write a place we've never been to, but know about, or a place we've spent minimal time in? Or, can we write a person we don't fully live inside the shoes of but can empathise with? Every writing lecturer says something different, but most agree that as long as there is a purpose for situating your story inside these differing frames – it could work.

2. When I wrote 'Panther', which was the first fragment in what would become my debut novel, I was writing to a timed prompt in Advanced Fiction Writing, Semester 2. In these automatic sessions, we didn't have the time to Street View a place, we didn't have time to research the trees that would line it, what cars were most likely parked on these streets. The prompt we were given was something broad, I think, something like 'write a home'. And of course, one of the first things we think about when we think about a home is what's outside of it. What does the landscape look like if you're standing at the window? The place I had described in my less-than-100-word response was a timber flat in an inner-city building. A busy Chinese home in a busy, non-Chinese surrounding. I had been chosen to read that week because I hadn't put

my hand up for any of the other weeks and it was nearly the end of semester. The general feedback was given. A classmate of mine had said; you can really *smell* it.

3. If we were to take the stance of writing from the inside-out, it could work. On Google, when we Street View or Google Earth, we can only see the outsides of homes. Sometimes now the technicalities are altered and we can look into public stores, restaurants or bars but it still looks flat and unrealistic. When I wrote the first 500 words of the book, I had not even thought about the outside of the apartment.

What I knew: it was upstairs, it was overlooking a street with bins and occasional people slipping in and through corresponding streets, there was no backyard. I knew this because it was the first thing I had noticed about my character, she felt squished.

4. Elements of the inside stretch onto the streets, onto the grey pavement. In the book, it doesn't extend beyond what is considered Chinatown for a while – my characters are staying in the house and right outside of it. And this says something about them, and it says something about the city they're in.

5. I've been to five different Chinatowns in five different cities. I have seen plenty in movies. There is something familiar for me in all of them.



Jamie Marina Lau. Photo: Jesse Mercieca.

6. In interviews I've talked about 'designated spaces' for culture and ethnicity to exist in. When you are the best version of your identity, you are probably in a comfortable space to do so. As a child I performed my culture in the spaces that Western society would feel comfortable with me doing so. I remember this Chinese restaurant we stopped at in Coober Pedy, a comment my mother had made about the black bean sauce looking like the giant flies bumping the windows. I remember the hot pot place in San Francisco we spent CNY in last year. Firecrackers going off in the gutters, hobby shops, ladders hanging from the tight buildings (this is what I imagine in 'Pink Mountain on Locust Island'). I remember the empty streets of the Los Angeles Chinatown, the import stores. The fruit shops in Sai Ying Pun, the Mandarin Centre and the Korean buffet upstairs in Chatswood, the statues of fruits with faces in Box Hill.

7. This is how I wrote the city in my book, and even more so, this is how I wrote the character in my book. The way that she consumed the place around her was the way she felt comfortable or uncomfortable within it. The way that she walked a street was the way the street instructed her to walk with its people and with its architecture and with its colonial buildings.

8. When we are given so much to look at (whether it be the way buildings fuse with time and reconstruction, deconstruction or whether it be with the historical and emotional information we absorb; the articles, the movies, the genres we consume) – it's hard to reduce a place and time to one moment of it. We are made up of different memories, different digital memories, different consumed/second-hand memories.

When we're writers, we're writers of this time with the resources made available to us. No place belongs to us, but what we take and what is stained in our memory of it, belongs to us.


9. We have this feeling of connecting to foreign places through familiar sound, moments, objects, colours, language, smell. For me, it was the way my grandparents, our family and the people surrounding me growing up, had all moved across borders and oceans to be in one place – then, not be in one place. I think I have adopted the same method of extracting elements of nostalgia I find in new places and adapting myself there through them. I wrote the book like this. I was not picturing 'home', I was picturing things which triggered 'home' in me. This is the way a lot of us will live, this is the way a lot of new writers will write, the way

voices that should be heard should be listened to. Alexis Wright said it well when she said in her essay, 'Is Travel Writing Dead?':

While my library contains the works of travel writers, I have mostly searched for those who speak about their own place in the world. But the world is changing and many people have no place to call home. Some of the most important kinds of travel writing now are stories of flight, written by people who belong to the millions of asylum seekers in the world.

10. Many places have restricted us from calling it home, many people have restricted others from connecting to a home. As writers, what is becoming more interesting than knowing a place is how our relationship to a place is cut through and morphed by others.

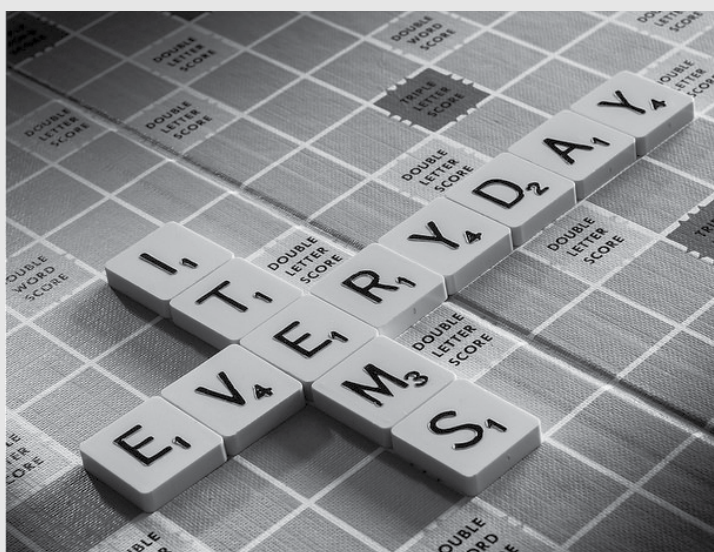
11. The way we read place is to read how the place may influence its character, its author.

For 'Pink Mountain on Locust Island', the 'unnamed Western city' became a character made up in the head of a fifteen-year-old who didn't know how to see herself in it, or comprehend it. We write as travellers and visitors, commentators, exposers of the places we've been to and lived inside of. You write from inside of the apartment until you discover you're writing the outsides too. 

Jamie Marina Lau is a writer and artist. Her debut novel, 'Pink Mountain on Locust Island' was published by Brow Books in April 2018 and shortlisted for the 2019 Stella Prize. She is currently working on her next novel, more writing, and producing music.

Nitpicker

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



1. Vera's place in the (1980's/1980s) needed a lick of paint.
2. The dilapidated bullnose verandah (that/, which) skirted three sides of the house, was her sanctuary in the afternoons.
3. She'd settle (in to/into) the couch Lionel had left behind when he'd skidaddled.
4. 'Bloke was no good for nothin' (' She'd/, she'd) mutter to anyone who'd listen.
5. But neither the cat stretched out on the window sill (nor/or) the old labrador at her feet stirred.

Answers on page 32

CC image courtesy of John Bugg on Flickr.

Block With Development Potential, STCA

Jock Serong visits his childhood home and finds an intersection of memory and place.

I was driving through Melbourne's eastern suburbs, alone and killing time.

The main road was a stranger to me until it started whispering familiar thoughts, and I saw I was only blocks from my childhood home. One of them, at least. Dad worked in sales – we moved around.

This was the place I'd lived in from age four to nine; the time I had felt most keenly the protective cocoon of my parents' love. The garden my father kept immaculately mown and clipped. The circular above-ground Clark Rubber pool he installed one blistering summer. The backyard that I visualised as I wrote the terrain in my novel, 'The Rules of Backyard Cricket'. The living room where we unpacked a brand-new wood-grain Rank Arena colour TV, plugged it in and marvelled at the iridescent orange of Ossie Ostrich's beak.

I rolled north up the street, past the Yamadas' house. A Japanese man married to a French woman – impossibly exotic, the two of them in the 'burbs. The Philands, whose son Murray told me always to do woodwork with screws because nails could fly out and hit your eye. The tree where our friends' minibus had screeched to a halt one footballing afternoon, loaded with kids, because one of them had somehow got his penis stuck in the fly of his jeans and they needed our mum, a nurse, to extricate it. The family across the road, whose pretty daughter Mandy pushed me into their decorative pond, and when I rose in shame and dripping fury and called her a dingaling because it was the most extreme insult I could think of, had collapsed with laughter and ingrained the humiliation forever.

These points, both temporal and physical, were my coordinates as I slowed the car, searching for number thirty-seven.

But the white timber fence did not appear. The fence, built by the grumpy and probably long-dead carpenter who threw my scooter into the garden because I ran over his extension lead.

I did a double-take, checked my bearings. No, the fence was not there.

In its place was a temporary fence: one of those wire barriers connected by footing blocks, that denote construction in progress. That was the first thing I saw. Then I saw a rubbish skip on the kerb, hulking under the flowering gum that used to consume our footballs and frisbees. Protruding from the skip was a torn-off section of plasterboard wall, and as I studied, reality came hammering in.

The wall was my bedroom wall. The wallpaper could not be mistaken: its rows and rows of colourful locomotives against a white background, the ones I would run my finger over in the bottom bunk as sleep overtook me and whispered conversations with my older brother on the bunk above would fade and expire.

My focus lengthened, through the fencing to an empty block, excavator tracks still visible in the erupted soil.

The block in its totality: bare, flattened earth, made no sense to me. The back lawn my father had agonised over, mowing long, straight tracks in his shorts and sneakers – it was immense. The house had room for all of us, with leftover space out the front for another lawn, garden beds and that fence. There was

a wide driveway down one side of the house, wide enough that one spring I planted petunias along its edge and the car could pass them with room to spare. There was a garage at the end of that driveway, and although it never housed the car, it was home to all the oil-smelling machinery that made our garden so impeccable.

How did that sprawling world fit on the short oblong of desolation that remained?

I rang my brothers afterwards, after the unexpected sting of tears was over. I didn't ring my parents – cocoons are by their very nature impermanent.

The brothers were philosophical: after all, pre-fab neo-Georgian masionettes had been devouring the eastern suburbs for years, and a neat post-war three-bedroom weatherboard had no heritage claim to make against them. With its vast front and back yards, our house was arguably a poor use of land. The masionette would suffer no such deficiency: it would glower high over the paling fence and within inches of its posts and rails on three boundaries, and eaves be damned.

Within six months, the same fate had befallen our next home, a few kilometres away. I felt less sentiment over its loss: this one was populated by teenage memories. I suffered no great trauma in those years – just adolescence – but enough of the memories were troubling that any nostalgia had been counterbalanced in the instinctive ledger we keep of such things.

We'd added a second bathroom onto the back of this place. As it was being plastered I'd stashed a Matchbox car in the framing of the wall before the Gyprock sealed it in there. I anticipated that one day, centuries hence, someone might take apart the wall and find the little maroon ambulance parked on a timber stud like a time capsule. In my imagining, that future someone would marvel at the cuteness of the gesture.

Centuries, it turned out, was thirty-nine years. Not a bad stretch for such an ambition, I suppose. But the savage sweeps of the excavator would have obliterated every trace of the little car. No-one picked it up, pondered its provenance. They annihilated living memory because that's the job.

I wondered for a while why the two demolitions hurt so much. I can only conclude this: both experiences punctured the safe assumption that anyone carries while living in a house: the belief that this is my house. That sense of proprietorship – false and seductive – is heightened if you are a child, or if you raise children in it. The presence of children fills a dwelling with emotional overburden; leftover laughter and arguments, love and hope and disappointment concentrated into a focal point like an animation of lightning strikes.

No house is ever yours. Families occupy them, coalesce then splinter. Then another family does the same thing in that house. Perfect small children grow until they shave and take your car. And unless the house says something impressive about aesthetic values – which ultimately shouldn't matter – one day the heavy machinery arrives. Because another couple wants to also press their cheek to their warm sleeping children, but in a bigger room with north-facing light and a new shade of Boston Slate Interior.

Ephemerality distresses me. My memories pixelate and freeze, decompose and rearrange themselves and cannot be trusted. Almost every photograph of my childhood was lost in a fire when I was a young adult. I am no longer sure those years existed.

But those two unexceptional houses, in their undifferentiated streets, they stood for something. They told me that the past really happened: until they could no longer guarantee it. ⑩

Jock Serong is the author of 'Quota', winner of the 2015 Ned Kelly Award for Best First Fiction; 'The Rules of Backyard Cricket', shortlisted for the 2017 Victorian Premier's Award for Fiction, finalist of the 2017 MWA Edgar Awards for Best Paperback Original, and finalist of the 2017 Indies Adult Mystery Book of the Year; and 'On the Java Ridge', winner of the 2018 Colin Roderick Literary Award and shortlisted for the 2018 Indie Awards. His latest book, 'Preservation', (Text Publishing) is based on the true story of the wreck of the Sydney Cove.

Where Place Becomes Canvas

Nancy Langham-Hooper reflects on street art and the importance of seeing things differently.

When my friend Catherine moved back to Norway from England, she missed the squirrels that would run along her back fence in Oxford: wary, trembling and unintentionally hilarious. Though she had grown up in 'the Bible Belt of Norway', she realised how much she had forgotten its ways. People tended to shiver, like squirrels, at her ideas and opinions. As she tried to both be her true self and behave like a local, she could feel the incomprehension and judgement directed towards her. It was that silent disapproval that finally led her to act out.

One night, as her husband minded their sleeping children, she crept out of the house with an armful of rebellion. The next morning, the townspeople awoke to squirrels: running up the drainpipes two by two, quivering on utility boxes and phone booths. Made of glued paper that would eventually wear away, she asserted her true self on a place that couldn't accept it, and it made her feel a bit better. Catherine's squirrels are perhaps not the first thing that comes to mind when discussing street art, but for me they are everything that makes it unique.

Street art and graffiti are certainly different genres (at least, according to most city councils), but they are difficult to separate historically. Most graffiti/street art used to be illegal until recent years, and the most common type was tagging, a marking of territory by gangs or just an individual's rebellious mark on the city. Each person had their tag, a unique

monogram that was carefully worked up and practiced over time. Police tracking down graffiti artists would sometimes seize school notebooks, looking for preliminary drawings of a tag to connect to the various places in the city it had surfaced. Tags remind me of holes punched in walls, anger appearing on a city, in places obvious and hidden. Graffiti is not done by the powerful, by those who built the smooth concrete railway walls or the bridges or the laneways. Yet graffiti, a simple tag, says to everyone in that place, 'I am here, too. Fuck you.'

Murals can have that same message. The first time I went to Belfast, about ten years ago, I was surprised to see how the evidence of the Troubles was still very much alive in the street art carefully marking Protestant and Catholic areas around the city. Badly drawn masked men with guns flashing particular colours on the side of a non-descript building told the viewer in no uncertain terms, 'Be on our team or be afraid'. It was scary, intimidating. Well-drawn portraits of heroes and martyrs were set next to text about not giving up the fight. In the heyday of the Troubles, less so today, these murals were a kind of map. You knew if you had wandered into a Protestant or Catholic neighbourhood by the smiling faces of the dead, the masks, the guns and the colours.

Though not always meant to intimidate, most street art attempts to shout to the viewer, to grab their attention. By moving on from simple tags or phrases, artists were able to create

a more complex and compelling message for anyone who happened by. Rather than a raw expression of anger, street art became something for the viewer to consider – a cry for justice, or a reclaiming of heritage. This is especially evident in Harlem, New York. The traditionally black, though currently culturally diversifying, neighbourhood is wallpapered with art: small and large murals, and even large-scale mosaics celebrating African-American culture. Much of it commemorates black heritage and achievement, and especially the flourishing of the arts during the Harlem Renaissance in the early twentieth century. Walking through Harlem, you see jazz greats play silently among a riot of colours, while the dignified portraits of Martin Luther King, Jr, Nelson Mandela and Barak Obama welcome the viewer to a place that is historically, provocatively, proudly black. Some murals have a didactic purpose: warning viewers of the dangers of drugs or the importance of education. Some are political, claiming the place as Native American land or dealing in many and various ways with the long history of racism in the United States. To know what the community in Harlem thinks about itself, what they are hoping and struggling with, you only need to look at the colourful walls.

Those walls also function as interruption. In a never-ending metropolis, street art can be a reminder of the humanity within urban spaces. In Melbourne, I love the cheeky smiling dragons that hide behind bins, or the lush jungle that takes up a whole side of a house, turning the laneway into a botanical extravaganza, with flowers the size of small cars and leaves that could shelter whole families. Whatever the viewer was preoccupied with as they approached, the art asserts itself into their day: 'What if there was a jungle here?', 'What do you see in this face?', 'What do you imagine in these colours?'. Though now often sanctioned by the city, or commissioned by private owners, street art still defiantly asserts its place. From I am here to we are here to you are here.

That's what Catherine did. No one can know if her scampering squirrels changed anyone's mind, but they did help Catherine finally take ownership of her surroundings.

Beginning as anger and rebellion, those paper and glue disruptions became her reconciliation to her past, a marking of her old and new territory, and a plea for the passers-by to see things differently. ⑩

Nancy Langham-Hooper is an art historian and writer based in Melbourne. Academically, she specialises in British nineteenth-century painting. Her non-academic writing, however, covers many diverse topics within art and culture. She is proud to be a Digital Writer in Residence for Writers Victoria.

The Fire

By Barry Revill

And they reached the back of the house, and the sun was getting a bit higher and the heat was coming up a bit and there was wind and some swirling around of the dust out in the paddocks and the galahs were taking a bit of a feed and he could see all this as they were walking along. The dust came up on to his boots and up on to her shoes too, and it kicked up as they walked, and the country looked dry all around, even up on the top of the hill where there were some sheep. And he saw all this as they walked.

They came towards the house, the sun had got a bit higher and the heat was coming up from the paddocks. He could see the dust rising in the top paddock where the wind had come down from the gully. They both knew it was going to be a rotten day and it could be a day for fires. The last time the fires had come through, even years later, the people were talking about the speed of it all. How it had come to the edge of the town and, strangely enough, had stayed there for a while. Then the wind changed, and with the change came the fear, and it was real fear because people knew this was it, there was nothing you could do to save yourself, or anything. And worse, you would have thought you could have done something to help someone else as well, like the bloke who lived in the caravan further up the gully.

But they saw him in the morning, and he waved, and he looked ok, and then they saw him again later in the morning when the fire was coming up the hill, and moving fast. They saw him wave, and then he waved again, and then again, and then the fire came upon him, and they heard the screams and it was not the

sound you would want to hear again, not the sounds of a man being burnt to death. They found him later in the day when the fire had gone through. Though the heat was still in the air, you could breathe a little – but not much. They found him where the caravan had been, which was difficult to detect because this fire had been ferocious, but they found him anyway and you could see that when the fire caught him he was heading for the iron bark tree, where the remains of his rifle lay. ⑩

Barry Revill is an 83-year-old writer who is the first to admit, he was, for years, a talking writer. Since retiring some years ago he has gone on to have monologues performed, short stories published, 'Muses' published in 'The Age', and a book of collected stories on the way to, hopefully, publication.

A Haunting

By Andrew Trounson

She woke to find him turned away from her, breathing softly. His knees were pulled up tight to his chest, the sheet wrapped snug, up to his chin. The lines around his eyes had retreated, leaving the skin puffy and red. Spooning him, she nuzzled the back of his head and breathed in his soft closeness. Then slowly, so as not to wake him, she slid out of bed to make coffee.

But on standing she felt groggy and light, as though she were staggering and floating at the same time, the motion both nauseous nauseating and strangely somniferous. She swayed down the hallway to the kitchen, frowning as she went.

Sunlight streamed through the kitchen windows, but she felt cold in the shaded house. Draughts curled about her naked feet and ankles. She padded across the floorboards, into the light, but felt no warmer.

It was as though the earth had shifted during the night to an outer circumference, and now even the sunlight was empty of warmth, exhausted by its long journey.

It was then the charms of cold began to claim her, offering her numbness and clear nothingness, and promising to end the dizziness.

But she wanted to make him coffee, to put the mug on his bedside table and watch the swirling steam tempt him into wakefulness. She wanted to see him stretch awake, when for a moment his eyes would shine with confused newness, and she would kiss his surprise and hold it to her like a talisman, to have him always as he was before the veil of consciousness claimed him.

She turned on the tap and listened to the pipes groan as she filled the kettle. The gas whispered to her and crackled into flame, and she sat down on the small step at the threshold to the kitchen to wait for the water to boil. But as soon as she was still the cold came again and she closed her eyes, the numbness lulling her away from her limbs. A darkness found her. All around wafted vapours and distant voices. She crouched, her head between her knees, and began slowly to fall into herself in a dizzying spiral. But then the kettle screamed and she jumped up.

Holding their mugs tightly, she walked slowly back up the corridor, bracing herself against the walls, spilling coffee over her fingers as she went. She didn't stop to wonder that it didn't scald her, she was anxious now to get back to him.

He was awake, sitting up with his feet on the carpet, his face turned up to the ceiling as though he was reading the thread-like cracks in the plaster. He was holding back tears, tilting back his head to keep them from falling.

He didn't want to cry. It was all too exhausting, too debilitating. But when he blinked the spell of water tension finally broke, and the tears fell in quiet streams.

Still, he refused to give in to them. He clenched his teeth as though he were trying to squeeze the tears away. Yesterday his tears had seemed to him as precious as blood, but now he just wanted to squeeze himself dry. He wanted a desert, a simple plain, and a rock to shelter under, to give him time to claim himself back from what was gone.

But she saw his tears and inwardly rejoiced. It was as though rain had come after a long drought, and she felt like running outside to let the raindrops prick her skin and wet her hair. She saw the softness in him and his loneliness reached out to her.

Shakily, she put down the mugs on the bedside table, and knelt beside him, rubbing his knees as though he were cold, as though it was he who shivered, not her.

For a moment he kept his face towards the ceiling, and then he seemed to relax, his shoulders slumping in relief. His tears stopped and as she watched him take a deep breath she felt a strange weight descend on her. Her head began to ache and her eyes hurt. She tried to put her hand up to his cheek to wipe away the salted snail tracks left there, but as she reached for him she began to feel strangely insubstantial.

Her fingers trembled just above his skin, and she suddenly feared that if she touched him she would fall endlessly. She tried to speak but her words were buried like a lost stone tablet, its language forgotten. She felt paralysed before him, and fearful that at any moment she would fade.

She wished he would just look down at her and help, but instead he stood up and wiped his face, and as he did so the weight on her increased and she slumped to the floor. She tried to get up too but she couldn't feel her legs.

Ignoring his coffee, he went to shower instead. She tried to follow him, dragging herself by her arms into the hallway. But it was exhausting and she could only watch as he disappeared down the corridor to the bathroom.

She waited, sprawled in the corridor, hoping that he would see her, but when he came back he just stepped over her. Behind her she heard him dress and then he pulled something out from under the bed.

She heard the harsh clicks of a case being unlocked, then drawers opening and closing, hangars screeching along the clothes rail. And then for a moment the weight on her seemed to lift, and she crawled back to the bedroom doorway.

Her suitcase lay on the bed, full of her clothes. Standing by the chest of drawers he was holding her old green jumper out before him. The wool had thinned and it hung limp, out of shape. She could not remember when she had last worn it, though she had scarcely been out of it the winter they first met. Years before she had gone to throw it out, but he had asked her to keep it. And so, she had kept it, too scared as the years went by to ask him again if she should throw it out.

Carefully he laid it on the bed and let his hands linger over the fabric, before slowly folding it again and putting it back in her bottom drawer. And then he left. She was too weak to stop him.

The day wore on into afternoon and the sun penetrated the hallway, lighting up the whirling eddies of dust that slowly settled on her. She listened as cars went by and footsteps came and went, and then it was night and still he didn't come back. Instead, the next day her sister and a friend visited the house with two large suitcases. They packed up all her remaining things – her shoes, her books, her drawings, the braided ribbons she hung from the curtain rails and door knobs – and left.

A few days later, or maybe weeks, the house was given up to removal men who shifted out all the furniture, stripping the rooms bare. They were followed by real estate agents and couples who walked around with their arms folded. She dragged herself out of the way and collapsed in a corner of the spare room.

But when finally the house was quiet again she found that she could no longer even drag herself around. Her arms had finally gone numb like her legs. It seemed only a matter of time before the numbness would spread and claim her completely.

*

The little girl ran down the hallway past the still unopened moving boxes, breezing through the kitchen and out into the brick-paved garden. She tore down branches to thrash and chew, stamping on ants and beetles because they moved. She yelled her voice into all the spaces, big and small, filling the new house with whoops, squeals and pleadings. She claimed it all for herself, except for the spare room.

A cardboard box taller than herself barred the way to the door. She went to brush it aside, but it was heavy. She felt the weight of the packaging inside it shifting and clinking. Frustrated, she pushed at the base of it, sliding the box just enough to squeeze through to the door, and then heedlessly rushed inside the room.

It was empty. She yelled and it echoed back at her. She yelled again, spun about in the middle with her arms out and ran around the room, her fingers skimming the walls. One corner, two corner, three corner, and then she tripped. 'Ouch,' she shrieked, more put out than hurt. But there was no reassuring echo. Her cry died flat and a curdled silence fell about her, holding her fast like an adult's hands.

It was then she heard the small voice inside her that had been biding its time. It whimpered as though it could be crushed just like the insects in the garden, like it didn't belong, like it wasn't her room, like she was being watched. She scrambled up and banged past the box in the doorway, fleeing from the unseen woman still laying in the corner.

After that the little girl became quiet and nervous. She started having nightmares that sent her parents rushing in to soothe her in the middle of the night. And there were panic attacks that came from nowhere, like a rising intake of breath that wouldn't stop till she screamed.

Her parents took turns taking her to a therapist, waiting with her in reception, encouraging her to talk during the sessions. At night they asked themselves where this doubt and fear had come from. And they shared their sadness that she had changed, that she had suddenly grown older, become like them. ⑩

Andrew Trounson is a Melbourne-based writer and journalist. He likes writing and sharing very short fiction/reflective pieces because they are readily finished and they make the weight of his dust-covered notebooks easier to bear. He is still writing that adventure story novel.

For Sale: A Past Life

By Mary Howley

'The carpet could be pulled up,' Barry says as he bounces on the carpet. The floorboards underneath make a painful squeak. They must be as arthritic as my knees.

'Caro, I reckon the boards might be alright.' His eyes are seriously intense.

I jerk my neck. Caro? Did he call me Caro? Do all real estate agents have this instant familiarity with their clients?

Bazza, the name's Caroline, I correct him in my mind as I inhale the stale mustiness of the old house. Hmm, Mum used to walk around this house spraying magnolia air freshener. It could do with a spray now.

'Just a sand n' polish and the floorboards will look pretty spiffy.' Barry's shaved scalp is as shiny as Mum's stainless-steel kitchen sink used to be.

'So, Barry, is the price negotiable?' I'm doing my best to fake it.

His face tightens. 'You could put in a lower offer, but ... I can't guarantee anything.' Beads of sweat form on his forehead; his suit is about two sizes too small. I know he needs this sale. Things are tight in the housing market. I really shouldn't be here, giving him the impression that he's got a possible buyer.

I walk into the room that used to be my bedroom, recalling where all of the furniture used to be. Bed here, doll's cot there, white Queen Anne dressing table there by that wall. I could hear my five-year-old self, 'Hey Mum who's Queen Anne?'

'Three big-sized bedrooms,' Barry says shadowing me as I walk from room to room. I stop abruptly at Mum and Dad's bedroom door. Barry almost collides into the back of me. I'm remembering how their whisperm used

to drift through my fairy-floss-pink bedroom wall. Most nights as I lay cocooned in my bed, I could hear their muffled laughter and then shortly after, I'd hear Dad's gurgling snores.

Mum used to say that we were lucky. 'Can't get better than this,' she'd say referring to her life – our life, together, here. Dad used to kiss her and then he'd pretend he was going to eat her cheek. My brother and I would put our hands over our eyes, feigning disgust at their affection for one another. We'd scream, 'Yuck! You two are gross!'

I walk out of Mum and Dad's room and into what used to be my brother's room. Shane used to have a train set circling the floor until Mum stepped on it in the dark when she'd come in to wish him good night. Shane cried for hours. The train tracks were forever wonky after that.

Barry nods his head, navigating the floor plan. But I know it better than him.

'Lounge room is huge,' he says. 'You could have a few parties here.'

And my parents did ... oh shit! I'm wearing shoes on the carpet.

'Shoes at the door!' Mum used to command, her arm waving towards the front door. 'No shoes on my carpet.'

My eyes sweep around the empty room. It looks unloved and ... so much smaller than I remember. Right there in front of the window was where we'd position the spindly-silver Christmas tree. I place my hands in my pockets, because my fingers threaten to point the spot to Barry. All through December, Mum used to have the beige lace curtains gaping open, ensuring the neighbours noticed the heavily decorated tree.

'Kitchen's got that retro look everyone's mad for it,' Barry says pointing to the burnt-orange tiles. Hell! Are they still there? Dad was swearing like crazy the day he stuck those above the kitchen sink. The cheap adhesive he'd bought was – according to him, 'bloody useless.'

'Now kids don't jump around 'cos they'll fall like dominos,' he'd warned. My brother and I giggled behind our starfish hands at the white adhesive streaks all over his raven-black hair. I was wearing my pink Barbie pyjamas, goose-bumps all over my straw-thin arms, as the rain tapped on the terracotta roof tiles. Shane wore his Mickey Mouse pyjamas, the ones that hung limp around his skinny thighs.

I walk back to the lounge room and stand in the middle of the room. This was where the wooden coffee-table with the cigarette burns, used to be. Mum said it was a wild New Year's Eve party the night that Uncle Charlie, who was described by Mum as being 'drunk as a skunk', had scorched the table by butting his cigarette onto it. He hadn't realised that Mum had picked up the ash-tray and taken it to Uncle Terry, who was smoking on the back veranda. I'm guessing that the record player was probably spinning Dad's favourite tune which was, Roy Orbison's 'Only the Lonely' – hell, now it's playing in my head.

Barry walks to the wire back door, where Shane and I used to kneel, hoping to catch the first cool breeze after those stinking hot January days. He turns his rotund head to face me as he speaks.

'Just need to let you know that there has been a lot of interest in this house. The block's massive, half an acre in all, if you demolish this old house you could build four units here ... easy.'

I nod silently, observing that Barry has taken the marketing push a notch higher. The desperation in his voice plucks at my guilt, I really shouldn't be wasting his time. Walking out to the backyard, I'm aghast at the clumps of thistles that have conquered what used to be a pristine lawn and garden. Every Saturday morning Dad mowed the lawn, manoeuvring the lawn mower with such reverence that it reminded me of a doting parent pushing a pram. Shane and I would cling onto the Hills Hoist and swing round and round, till Dad

would turn off the mower and yell at us to get off the clothes line.

My eyes search for any traces of the fruit trees that used to be growing along the back wooden fence. Walking closer to the fence I almost trip over the tree stumps that are concealed by the weeds. And then I realise that these stumps are the ghosts of what was once a flourishing orchard. It was right here that I spent my tenth birthday, sitting in the fork of the nectarine tree, biting into the ripe fruit and licking the sticky juice that trickled down my wrist.

'Hey, Caro, check out the lemon tree,' Barry says, pointing to the only tree that's still standing.

I smile as Mum's voice rings in my head. 'Shane, go pick me a few lemons, will ya, love. Uncle Charlie's brought flathead. We'll have it for dinner.' Her voice from the grave.

The passionfruit has spread profusely over the back wooden fence. It was only a sapling, all those years ago, thin-tentacle like tendrils just beginning to creep into the cracks between the palings. That's where Dad was standing, coiling the garden hose around his arm, when the police came.

Mum was standing at the kitchen window. 'He's gone,' she'd muttered over and over. 'My Shaney's gone.'

Barry's watching me and I feel an urgent need to explain to him about what happened to Shane but I can't verbalise it because it's still so bloody raw. I want to tell him that Shane had gone rabbit hunting a week after he got his car licence, driving Dad's Holden. He was bursting with excitement early that morning, while Mum made him sandwiches and I stirred his Milo in the saucepan over the stove. He'd turned eighteen the week before. Couldn't wait to go shooting; he was picking up the cousins – they were bringing the beers.

I'm remembering Dad's voice: 'When did he grow into a man?' He'd said that as we all watched Shane drive off with Uncle Terry's ferrets in the boot of the car and Dad's shot gun in the back seat. Huh, no seat belts in those days. He might have survived the crash if he was wearing one.

I'm trying not to cry as I walk back into the house. The thumping of doors greets me as Barry stands in the laundry, muttering something about laundry cupboards being cheap at Bunnings.

'This'd be a good renter, you'd make good money out of it.' He says, 'It's in a good location.'

I take the floor-plan brochure from Barry, leaving him to turn off the lights and lock up. Meanwhile I'm back in my car. I had to see the house one last time, but now my festering heart-wound is starting to bleed. The black hole of depression is always at the surface; I don't want to fall in.

Barry's walking on the cracked, concreted driveway. He's got a skip in his step; I'm guessing he thinks that he's got a sale. I start my car and take one long look at the house. Countless other owners and hundreds of footprints after my family had moved away and the house remained, guarding our secrets. I take one last look and wave goodbye to Barry and to the old house – the place that's anchored my past. ❶

Mary Howley worked as a teacher and interior designer before she began studying in the Professional Writing and Editing course at RMIT. She has had fiction and non-fiction stories published in magazines such as 'The Foothills', 'MiNDFOOD' and 'Country Style'.

Recently she worked in a restaurant and events venue, which gave her the idea for a crime fiction novel she is writing.

On the Lookout

By Allan Lake

I went out looking for one this afternoon, just after an uninspiring lunch of leftovers. Sometimes I hear one singing or repeating a single syllable but other times I catch sight of a flash of colour or happen upon one as it's dozing. I even located one by scent. You're unlikely to find one if you wander about hoping to find one but I do anyway. Like us, their habitat is anywhere, so I prowl with my net, my dart, combing the You Never Know Department. Rare ones behave like they want to be caught, flirt with you, flop into your arms. More love-making than wrestling. There's pastry and coffee along the way no matter what. Reward regardless. That's Policy. I don't believe in suffering while on the hunt; that generally comes later. You will capture and be captured by your prey or return home unscathed, in which case there's TV, a siesta, a book, another snack or even a bit of righteous dusting which doubles as atonement for being human and a reminder of the dust that is. This all fills hours well enough until I eyeball one, seize it and wrestle it into submission. Eventually we let go, wonder why and the whole process somehow starts again. Nothing found today, so this. ❷

Originally from Saskatchewan, Allan Lake has lived in Vancouver, Cape Breton Island, Ibiza, Tasmania and now calls Melbourne home. Two collections published: 'Tasmanian Tiger Breaks Silence' (1988); 'Sand in the Sole' (2014). Allan won Elwood Poetry Prize in 2016, Lost Tower Publications Poetry Comp 2017 and Melbourne Spoken Word Poetry Festival/The Dan Competition in 2018.

Milestones

Mary Birch is very pleased to announce that her book 'Breathe: the four-week breathing retraining plan to relieve stress, anxiety and panic' was launched in January by Hachette Australia in Australia and New Zealand and by its sister company Little, Brown Group in the UK and Ireland.

Nalini de Sielvie's 'Thistles in the wind', an autobiography of childhood in Sri Lanka, and then migrating to Australia in 1972, is a captivating story of fortitude in the pursuit of her dreams. Her indomitable spirit, faith, and resilience in the face of adversity and loss is truly inspiring, as the rich tapestry of her life is interwoven with optimism and determination to succeed in a new country.

Jacqui Greaves has published 'Gods of Fire', an historical fantasy, filled with elves, sex, adventure, death and mayhem. The book is available on all your favourite platforms: books2read.com/godsoffire

Karen Casey has published her first children's title 'The Extraordinary, Unordinary Gum Tree' in support of Australian farmers. It follows the story of four farm kids who explore nature in a unique and magical way. With the help of their native animal friends they turn some of nature's challenges upside down. 'The Extraordinary, Unordinary Gum Tree' is a privately published project from which \$1 of every sale goes to Aussie Helpers, a charity supporting farmers facing nature's challenges for real.

Comps & Opps

Henry Lawson Society Literary Awards 2018-2019

Entry forms are now available for the 2018-2019 Henry Lawson Society Literary Awards for : Traditional Rhyming Verse, Short Story, Free Verse, Henry Lawson Society poetry prize for members only, Encouragement Award for poetry and Wombat Award for poetry for children 12 years and under. Over \$3500 in prize money.

Closes 30 April

henrylawsonociety.org

Arteles - Enter Text

Enter Text is text-based one-month residency program based in Hämeenkyrö, Finland

Held October/November 2019, this is an international residency program for writers, researchers and artists working with text. The program brings together a diverse group of writers & artists from various backgrounds, with different ways of applying text & language in their work.

At Arteles, artists are given the freedom to create and deepen their focus in a stress-free environment. Share ideas and approaches, form collaborations and gain fresh perspective to your usual practice, without the pressure of producing a finalized body of work.

Closes 24 Apr

arteles.org/enter_text_residency.html

Growing Up Disabled in Australia anthology

Black Inc. is calling for submissions to 'Growing Up Disabled in Australia'. This anthology, edited by Carly Findlay, will be published in April 2020, and is open to non-fiction submissions between 1000 and 4000 words.

Closes 30 May

writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/news/new-anthology-calls-disabled-writers

International Writer's Residence in Reykjavík

In 2019 the Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature for the first time offers a free residency for a writer from another UNESCO City of Literature.

Reykjavík, a UNESCO City of Literature since 2011, offers a one month residency for a visiting writer from another UNESCO City of Literature. The offer is open to published fiction writers from, or affiliated with, any of the other 27 Cities of Literature, writing in any genre.

This first residency will be a one month stay for one writer during October 2019.

Closes 23 May

bokmenntaborgin.is/en/grondals-house-residence

Send your opp, comp, milestone or classified to
editor@writersvictoria.org.au

Nitpicker (from page 16)

1. 1980s 2. , which 3. into 4. , ' she'd 5. nor

Workshops and Courses

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

Online

The Business End: Grant Writing with [Amra Pajalic](#)

Writing grant applications for a new development project is a process fraught with confusion. Usually the advice writers receive is to be 'audacious,' but there are other factors to consider, such as ensuring your project is viable, preparing a budget, obtaining support letters, and selecting a writing sample. In this 90-minute webinar, Amra will share her own successful funding applications and give real-life examples of how to address the criteria and share the do's and don'ts from her experience as a grant assessor.

When: Mon 6 May, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$20/\$35

Non-member price: \$45

Level: All

The Business End: Career-Building with Crowdfunding with [Tansy Rayner Roberts](#)

Crowdfunding platforms offer a variety of benefits to authors at various stages of your career: for sourcing funding for special projects, or providing consistent long-term income. But it's not just about the money! A well-designed crowdfunding campaign inspires ongoing reader loyalty, and allows you to develop a community of supporters and well-wishers around your work. Tansy shares her experience with Kickstarter, Pozible and Patreon to innovate your way to a stable writing income.

When: Mon 20 May, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$20/\$35

Non-member price: \$45

Level: All

In-person

Overcoming Self-Doubt and Procrastination with [Annabel Smith](#)

This interactive workshop will delve deep into the thoughts and feelings that hold us back from achieving our potential as writers, including self-doubt, fear of rejection/criticism, procrastination, perfectionism and lack of resilience/staying power.

When: Thu 4 Apr, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Write Here, Write Now with [Angela Savage](#)

This 1.5-hour members-only 'taster' workshop is designed to help you turn your dream of being a writer into reality. Author and Writers Victoria Director Angela Savage will help you to identify your motivation to write and the obstacles that stand in your way. You will discuss practical ideas and strategies for organising your life in order to free up your time and energy to write. We'll discuss the creative process and how to find a way of writing that works for you, looking at a range of tools and strategies that may help you make a start.

When: Fri 5 Apr, 11.30am-1pm

Member price: FREE

Non-member price: \$25

Level: All

CSI: Crime Story Investigation – Session 3 with [Mark Brandi](#)

'This Is How' is a brooding, unforgettable novel by MJ Hyland. It's the story of Patrick Oxtoby, a young man who moves to a small English seaside town to escape the aftermath of a broken relationship. But a split-second decision will irrevocably alter the course of his life. While not widely regarded in the realm of crime fiction, it's a genre-defying, utterly compelling work that goes to the heart of why good people sometimes do terrible things.

When: Wed 10 Apr, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

Writing Animals with [Laura Jean McKay](#)

What does it mean to write animals now? People have been depicting nonhuman animals for millennia, but how can we create meaningful nonhuman animal characters in 2019? What are the implications? Isn't anthropomorphism bad? In this workshop we look at ourselves as writing animals and how we can write other animals in a meaningful way.

We draw from ancient and modern examples of animal fiction and work through

character-driven exercises to explore the nonhuman in our fiction.

When: Sat 27 Apr, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Collage Technique for Writing with Carrie Tiffany

Collage is a technique of cutting up or excerpting parts of other texts and reassembling them to create something new. This day of discussion and practical exercises will encourage both emerging and more experienced writers to be alert to the texts that surround them and the story-making possibilities they contain.

When: Sun 28 Apr, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Writing for Competition – Expert Tips

with Vikki Petraitis

Lots of keen writers enter writing competitions but don't experience success. Entering Writing Competitions will help budding writers to identify key elements to make their stories stand out from the crowd. The session includes lots of tips and notes to take away.

When: Tue 30 Apr, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$25/\$30

Non-member price: \$50

Level: All

The Festival Toolkit with Maryanne Vagg

The boom in literary festivals has provided writers, from emerging to established, with the opportunity to reach new audiences and engage new readers with their work, as well as the valuable experience of networking with peers and contemporaries. So how do you get on the program? In this workshop, experienced programmer and Festival Director Maryanne Vagg will explore what it takes to get a seat on stage and what to do when you get behind the microphone.

When: Sat 4 May, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging, established

Plotting and Structure for Beginners: How to Write a Gripping Story (repeat) with Anna George

In this jam-packed workshop, you'll discover what makes a story compulsive reading, and why a flabby mid-section is a sure sign of plot troubles. Whether you're starting out or have a manuscript underway, you can take your writing to the next level by honing your plot. Join acclaimed author Anna George to learn how to turn your story idea into a structured narrative, how to keep your writing tight, and your readers reading.

When: Sat 4 May, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging, established

In Conversation with Mackenzi Lee

with CS Pacat

Spend the afternoon with award-winning, New York Times bestselling author Mackenzi Lee in her only Melbourne appearance. CS Pacat is the international bestselling author of the Captive Prince trilogy and has branched into graphic novels with Fence, an ongoing series set within the competitive world of fencing. Come along to see these two influential and highly popular writers in conversation with each other about history, writing, YA fiction, queer narratives and holding an audience. The conversation will be followed by a signing and meet-and-greet.

When: Sun 5 May, 4-6pm

Under 18/Concession/
Member price: \$15/\$20

Non-member price: \$30

Level: All

CSI: Crime Story Investigation – Session 4

with Emma Viskic

'An Iron Rose' by Peter Temple is the story of Mac Faraday, a man with a murky past who is trying to live a quiet life. When his best mate is found dead, the assumption is suicide, but Mac isn't convinced. 'An Iron Rose' is a masterclass in understatement, scene-setting and dialogue. Temple sketches characters with his customary light hand and we are fully and immediately immersed in Mac Faraday's world through a close narrative.

When: Wed 8 May, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-member price: \$60

Level: All

Pitching Bootcamp with Erina Reddan

Just in time for our annual Literary Speed Dating in June, brush up your pitching skills in this fast-paced and interactive session where you will hone and rehearse your pitch to maximise the possibility of a publishing deal. Bring along both your full pitch and your elevator pitch so you can polish and refine them.

When: Sun 12 May, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Shaping an Essay Collection with Ellena Savage

Essayists are notorious magpies. We collect facts, anecdotes, theories, speculations, fantasies, and desires, finding our materials everywhere from textbooks to train rides. Given the vast and diverse terrain essayists move through, often within a single short piece of writing, how can we shape the 'messy everything' into a collection that in some way coheres? While there are no concrete solutions – the essay spills out, it resists simple reductions, and this is why we practice it – students in this workshop will study some tried and tested approaches to shaping an essay collection. Bring along your unfinished manuscripts, essays you think might be the beginning of a collection, or even your rough notes on what your future essay collection might be, and we will work these into a plan for you to develop and finish your essay collection.

When: Sat 18 May, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Contracts and Copyright for Writers with Alex Adsett

A fast-talking and fun overview of Australian copyright, the ins and outs of a standard publishing contract, how and what to negotiate when dealing with a publisher, some of the sneaky traps to watch out for, and different approaches when dealing with traditional vs alternative publishing models, US vs Australian publishers, or what should be in a literary agency contract.

When: Sun 26 May, 9am-12pm

Member price: \$80/\$90

Non-member price: \$120

Level: All

Maximise Your Wordcount with Clare Connelly

Whether you write 100 words a day or 1,000 (or 10,000!), writing regularly and reliably is the best way to take a story from your imagination and onto the page. But how do you get words down when you're suffering from 'writer's block'? How do you force the 'creative muse' to show up even when she's being uncooperative? And how do you prioritise your writing in the midst of the busyness of life, work, family and friends?

When: Sun 26 May, 1-4pm

Member price: \$80/\$90

Non-member price: \$120

Level: All

Event: Starry, One-Star Night with Writers Victoria

'Starry, One-Star Night' invites authors to turn the crushing blow of a one-star review on Goodreads or Amazon into a badge of pride. The brainchild of author Bram Presser, this free public reading event promises to be 'equal parts exorcism, self-immolation and hilarious middlebrow entertainment'. Register to read on the night or come along for kicks and giggles.

Where: Buck Mulligans,
217 High St, Northcote

When: Tue 28 May, 7-8.30pm

Price: FREE

Level: All

In-person Regional

Own Voices: Why Writing Matters Forum (Mallee) with Fiona Murphy

The Own Voices – Why Writing Matters Forum explores how language, writing and telling our own stories helps transform ways of thinking about the self, disability and community. Developed by people with disability, the forum also provides professional development on the Social Model of Disability and best-practice language for organisations.

When: Wed 1 May, 10am-3pm

Where: Venue TBC

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

Level: All

Membership Form

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☐ Other

Date of birth

(optional)

/ /

At what stage of writing are you?

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

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

<input type="checkbox"/> Academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Crime	<input type="checkbox"/> Literary fiction	<input type="checkbox"/> Radio	<input type="checkbox"/> Web content
<input type="checkbox"/> Biography/Memoir	<input type="checkbox"/> Essays/Reviews	<input type="checkbox"/> Lyrics	<input type="checkbox"/> Romance	<input type="checkbox"/> Young adult
<input type="checkbox"/> Blog	<input type="checkbox"/> Family history	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-fiction	<input type="checkbox"/> Screenwriting	<input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="text"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/> Copywriting	<input type="checkbox"/> Journalism	<input type="checkbox"/> Popular fiction	<input type="checkbox"/> Travel	

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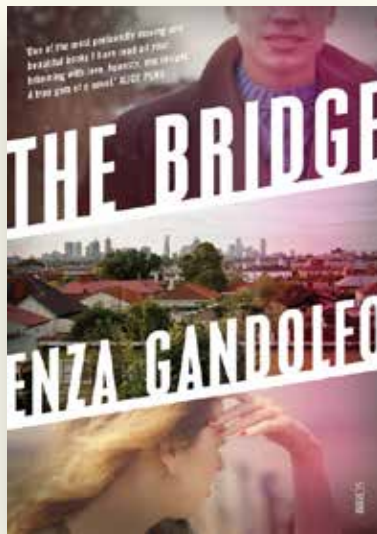


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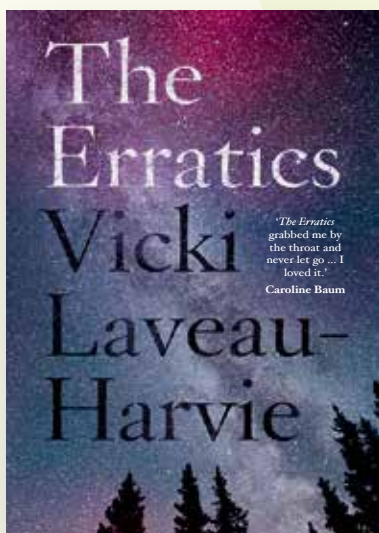
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LITTLE GODS



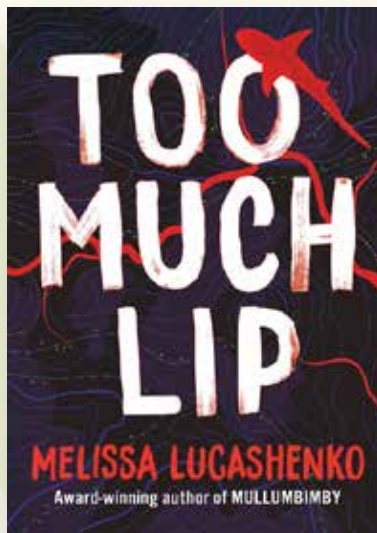
Enza Gandolfo
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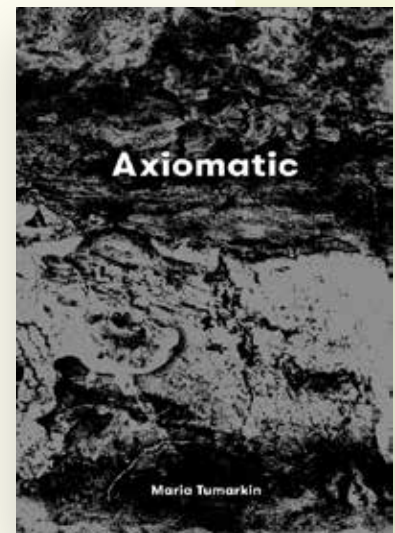
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