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Exchanges

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# Editorial

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Writing is all about connections – the connections that happen neurologically, those that happen on the page and those that happen on a social level. These connections allow for exchanges: of ideas, of wisdom, for that sense that you're not alone in all of this.

In this issue, Laura Jean McKay and Jane Rawson correspond on the imperative and impossibility of writing animals in an age of extinction; Angela Savage explores the value of engaging and exchanging as a member of the writing community; and McKinley Valentine details how the humble newsletter is reclaiming and subverting the internet.

'Don't read the comments', says conventional wisdom, but when it comes to fan-fiction, Jes Layton always does; and Eugen Bacon's quest for community pushes her to locate affinity with the characters of her fiction. Also in this issue, we have new writing by Maya Linnel and Dawn Nguyen. 📧

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'Exterior Scene, 'Ohayo/Good Morning'  
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# Community Minded

Angela Savage writes about the value of engaging and exchanging as a member of the writing community.

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Writing may be a solitary pursuit, but it doesn't follow that being a writer means resigning yourself to loneliness and isolation. Writing communities, large and small, exist in all kinds of forms, catering to all kinds of writers. Some communities develop organically. Shivaun Plozza<sup>1</sup> and Melanie Cheng<sup>2</sup> speak about connections made with other writers through short courses at Writers Victoria. The First Time podcasters Kate Mildenhall and Katherine Collette met while studying at RMIT, and Kate often speaks of connections made with other writers through social media. Creative collaborators Jane Rawson and Annabel Smith met on Twitter. There are numerous writers' groups on Facebook, based on common areas of interest and identity. And writers centres like Writers Victoria play a key role in fostering writing communities, both face-to-face and online – '[serving] a similar function to that of literary salons from the previous centuries', as Lee Kofman<sup>3</sup> puts it.

But what does it mean to be a good citizen of a writing community? In the absence of a professional code of conduct, or an industrial award for writers that outlines expected standards of behaviour, I'd like to propose the following qualities as guidelines – suggestions which come from members of the writing community themselves.

## Reciprocity

'Most things I've learned about writing have been through other writers, directly or indirectly. Taking short courses, checking out events, sneaking into book launches and rocking out at festivals have all helped me to be a better writer.'

Anna Spargo-Ryan

There's no denying the self-interest that motivates our involvement in writing communities. We need opportunities to enhance our craft through feedback, to build our professional networks, to promote our skills and our work. And there are potential career benefits to being part of a writing community: invitations to festivals, events and other collaborative projects. We need support in tough times, and we also need our peers to celebrate our successes: to come to our launches and talk up our stories/essays/books, in real life and online.

But you can't expect others to make these efforts for you if they are not reciprocated. All take and no give makes for an unhealthy relationship in any context, including writing communities.

In The First Time Podcast<sup>4</sup>, Kate Mildenhall suggests a 20–80 split on social media content: ideally, devote 20 per cent to your own work and 80 per cent to talking about other stuff, including other writers. This is a good rule of thumb for real-life conversations, too. That said, you get a pass for the major milestones like signing with an agent, getting published, launching books and winning prizes. Just remember to dial the self-focus back down again afterwards.

If you are fortunate enough to be invited onto panels at festivals and events, by all means talk about your own work – that's what you're there for. But be aware that you'll win over more fans by engaging with the other panellists than you will by dominating or talking over them. And for heaven's sake, think ahead about local writers who could use your support if you're asked for recommendations. It drives me up the wall when I ask panellists at writers' events to recommend another author and they come up with Stephen King. Impressive though he may be, Mr King does not need your help to attract an audience for his work.

## Share the love (and power)

'Helping emerging writers is the most important thing that any established writer can do ... If you're already in the room, then it's your job to open the doors and let other people in.'

Toni Jordan

Early in my career, I learned from my friend and mentor Christos Tsiolkas that whatever modest success you enjoy as a writer, you pay it forward. Christos is a great role model in this regard, never too busy to mentor emerging writers, launch a debut novel, provide a puff quote for a book cover. Puffing, launching, talking up and/or reviewing books are among the ways that established authors help emerging writers to build readership. This work is generally not paid – part of what Jennifer Mills calls, 'the cultures of reciprocity underpinning creative labour'. As she points out, this reciprocity is 'a counterpoint to #paythewriters but not a contradiction.' It is part of what makes a community.

You don't have to be an established author to help another writer out. You can go to the launch and buy the book (or journal, zine, etc) and take along a friend who'll also buy a copy. If you can't afford to buy the book, ask your local library to purchase a copy; authors get paid Public Lending Rights based on the number of libraries that stock their books.

Get on social media and amplify positive reviews; use appropriate hashtags – #CrimeFiction, #SciFi, #fantasy, #LoveOzYA, #WeNeedDiverseBooks – to draw the work to the attention of like-minded readers, and/or tag friends who'd like it. Post a brief review to goodreads and Instagram or, if you have a blog, post a more substantial review or do an author Q&A.

When it's your turn to shine, those writers whom you've helped out along the way will be predisposed to repay the favour.

## Practice compersion

'Foster collaboration, not competition. Practice compersion, not jealousy when others succeed especially when that person's contribution can lead to a more robust community.'

Cher Tan

## 'All take and no give makes for an unhealthy relationship in any context, including writing communities.'

'Compersion' is a word Cher Tan introduced to me via Twitter. I almost corrected it to 'compassion' but it's not the same thing. Compersion comes to us from the polyamory community: Wikipedia defines it as 'an empathetic state of happiness and joy experienced when another individual experiences happiness and joy'. The concept is found in the Sanskrit word 'mudita', meaning 'the pleasure that comes from delighting in other people's well-being' and in the Norwegian 'unne', meaning 'to be happy on someone else's behalf'.

It is easy to be jealous when other writers succeed. But as Stephanie Convery notes in her 'Overland' article, 'The book of my enemy'<sup>5</sup>, we can reshape our responses to others' success by changing the way we measure our worth – and, I would add, the worth of our writing community. Says Convery, 'I keep writing now because I believe that writing matters beyond its capacity to sell – that it reflects the world back to us anew and allows us to explore the possibilities for a different world, a better world. I believe that there is value in beauty for its own sake, and that it can be found in the most unexpected places. And I believe that I am not alone in my faith in these things.' Practising compersion – finding joy in other writers' success – becomes a way of keeping the faith in the intrinsic value of writing, recognising that a robust writing community is in all our interests. Or as Emily Brewin puts it, 'a resilient writing community is good for everyone.'

## Be kind

When I put a call out on Twitter asking about the most important qualities when it comes to being a good citizen of a writers' community, I was surprised by how often the word kindness came up in response. 'Honestly sounds lame, but kindness,' tweeted James Burgmann-Milner. 'Be kind with your feedback,' added Laura Besley, '[because] harsh words can crush

people.' I was reminded of Henry James's advice: 'Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind.'

I admit to being perplexed at first by the emphasis on kindness: is it really kindness, for example, to withhold criticism of writing when you believe it needs work? But reading more Twitter comments, it becomes clear that criticism is easier to take when delivered kindly. Dr Esther Chin suggests, for example, 'Listening to the heart of the writing and asking meaningful questions to help the author effectively convey their message.' Write Through the Roof<sup>6</sup> podcaster Madeleine D'Este, says what matters most in writing communities is, 'Listening and encouragement. And cake.' For Jennifer Barry, qualities that matter are, 'Curiosity. Compassion. Contribution. Consideration. (And a love of alliteration).'

It was also clear that some writers had experienced bullying, favouritism and/or being treated as 'a means to an end'. The emphasis on kindness, then, is about being treated with decency. 'Respect one another,' says Sharlene Kurupparac. '[Writers communities should be] inclusive and accessible to all writers'. Adds Ben Hobson, 'have a genuine interest in the journey of others.'

A writing life is a hard slog and often a lonely one at that. The support, advice and encouragement that comes from engaging with other writers, whether online, at events, in workshops or groups, is invaluable. In return, a writing community asks for reciprocity, compersion and kindness – with these simple qualities, your contribution as a citizen will be welcomed, our citizenry will be healthy and our local writing community is strong.

In a recent article for Writers Victoria, Andrew Nette<sup>7</sup> notes that when writers are portrayed in film, they usually appear as tortured artists, 'dealing with rejection, struggling with envy in relation to more successful colleagues [and] the constant effort of staying relevant.' Is it reasonable to expect such volatile and vulnerable individuals to channel our nobler selves when it comes to being part of a writing community?

I will give Jennifer Mills the last word. When asked for her conclusions regarding those cultures of reciprocity underpinning creative labour, she tweeted, 'I don't know that there are any except the obvious – that being generous is better than being a jerk.' 🍷

## Links

- 1 [writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/writers-on-writers-vic/may-shivaun-plozza](https://writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/writers-on-writers-vic/may-shivaun-plozza)
- 2 [writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/writers-on-writers-vic/april-melanie-cheng](https://writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/writers-on-writers-vic/april-melanie-cheng)
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- 4 [thefirsttimepodcast.com/2018/09/09/social-media-toni-jordan-on-planes-publishers-getting-out-of-the-house/%23comments](https://thefirsttimepodcast.com/2018/09/09/social-media-toni-jordan-on-planes-publishers-getting-out-of-the-house/%23comments)
- 5 [overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-218/the-book-of-my-enemy/](https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-218/the-book-of-my-enemy/)
- 6 [madeleinedeste.com/write-through-the-roof/](https://madeleinedeste.com/write-through-the-roof/)
- 7 [writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/writers-film](https://writersvictoria.org.au/writing-life/on-writing/writers-film)

**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 currently works as Director of Writers Victoria. Her latest novel, 'Mother of Pearl', is published by Transit Lounge.**

**@angsavage**

# Untying the Tongue



In August, the PEN Melbourne Lecture at Melbourne Writers Festival features Tara June Winch.

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PEN Melbourne believes that Indigenous Australians have suffered deliberate historic and ongoing silencing that underpins the systematic denial of Indigenous Australians' human rights and persistent widespread discrimination against them. In this Year of Indigenous Languages as part of PEN Melbourne's commitment to making space for Indigenous voices, we invited Tara June Winch to reflect on how language has informed her writing. In her lecture, Winch looks forward to a future where Indigenous languages are centred as national imperatives.

'I was born on ngurambang – can you hear it? – ngu–ram–bang. If you say it right it hits the back of your mouth and you should taste blood in your words. Every person around should learn the word for country in the old language, the first language – because that is the way to all time, to time travel! You can go all the way back.'

These are the beautiful and powerful opening words of Winch's new novel 'The Yield'. The novel is woven from many threads. A major thread, and one close to Winch's heart includes a dictionary of the Wiradjuri language as compiled by Albert Gondiwindi, a Wiradjuri man and the narrator's grandfather. These Wiradjuri words and concepts are elegantly integrated into 'The Yield' and they underline Winch's love of, and her stress on the political import of language as a measure of the strength, dignity and the continuity through centuries of her Wiradjuri culture.

Following the success of her first book, Winch was chosen by Nigerian playwright and political activist Wole Soyinka to participate in a year-long mentorship with him, and here there is a PEN connection. Soyinka became a high profile PEN International case when in 1967 he had been

marked for immediate execution by the country's head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, during the civil war over Biafran secession. The then PEN International president Arthur Miller intervened in his case and Soyinka was freed. Soyinka received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 and now uses his own international reputation to call attention to PEN's efforts on behalf of an international community of writers.

We warmly invite you to attend this PEN Melbourne lecture. 🎧

Sat 31 Aug, 5.30pm  
RMIT Kaleide Theatre

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Join PEN Melbourne to support our work with silenced and persecuted writers around the world: [penmelbourne.org](http://penmelbourne.org)

# Re: Dear Extinction

Laura Jean McKay and Jane Rawson correspond on the imperative and impossibility of writing animals in an age of extinction.

---

Dear Jane,  
The line you wrote in 'The Invisible Extinctions' about how we all think that there is an abundance of wilderness, of wildness, of wild animals out there – an endless supply to visit one day – but in actual fact, there is an emptiness ... it haunts me. Climate change hasn't kept me awake but extinction does. Which is why I want to start this letter to you in what Edward O Wilson called the Ermocene – the Age of Loneliness.

We're writing about writing animals, and that's what I've been doing for the last five years, but I've been stubbornly writing about their presence. Has this been a way for me to try to somehow counteract what is really happening out there? Am I trying to write wilderness back into existence? Are you writing about non-human absence?

Yours, with an intense beginning!

Laura.

Dear Laura,

Tempting as it is to tell you what you've been up to for the past five years, I'm going to resist! I think what I have been trying to do is to stop people's eyes from gliding past the absence. The immense gap between what people imagine the world of wild animals is like, and what it's really like, is the thing that has been galvanising my efforts. I was most shocked to read a French study that showed people vastly overestimate how many tigers, elephants, polar bears, gorillas and other charismatic wild animals are left, primarily because they see so many images of these creatures – on clothes, as toys, in advertisements and nature documentaries. Seeing them every day makes us assume they

are doing well, even though in many cases, the way we see these animals (in car ads, as part of disposable fashion etc) is part of the reason the real animals are dying out. I suppose what I hope to do is not necessarily to stop these unnoticed deaths, but just to have them be noticed. That we acknowledge the killing that's going on around us, caused by us.

Laura, can you tell me what it is about extinction that makes it even more compelling (if that's the right word) for you than climate change?

Jane.

Dear Jane,

When I read your work and this email, I can't help but think about how brave you are to look at extinction head on. Because I just find it so awful. And I sit around thinking about animals all day. If it's my 'job' (job! ha ha!) to think about human-non-human animal connection and disconnection, what about all the people who don't have to? Why would they think about something so devastating as extinction when they could just use a keep cup, have a meat-free Monday and sustainable palm oil Tuesday and feel like they're saving the world?

I think this taps into one of the reasons that people don't engage with extinction in the same way as climate change, and also starts to answer your question. In slowing climate change, I see some hope. Even though I have absolutely no faith in our government, I see that people are doing some very positive things to try to counteract the devastation. I also see that many humans will survive climate change, no matter how bad it gets. With extinction it's ... well, it's extinction. Once a species is gone it is never coming back. It is final. It is the end. The horror

of what we have done in terms of extinction is what keeps me awake. Of course, extinction is one aspect of climate change, but it is also (as you say) a result of mass consumerism, iconography, cultural practice and attitudes towards animals as beings in existence for our consumption, entertainment, experimentation and companionship.

Having said all of this, I am putting on my brave sunglasses. After writing animals into existence in short stories and a novel, I want to start writing about absence and extinction, largely because I don't think I can write animals anymore without writing this. I'm starting with poems (Not a poet! But anyway ... ) because I think the form allows access to devastating moments. How do you write animals, Jane? Do you find that a particular form allows you to say what you want to say? Are you working on/thinking on anything at the moment around this?

Laura.

Dear Laura,

The novel I am working on at the moment addresses exactly none of these issues. When I finished writing 'From the Wreck' – which, while it may not look like it, is mostly about humans' attitude that all other creatures are expendable – I started work on a new novel called 'The History of Extinction in Bohemia'. Good name, right? It was an absurdly ambitious project in five parts: historical fiction about the 'invention' of extinction; fabulism about WWII and exiles in Mexico; contemporary fiction about Eastern European communism and exiles in Canberra; non-fiction about the extinction of animal species; and a far-future section on terraforming and extinction of off-planet species. I thought the non-fiction part might be poetry. I wrote about 25,000 words and I was so miserable I had to stop. The non-fiction section turned into a non-poetic essay in 'Meanjin'. The rest is abandoned – forever or for now, I don't know. Instead I'm writing a novel about witches and fascists, which is a lot more fun. So much for bravery. I just couldn't think about those ideas all day every day any more.

But as to my previous attempts writing animals, and the death of animals, with 'From

the Wreck' what I wanted to write was the pain of losing everybody close to you, of trying to find somewhere safe, of constantly being flung into inhospitable environments. I wanted to write what it might be like to be a creature seeing its home and its companions destroyed. For me, the best way to do that was a first-person, 'non-human' kind of voice. Obviously I have no idea how octopuses (the closest earth analogue to the creature in 'From the Wreck') feel or think, but I did read a lot about them, and I tried to create a voice that might approximate it, while still being comprehensible by human readers. It was a weird experience. And I guess it ended up as much poetry (or maybe nonsense) as prose.

When I've written non-fiction about this stuff, the best I can manage is a kind of wry despair. I have a lot of affection for animals. I can't manage an objective scientific voice. But I also know I'm as much at fault as the next person, so a voice of lyric grief seems a bit self-serving; I'm no angel.

On that matter of writing in the voice of an animal, am I right in thinking you've been doing some research on this? What have you discovered? How can we do this without it being a terrible joke?

Jane.

Hi Jane,

I wrote an 80,000 word novel draft about communicating animals and showed my readers who said 'but where are the communicating animals?' In my horror of anthropomorphisation, I had rendered the animals silent. Maybe I needed to do that to get over myself. I think for me it's about looking at works by others who have attempted to portray animals as animals – like Alexis Wright's 'The Swan Book', Eva Hornung's 'Dog Boy', Marien Engel's 'Bear' – and working out ways that I might do that in my own narrative. For me it's about saying, yes, animals can be metaphors (and so can objects, landscapes and human characters) but they can also represent animals. A dog can be a dog in a text, it doesn't have to be a metaphor for childhood and it doesn't have to die to get a point across. And perhaps from that, a voice might emerge that isn't 'poetic' or

'wise' or 'stuttering' or 'prophetic' or 'innocent' but one that might surprise us by speaking from a place that isn't centred around the human. All I'm trying to do is to imagine myself into a place where humans aren't the centre of the universe.

Having animals 'speaking' like humans isn't, for me, as much of a problem as making the human characters the only thing that matter. The number of animal-centred novels that come out where the publisher has written on the back cover blurb 'This story reveals what it really means to be human!' It makes me chuck such a tanty in a book shop!

Your term 'writing from wry despair' is what we're doing, isn't it? Your story about the (hopefully not completely) abandoned or paused extinction project captivates me. It also makes me laugh because I have been thinking of writing along the same lines and your cautionary tale makes me wonder if my YA sci-fi trilogy would be a better option. But is there a way to write from wry despair without burning out? Is burning out part of the necessary process when addressing these ideas? Part of me loves being savaged by my own writing. But my body tells a different story – ones that is chronically ill and wearing down, partly from these sorts of words. How does one go on?

Laura.

Dear Laura,

There is so much in what you say that I just want to copy, paste and write YES, THAT!!! under. 'A dog can be a dog in a text, it doesn't have to be a metaphor for childhood': YES, THAT!!! For a creature to just be the creature itself, not a reflection of us: an impossible task, but one worth doing – I think – if we're to let go of our self-importance just for a minute. There are so many humans in books. And, like you, 'all I'm trying to do is to imagine myself into a place where humans aren't the centre of the universe'.

Why do that? Today we have news – no surprise – that is a reminder of why we bother. The United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has released a report which says (and I'm just going to go ahead and quote Jonathan Watts at 'The Guardian' here):

'... the human footprint is so large it leaves little space for anything else. Three-quarters

of all land has been turned into farm fields, covered by concrete, swallowed up by dam reservoirs or otherwise significantly altered. Two-thirds of the marine environment has also been changed by fish farms, shipping routes, subsea mines and other projects. Three-quarters of rivers and lakes are used for crop or livestock cultivation. As a result, more than 500,000 species have insufficient habitats for long-term survival. Many are on course to disappear within decades.'

How do we solve a problem like that? For starters, we could stop thinking that the only thing that matters is us. We could try to imagine other creatures have feelings, thoughts and rights. When we make decisions we could consider their needs, and maybe even give those desperate needs as much weight as our fleeting desires.

How does one go on? For me it's either sit by and watch everything beautiful crumble, or do the only, tiny thing I can do, which is write about it. I think I'd feel even worse if I did the first. Because writing is something, right? Right?

But also, y'know: eat well, get some sleep, stand up and stretch, talk to kind people, go out among the trees a bit (unless it's too cold or hot, then stay inside and read a nice book).

I suppose when you write, and when your writing is published, you discover other people care about animals too. And you remind them you care, and they're not alone, and between us we can change things.

... I think I'm out of questions. Is there something else you'd like to talk about? Perhaps feeling a bit exhausted today ...

Jane.

Hi Jane,

I just can't read that extinction report. I mean, I will, but even the basic details throw me into utter queasy despair.

In your email, though, the idea of watching 'everything beautiful crumble, or do[ing] the only, tiny thing I can do, which is write about it' there is a light. I see it as the lure-light on an angler fish in the very dark deep – a light made up of glowing bacteria. I was reminded today, by a bug specialist, that many of the specks of dust and

grit that we see are actually bugs, mites, bacteria. Disconcerting but also great company. In the lonely looming void that the extinction report draws attention to, it is useful to remember that we are made up of and surrounded by animals and, of course, that we are (super predator) animals ourselves.

As human animals, we are wrapped up in language. Crawled all over by letters, numbers and words. I've been reading a lot of theory around JM Coetzee's work – so much discussion on his style and interpretations of his meaning and analysis after analysis – but what I get predominantly from reading his fiction, especially around animals, is a call to action through relentless questioning. Coetzee uses language to ask questions. I have loved our correspondence, Jane, for the asking of questions. Because if you're asking questions, in life, love, art, belief, politics, then perhaps you're engaging in a discussion with someone – yourself, another, the world. If you're asking questions, you're not alone. And if the subject you're asking questions of doesn't respond? Questions the idea of response. Are we the only thing that matters? No, of course not, resoundingly no! What happens when we write that? Let's see ...

Next week, when we meet for tea, we'll see each other's real faces for the first time! I look forward to sitting with a hot drink, just you and me and a billion bugs.

Laura.

Dear Laura,

'Disconcerting but also great company' is my favourite part of this whole exchange.

Jane. 🐾

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Jane Rawson is the author of novels 'From the Wreck' and 'A Wrong Turn at the Office of Unmade Lists', a novella, 'Formaldehyde', and the non-fiction book 'The Handbook: surviving & living with climate change'.

Laura Jean McKay writes about humans and other animals. Her novel, 'The Animals in That Country', is out with Scribe in 2020. She is also the author of the short story collection Holiday in 'Cambodia'. Her work appears in 'Best Australian Stories', 'The North American Review' and 'The Saturday Paper'. Laura has a PhD from the University of Melbourne and she is currently the 'animal expert' presenter on ABC's 'Animal Sound Safari'.

# Good Newsletters

McKinley Valentine details how the humble newsletter is reclaiming and subverting the internet.

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If you found out that your favourite advice columnist wrote a science fiction novel, would you want to read it? If you found out that your favourite true crime novelist wrote a cookbook, would you check it out? I think most people would at least be interested.

There are people who do read entirely by subject matter – they’ll read any biography of Winston Churchill, no matter who it’s by. But most readers fall in love with voice and tone and feel, with the unique worldview that shapes everything the writer brings to their work.

Any human can understand that, but the algorithms that decide what you see on Facebook, Twitter, Amazon and so on are completely ham-fisted at it. Google can’t parse voice, tone or worldview. If you read, say, a melancholy short story about an old man’s memory of climbing a lemon tree in his childhood, Google will not present you with more short stories on the theme of loss and nostalgia. Google will show you ads for lemons.

Google rewards content that sticks to a single, coherent topic – reviewing DSLR cameras, or disastrous date stories, or science news. But if a writer does all three, Google has no idea what to do with them – even if each piece is written with the same dry humour/lyrical beauty/undertones of cosmic horror.

Given that the way that the internet presents content to us is diametrically opposed to the way that we naturally engage with it, how can readers find writing that speaks to them? And how can writers find that community of readers with whom their writing resonates?

Community doesn’t just mean a group of people. It’s the feeling that you belong. You can feel alienated and alone at a family gathering or a workplace morning tea, and you can feel wanted and welcome at home by yourself, reading the words of someone who articulates all the thoughts and feelings that have been circling your head for years.

If you are someone who goes through life periodically feeling completely bewildered by humanity and wondering if you might be an alien, then you probably also know the bone-deep solace that comes from reading a writer who gets you.

And then realising it’s not just the writer who feels like you do, because this book is published, there are other copies, which means there are who-knows-how-many other readers out there who feel like you. You’re not an alien after all.

## The ideal bookstore

I have a dream of setting up a bookstore by tone instead of by genre.

It is absurd to group ‘jaded cop tracks down serial killer (while battling heroin addiction)’ with ‘small-town librarian solves tea-based mysteries’ but we put it all under Crime. Gritty war books shouldn’t be at opposite ends of the bookstore just because one of the wars is in a made-up country with a Dark Lord. All the gritty war books together! All the cosy books together! Hard-boiled space detectives with hard-boiled LA detectives! Lyrical, thoughtful fantasy with the lyrical, thoughtful Booker prize-winning literature!

That's never going to happen, but I have found something with very much the same spirit as my imaginary bookstore: newsletters. The newsletter has become a vehicle for a writer to email out humour pieces, poetry, memoir, weird microfiction, travel stories, political analysis ... anything that can be done with the written word.

The newsletter is a way for writers to connect with readers – *their* readers – in a dedicated, ongoing and personal relationship. Instead of being organised around a single flattening, search-engine-friendly topic, it is organised around the creator's tone, their voice, their way of looking at the world.

In other words, it is organised around the thing a reader falls in love with.

### **The Dark Forest Theory of the Internet**

Sci-fi author Liu Cixin's 'Dark Forest' theory of the universe says that the reason we haven't heard from extraterrestrials is the same reason small furry creatures stay quiet in a dark forest: they know it's not safe to attract attention.

Writer Yancey Strickler says the internet has become a dark forest. Even people with small follower counts can draw the attention of trolls, harassers, literal Nazis and tabloid papers looking for a scandal-of-the-minute. Not to mention the harmless but tedious 'I interpreted your joke too literally but I'm doubling-down rather than admitting I misunderstood' and 'I only read the first sentence of your article but I'm FURIOUS about the points I imagine you probably made in the rest of it' and other bad-faith commenters.

And so, people are leaving the public forums and creating spaces where they can talk with nuance, at length, where people know them and know what informs their perspective: podcasts, group chats, private Slack channels – and newsletters. Strickler: 'These are all spaces where depressurised conversation is possible because of their non-indexed, non-optimised, and non-gamified environments.'

### **Finding your people**

The best way to find a community of people you belong with is to be as much yourself as possible and to let the people who like that find you, and the people who don't self-select out.

For some people that community will be small. But it will be real. Newsletters don't care if you have five readers or 5000, if you publish to a daily schedule or every few months when you feel in the mood. There is no algorithm intermediary deciding if your take is hot enough.

Newsletters are a space where you can get as weird and niche as you like. This is probably not true if you want to make money, but the costs of creating a newsletter are so low that you don't need to make a lot. You don't need to pay for advertising to get your writing shown to your own followers the way you do with Facebook. Even the time cost is low, since you don't need to publish on a regular schedule to keep your SEO ranking, like you do with a blog. As long as you avoid phrases like 'Save \$\$\$ on Viagra NOW', your newsletter will make it to the inbox of everyone who said 'Yes, I want to read that.'

We are living in the golden age of newsletters. It's a glorious time to be a reader. And I think it's a glorious time to be a writer, as well. 📧

\*Yancey Strickler, 'The Dark Forest Theory of the Internet', <https://onezero.medium.com/the-dark-forest-theory-of-the-internet-7dc3e68a7cb1>

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**McKinley Valentine is a copywriter, editor and creator of newsletter 'The Whippet', which you can subscribe to at [thewhippet.org](http://thewhippet.org). Apologies in advance to anyone hoping it will be about whippets. If you're feeling inspired to start your own newsletter, she will be running a workshop on 3 November. More info at [writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/events](http://writersvictoria.org.au/calendars/events)**

# Comment Values

'Don't read the comments', says conventional wisdom, but when it comes to fan-fiction, Jes Layton always does.

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When you post fan-fiction online you spend a good few hours or so constantly refreshing the page, hoping that the first comment you get will be as gushy and complimentary as the countless you have left on other writers' fic.

I was eleven when I shared my first story on fanfiction.net – an online archive (one of many) where creative works by fans are displayed for any and all to interact with. Here is the first comment I received:

Uhh your font??? Dude, I had to actually try to manually shrink it and it still looked funny :S DM me, think I know what's up lol  
– 6 Mar 2006

OK, not gushy and complimentary, but this comment would teach me two things. One, that nothing would ever compare to the singularly unique fear at being – and yet the desperate longing to be – read by someone else. Two, I needed to learn how to code.

It might surprise you to learn that the majority of people in the fan-fiction community aren't actually writing at all. The fan-fiction community, first and foremost, is a community of readers.

Fan-fiction readers are all too generous sharing their thoughtful critiques and enthusiastic encouragement. They politely point out errors, praise well-done characterisation, make suggestions, and are a consistent wave of 'Update please/Can't wait to read more!' even on the pieces you're most insecure about.

It can get a little unwieldy when you start getting responses in the hundreds and thousands from people finely attuned to the minutiae of writing and characterisation. Each one of them taking your work personally.

The fan-fiction community has exploded with the help of social media. The recently Hugo-nominated 'Archive of Our Own' (AO3), an archive specifically made for fan-fiction by the community, is a foundational buffet with meticulously labelled dishes – down to the very ingredients – so readers can pick exactly what they crave and avoid what they are deathly allergic to. Fan-fiction communities make up fanfiction.net, AO3's ageing predecessor and Wattpad, its younger more phone-compatible cousin. They thrive on Discord, Reddit, Tumblr, as well as Dreamwidth and LiveJournal. Of course, this list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, though all are home to some portion of the worldwide fan-fic community.

All social media sites have a unique flavour, drawing in different communities, each with their own accepted niceties, culture and inside jokes. For example, 'Bluest blue to ever blue' certainly means something different for the SPN ('Supernatural') family than it does for the Whovians.

Good work! Looking forward to more!  
– 11 Feb 2012

Through the fan-fiction community, writers and readers are in near constant conversation, so much so the lines between reader, editor and collaborator blur. Consistent readers can become beta readers, betas can become friends. I've been lucky enough to wrangle plot bunnies and write with writers from Switzerland, America, Germany, England and China.

The friendships that form within our community do so hard and fast. How can they not when you already know you both have something so intrinsic to your identity in common? This passion makes it easy for fan-fic relationships to move

over into the physical world. The community finds ways to meet through events and conventions; fans (as I have done so) arrange to meet in real life, act as a guide to other fans moving into their area, and are someone to meet for a drink during tough times. Sometimes I meet someone who actually knows me by my fan-fiction first and by my place in Melbourne's writing scene second. It's always flattering.

Despite anonymity, we tend to find each other quite easily, we share a common language. We like each other's shoelaces.

Hey, I have this solid rule not to start reading WIPs, ever. I saw someone's comment on Tumblr about your fic, so I came here to check it out and hit that pesky little 'Subscribe' button. Yet here I am, just finished the second chapter and omfg. That rule was soo solid, dude. Like, unbreakable. Do you work magic? Like, Magick magic? Cuz damn now I can't stop reading. Update soon! (please?)

– 23 May 2017

The first time one of my fics cracked 10,000 readers, I did a happy dance then shared the good news with my dad (immediately having to explain to him that no, I could not charge these people a dollar to read my work, that would be illegal – at least at fourteen I was pretty sure it was).

Money was not the reason I was spending hours upon hours writing and posting online. Staying up until daybreak sharing ideas with other fans, writing, reviewing fan-fic, writing, compiling recommendations and welcome packs for newbies to the fandom. Writing.

There's a certain intoxication that comes with having actual living people reading your work. And I have long been addicted.

The assumption is that fanfic readers are eager and willing to read anything laid in front of them. As a fic writer, I wish this were true. In general, readers do not have an endless resource of time with which to read everything they come across. With free, low-risk fan-fiction, getting readers to click on your link is a competitive affair.

Quality matters. Fic readers are discerning – they have expectations, standards, itches that need scratching. What's perhaps most interesting though is that it is not always the technical quality of the writing that matters but rather the quality of the idea.

We can more easily forgive the small spelling and grammar errors writers make if the plot keeps us up to 3am, unable to close the tab. We'll gladly offer assistance and encouragement in translation for writers writing in languages that are not their first (or second or third). We allow writers to make mistakes, to have safe places to explore and experiment not just in content but in form and expression. We create podfics of pieces to make them more accessible, readily translate each other's work into different languages. Perhaps what stands out the most is people simply wanting to talk about what they've just read, or are excited to read next.

Commenting is considered both a common courtesy and the highest compliment.

You did a great job writing this chapter, and the others before it. I'm really enjoying this fic. I'm a F-M transgender, so this really hits me hard because I relate to C. I think you really captured that heartache and desperation that C feels being trans and unable to be herself. But you give her happiness too. Thank you for writing a fic like this.

– Thu 14 Apr 2014

It takes a certain degree of courage to allow others to read your writing. Any writer can tell you that what you write often represents not only many, many hours of work but also most likely is made up of some stuff that is really very personal to you.

As a queer and regional eleven-year-old, the fan-fiction community was the perfect hub for me to gather myself and my courage so I could share my work.

With the safety of anonymity, I could write what I wanted to write and have it be readily accessible to people who wanted to read it. We were joined not only because we all loved the thing but because sometimes we were also disappointed in the thing and thought we could

do it better, carve out spaces in the works we loved for some reflection of ourselves and our experiences to shine through. Fan-fiction online is a supportive community atmosphere that stands in stark contrast to the negativity and even hate speech that is found so often online.

The life of a writer both by necessity and design is a pretty lonely affair, even more so for those marginalised, and those living regionally. But, you become less alone in your little sphere when your idea connects with even one other person.

I liked the third person limited point of view. It really added to the story. I liked not having all the answers. Only one gripe, V calls for J but we never see or hear her in this chapter, just felt odd and took me out of the moment.

– Mon 23 Nov 2018

It took several years of reading fan-fic before I really got any good at writing it. I can look back on what I wrote in 2006, 2014, 2017 and pick apart every flaw, but although I got a tense change wrong there, or did some pretty clumsy foreshadowing here, I can tell a work has something of value by how many people tell me they're going to bludgeon me for making them feel the feels.

Emotion is the strongest thing that comes from a fan-fiction writing community. We learn how to make readers feel because fan-fiction readers will be exacting in letting you know the kind of emotional responses your works elicit within them. There's no greater compliment than someone saying your work made them sob with relief, or anger or mourning. We in the fan-fiction community are very generous with our feelings. How could we not be? We come to a work of fan-fic wanting to love it as much if not more than canon. Expectations are high but when met, the rewards are higher.

I haven't felt this touched reading something since Jane Austen. Your writing voice and style is truly beautiful to read. Idk if that makes sense, but seriously, if writing is a passion for you, I highly encourage you to pursue it. I would love to read your works for the rest of my life. Your writing voice is BEAUTIFUL and I've fallen in love with it :)

– Sat 28 Jun 2019

I've written over sixty stories online, over a million words of fan-fic and I'm forever improving, not just through the practice of writing a lot, but because with people regularly, meaningfully interacting with my work, my motivation has switched from starting pieces to finishing them – which for many writers is the hardest part.

I don't get writers block. There is always another project to work on, and a consistent streaming of support both from the fan-fic I post now to the fic I posted thirteen years ago. It is all still being read and shared and commented on, usually enthusiastically and always gently.

It's undeniable that in a world of fake news, bitterness and cruelty online, the fan-fiction community stands as one of the few online spaces where mistakes are kindly corrected, creators lovingly encouraged and diversity openly celebrated.

The fan-fiction community is an ongoing conversation.

So yes, despite conventional wisdom, I always read the comments. 🗨️

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**Jes Layton is @AGeekwithaHat, writing about and discussing queer-nerdy things. Jes works in administration for the Melbourne City of Literature Office and Express Media. His latest work can be found at Junkee and her story 'Chemical Expression' is featured in 'Underdog: #LoveOzYA Short Stories'.**

# Writing Myself In

Eugen Bacon's quest for community pushes her to locate affinity with the characters of her fiction.

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'Where are the black people?' Me, at the 2019 Aurealis Awards in Melbourne, an annual celebration of Australian speculative fiction. I looked about the room and it struck me just how 'white' Australia is.

And I wondered about speculative fiction – is it a 'white' genre? Yet I also wondered about the inhibited diversity in the room – was it representative of speculative fiction writers, or just of the Australian populace in that room, in Melbourne, right then? If I gallivanted across the streets of the central business district, how many people of colour would I chance?

My thoughts flittered to writers of colour in speculative fiction. NK Jemisin. Samuel R Delaney. Nisi Shawl. Octavia E Butler. In 2017, editors Alexandra Pierce and Mimi Mondal paid special attention to the topography of Butler's work in a reflexive book titled 'Luminescent Threads: Connections to Octavia E Butler'.

The book was a mammoth collection at 434 pages of original work and reprints, a 2018 Hugo nominee that accomplished what it set out to do: celebrate Butler in stirring tributes by a universal readership. The assemblage was a positive obsession comprising epistles and monographs by a community of colour paying homage to its own. And the dominant motif was inspiration: Butler as pioneer – a woman of her time. Butler as soothsayer, seer, Oracle ...

The work offered an intimate gaze at Butler from the eyes of diverse writers and academics enamoured with her, readers who saw themselves in Butler's characters and plots.

Butler's humanity came to fore in each individual yet aligned reminiscence of her stories, her victims, her villains. Approaching the text, anyone new to Butler quickly collected an understanding that this commanding literary artist who wrote science fiction to see herself in the world, who 'wrote herself in' because novels and short stories of the time did not feature an 'other' like her, moved lives. Her speculative fiction of change, sexism, power and politics, with its black heroines like Lauren Olamina in 'Parable of the Sower', continues to challenge traditional paradigms in a world of male-dominated genre fiction ... in a world of 'white', male-dominated genre fiction.

One smitten author, Tiara Janté, spoke of Butler's novel: "Kindred" is more than a slave story. It is a woman's story. It is a Black woman's story.'

I did clasp some reassurance from the Aurealis awards, in the awarding of Best Young Adult Novel to 'Catching Teller Crow' by Ambelin Kwaymullina and Ezekiel Kwaymullina – a brother-sister team of Aboriginal writers from the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

The novel also won the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Young Adult. In the acceptance speech at the Aurealis awards, the publisher acknowledged the importance of 'Catching Teller Crow', how the story gave voice to people of colour. How the writers established a sense of community: black people writing about black people.

When Black Inc Books published 'Growing Up African in Australia', an anthology edited by Maxine Beneba Clarke, the work drew attention to the appetite of African-diaspora stories in Australia. Stories like Nuzo Onoh's 'Ogali', published in 'Aurealis' #118 – a story that looks at black magic in subversive text set in rural Africa, and draws attention to cultural practice, social injustice and the plight of women in the third world.

Let's consider prolific cross-genre writer Toni Morrison whose literary speculative novel 'Song of Solomon' takes you soaring in the air with protagonist Milkman. Morrison was the first African American woman to receive the Nobel Prize (1993) in literature and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for her novel 'Beloved'. In her writing, she is compelled to write something she can relate to:

'My deepest passion was reading. At some point – not early, I was 35 or 36 – I realised there was a book that I wanted very much to read that really hadn't been written, and so I sort of played around with it in trying to construct the kind of book I wanted to read.'  
Toni Morrison, 'Time', May 2008.

In works that 'The New York Times' determines as possessing an 'arc of Greek tragedy, yet ... filled with domestic details, street talk and folklore' (1998), Morrison's writing holds black cultural focus. The essential aspect of her cast is their being black, their battles with or acceptances of being black. To Morrison, the black novel is important because of what it suggests about conflicts and issues. She makes her writing personal, casts her characters with strength and spirit in an accessible way. Does Morrison, like Butler, write herself in? Is she creating a community of self and text, finding affinity with the characters inside her stories?

In film, when the blockbuster movie 'Black Panther' came out and snatched Academy Awards, Golden Globes, BAFTAs, and then some, African Americans and universal people of colour hailed it as a celebration. They loved its story that addressed themes of racism, feminism, inclusion, social injustice and political correctness ... that heralded a sense of community, albeit brief, with its natives who

spoke Xhosa, the language of Mandela. They became infatuated with its predominantly black cast. The Force had awakened in Prince T'Challa of Wakanda and his personal guard of Amazonian-clad females. 'Forbes' called it the biggest success story since 'Star Wars' and 'Jurassic World'.

The US, in opening itself to more stories people of colour can relate to, is the farthest distance from Australia. There we see the uptake of Nnedi Okorafor's 'Binti' series, Marlon James' 'Black Leopard, Red Wolf' – the first of The Dark Star trilogy.

I came across 'Exploring Dark Short Fiction: A Primer to Nisi Shawl'. Approaching the work, I encountered racially-charged speculative fiction from this 2016 Nebula finalist whose Tiptree Honor novel 'Everfair' is an alternate history story in which the Congo overthrows King Leopold II's oppressive regime. The primer to Nisi Shawl features diverse protagonists whose names are Dosi, Iya and Fulla Fulla. I saw my mother, my sisters, my cousins in characters with wiry tresses and corn rows on their heads.

A proponent of writing diverse characters, Shawl co-authored with Cynthia Ward 'Writing the Other: A Practical Approach', an important text that is on diverse character representation in imaginative genres.

Baby steps, not nearly enough in the recognition of speculative fiction by black people, but the US is ahead. And Australia is not gaining.

My quest for community as a writer pushes me to locate affinity with the characters of my fiction. As an African Australian who writes speculative fiction, I am finding confidence to weave people of colour as protagonists in my stories. In 'Claiming T-Mo', published by Meerkat Press, T-Mo's mother, Silhouette, has rugged skin the colour of coffee beans. Ma Space has dark liquid eyes and tight curls. Hybrid Myra, is 'half-caste' with dark caramel skin ... I wrote myself in – this person of colour in a white, white world.

At first tentative, I'm startled to see more colour in my writing. Is this act of appropriation a consolation, like the sucking of a thumb, or is it an inherent search for community?

Perhaps because I'm searching for it now, I'm seeing more afro-futurism in speculative fiction by black writers. Most are from the Caribbean Islands (like Nalo Hopkinson and Karen Lord) and the US (like Sheree R Thomas and Victor LaValle).

I am now affiliated with communities of writers such as the African Speculative Fiction Society (ASFS), and an online community of black writers and artists called the State of Black Science Fiction. Each group offers a sense of kinship in its elevation of black writing.

Yet one publisher of black authors – Afrocentric Books – startled me with its unapologetic bias on the submissions page: 'We only publish novels in which at least one of the main characters is of indigenous African descent. Sorry, White South Africans, but you are of European descent.'

I deleted the bookmark to this site and was certain I'd never let them publish me because, in writing myself in, might I subconsciously write others out? 🙄

Eugen Bacon is an African Australian writer whose stories have won, been shortlisted and commended in international awards, including the Bridport Prize, L Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future Contest, Copyright Agency Prize and Fellowship of Australian Writers National Literary Awards. Recent publications: 'Writing Speculative Fiction', Macmillan (2019). 'Claiming T-Mo' – Meerkat Press (2019). In 2020: 'A Pining' (Meerkat Press) and 'Black Moon' (IFWG).

Eugen is running a Writers Victoria workshop: **Seduce Your Writing: Self-Editing techniques for writers on Sun 4 Aug. More info on page 29.**

# Nitpicker

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



1. Zaina's customers were tourists, students, newlyweds and people (who/that) were looking for an unusual birthday present.
2. For six months now she (wrote/had written) poems in the city square for ten dollars per piece.
3. One late wintry afternoon a man (reeking/wreaking) of alcohol stood before her.
4. (Most lucid/More lucid) than he looked, he asked for a poem.
5. Instead of ten dollars (, he said,/he said, ) I can offer you something small but precious – a prayer.

Answers on page 27

# The Stuff of Dreams

By Maya Linnell

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The seeds for my new beginning were sown at an early age, but it wasn't until a late-night conversation in 2016 that germination began. We were living in a shed at the time, a 64m<sup>2</sup> space we had decked out into a mini-house for the duration of our ambitious owner-builder project.

But for the first time in a long time, the conversation had nothing to do with our new home, and everything to do with life beyond an occupancy permit. It was about a new beginning. I knew that in eighteen months when we were happily moved in, and the children were at school, I'd have more time on my hands than I'd had in a whole decade. The possibilities scared me as much as they excited me. I murmured the question that kept me awake on that wintery night: 'What will I do next?'

The lights were switched back on. The kettle was boiled. And my husband and I sat in bed, cups of tea in hand, to discuss my options. I'd spent years doing the stay-at-home thing with occasional journalism and copywriting gigs thrown in for good measure. But neither of those jobs continued to beckon as a future career. I also had three little bookworms who needed taxiing across the countryside for school and sports. Whatever path I chose, it needed to fit with family life.

Our mugs were empty, and the magpies were rehearsing their dawn chorus when the topic turned to dream jobs.

'What is it you really want to do?' my husband asked. 'Is there anything you've ever dreamed of doing? Anything?'

I spent a long time deliberating the question. I stared into the depths of my empty mug and studied the cobwebs on the ceiling. Up until that moment, I'd never given my childhood dream of 'one day' writing a book much

credence. I didn't know anyone who had written a novel.

To my ears, voicing my long-held desire to write fiction instead of returning to rural journalism or PR seemed selfish. I'd already spent years out of the paid workforce while my husband climbed 80-metre-high wind turbines day in, day out. Yes, I'd been raising three rambunctious children, keeping house, building a house, transforming a nine-acre paddock into a rambling garden and tending to our menagerie of animals. But was a childhood dream of writing a book anything more than a fantasy? A gamble? Would hours slaving over a keyboard ever amount to anything or assist with our mortgage repayments?

Feeling somewhat self-conscious, I eventually opened up. I didn't know what type of story I wanted to write, or how to go about it, yet I dreamed of running my finger across a front cover embossed with 'Maya Linnell.'

To my surprise, my husband nodded as if it were a straightforward and utterly logical proposition. 'Well, there you go. You should write a book then. You read enough of them to know what works,' he said. I understand it isn't particularly pro-feminist to suggest a husband's permission is required to write a book, but given we were about to move into a brand-new house, with no trust fund in sight, I certainly needed his blessing.

We spent many evenings planning my new beginning. One thing we both agreed on was the importance of giving my fiction-writing dream a fighting chance. Just like the house we were building, I started by laying a strong foundation; studying the craft.

An online first-draft course was a hefty investment in both time and money, but it gave me deadlines, structure and feedback that kept me returning to the keyboard after a hard day making bricks.

My husband started an online university degree at a similar time, so we built an extra-long desk from timber scraps to accommodate two computers and squeezed it into our tiny shed-house. After working side-by-side on our house during weekends and holidays, we came together for a nightly 'hour of power' after the children went to bed – him on his economics degree and me on my manuscript.

My new beginning grew roots as we kitted out our new house. I dreamed up plot-lines as I applied four coats of mahogany stain to the 900-lineal metres of ceiling timbers, invented characters while painting and mentally killed off my darlings as I grouted tiles. I also soaked up invaluable information from published authors and industry professionals on podcasts like 'So You Want To Be A Writer' with Allison Tait and Valerie Khoo.

Attending author talks and writing workshops became a priority. I met Rachael Treasure, Australia's pioneering rural romance author, at the iconic Sheepvention event in Hamilton, and although I followed her advice about starting a social media platform the very next day, I didn't realise how valuable her tip would be until eighteen months later.

A magical group called Romance Writers Australia (RWA) came highly recommended by another visiting author, and I signed up to discover a calendar of writing competitions, a mix of aspiring, emerging and established authors, and an annual conference where writers sipped champagne while talking books. I was sold! I also kept devouring novels at a rapid rate, sampling new authors and genres in the interests of thorough research.

And just like that, my manuscript grew until I had something that resembled a novel. It wasn't until this stage I started telling friends I was writing a book, always fearing my muse would desert me if I announced this bold ambition too early. I wasn't quite brave enough to call myself a writer yet, but their encouragement was a massive boost to my writerly soul.

The cramped double-computer desk became a charming memory as we moved into our almost-finished house. My new office was a pleasure to write in; my computer chair rolled over floorboards I'd helped lay during the stinking hot summer before, and cargo ships floated on the blue horizon just above my computer screen.

The first day of 2018 was a sign of fabulous things to come, with a New Year's Day email congratulating me on making the finals in my first romance writing competition. I made the finals three times that year and used the judges' feedback to hone my second draft. I also started blogging for RWA, combining author interviews with book reviews.

When our youngest child started school, I threw myself into rewrites and booked a virtual ticket to the 2018 Red Dirt Week literary speed dating event. Organised by the Australian Society of Authors, the event offered rural writers the opportunity to video pitch their novel. It was a hit. Suddenly a publisher and an agent wanted my manuscript.

Aware I was unlikely to hit the jackpot with my very first book, on my very first pitch, I hedged my bets, booking tickets for the RWA conference in Sydney, where agents and publishers would take in-person pitches.

Back in 2016, when I'd felt like an imposter creating an author platform, I didn't realise my book reviews, country photos, writing-related posts, competition wins and a community of online friends would play a vital role in becoming an author. As it turned out, my social media account helped me connect with a delightful publisher from Allen and Unwin.

As well as being a fellow baker and green thumb, Annette Barlow represented some of my favourite rural romance authors. I took the liberty of following her public Instagram account, then just about fell off my office chair when she followed me back. Much to my delight, Allen and Unwin offered me a two-book publishing contract a few months later and warmly welcomed me into the fold.

Fast-forward to winter 2019 and my novel 'Wildflower Ridge' started appearing in bookstores and library shelves. It truly was the stuff childhood dreams are made of. 📖

**Maya Linnell lives in regional Victoria with her husband and children and a menagerie of animals. Her debut novel, 'Wildflower Ridge' was released with Allen and Unwin in June, and she will be touring Victoria, South Australia and Queensland this winter to talk books, writing and new beginnings. Visit [mayalinnell.com](http://mayalinnell.com) or follow her @maya.linnell. writes on Instagram and Facebook.**

# In Peopled Places

By Dawn Nguyen

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I'm a nomad when it comes to writing. In a quiet corner at home, I have a desk with a comfortable chair, but I rarely use it for writing. Instead, I write at the dining table, the kitchen bench, on the train, in a café and in the park. I need space. I need nature's presence. I need human activities. I need human voices.

Growing up in Vietnam, I never had a room of my own and always shared space with my two siblings. Our house only had two rooms and we kids slept in the larger room, where all the household activities took place. It was not insulated against extreme weather or the noises of the neighbourhood. I'd be woken at the same time every day by the shouting and reprimands of the woman in the house behind ours, directed at her youngest black-sheep son. She had a flair with her reprimanding, producing long lungful sentences with rhythmic ups and downs. Since she was home all the time while my mother worked full-time, I would hear more of her voice than that of my own mother.

Here, conversations in English are like 'white noise' to me. It takes focused effort for me to pick up and process meaning. Because of this, I am not distracted by conversations around me and I can write anywhere I want. In fact, some synchronicity seems to happen within me. Energy flows best when surrounded by other human beings. Maybe it's also because of the rhythm of spoken English.

But understanding why I prefer to be surrounded by people doesn't seem to answer why I like to be in a public place when writing. Perhaps it hinges on the reason why I wanted to write in the first place. Why do I want to write when a love of numbers and math led me into a career in data analytics? Why do I want to write in English instead of Vietnamese,

my mother tongue? Why make my life difficult pursuing the potentially futile task of writing in a second language, grappling with words I sometimes can't even spell, instead of the language I used to breathe out effortlessly? And why have I come to love something that once presented the greatest barrier in my life?

I needed to learn English to get by, but also to respond to the strong lifelong pull I've felt towards this language. But to claim to love a language that is not your mother tongue is an unconventional and somewhat unacceptable claim. Like abandoning the lush velvet green rice fields to fall for the khaki eucalypts that lack all the elements of intensity, uniformity and mass for a long-lasting impression. Or throwing out your own baby to adopt another's. I felt compelled to dig in to find a good reason, for otherwise am I not being false to myself?

I revisited my first diary a while back, after rediscovering my first 'special friend' in Vietnam on Facebook. It was written in Vietnamese at the beginning but in English, broken and awkward, at the end. It covers the time after I first arrived in Australia and had my own room; I felt secure enough to put down my private thoughts in purple ink. My inclination to observe my world in English had started even when Vietnamese was still my dominant language. So it seems English was associated with the freedom I felt then. Maybe my bond with English is about the 'clicking' between the 'character' of a human being and that of a language.

My history with English goes back further to my early childhood. I used to listen to the beautiful melodies that travelled from the only cinema in town across the rice fields into our home every afternoon. My body wanted

to move with their beats. Radio and TV were almost completely absent then and I waited for these tunes each day. I could tell when there were changes in the winds that carried them, in their oscillating volume. However, they were in a foreign language that even the grown-ups couldn't put a name to. I knew they were not Russian, the foreign language I had to study at school. Despite that, the singers' voices were magical, and the mystery of these songs enchanted me.

I later learned these magical melodies were those of Boney M: 'By the rivers of Babylon', 'Daddy Cool', 'Brown Girl in the Ring' and so on. This upbeat music made it past the Communist state media controls. Those songs still make waves in my body. For me then, they presented the possibility that something impossible in my world was possible somewhere else. Paradoxically, the same somewhere was used often in my father's favourite threat: 'Behave, or I'll kick you to the West'. There was a contradiction between these adult words and what I was beginning to perceive: why did this menacing West have such magical music? And what were all these songs about? English was seeded deep within me at this early age. English had come to represent the magic, beauty and mystery of a childhood fairy tale. My love for it has been there all along, from the time before I learnt to speak it.

By now I have read more in English than in Vietnamese. My bookshelf at home has more reading material than the scanty collection held by the public library in my childhood town. All I owned during my time in Vietnam was a few copies of a teenage magazine. English now has seeped into me deeper than my mother tongue. This happened, however, only after a long and challenging period of adjustment.

When I first arrived here, the first English I learnt was academic. I was shocked at how text books were not just bigger but also twice or three times thicker than those I'd had in Vietnam. I also discovered I was short-sighted, likely due to the intensity of reading these text books and the fine print of the dictionary that I referred to every day.

Then I joined the workforce, and the English I used was mostly business or office language. In that context, English was merely a vessel

for bread earning. But meeting the language requirement at work doesn't equate with 'living'. Office language is a language without a soul.

Learning English was part of the long settlement period in this new homeland for myself and my young daughter. Feeling that my language skills were less capable than a ten-years-old child's, I was overwhelmed with worries and stresses. Coming home from work, I struggled to recite the alphabet and Dr Seuss's rhythms for my daughter. There was so much to learn and little space or time to appreciate life. I didn't feel I was really living.

So maybe my recent turn to writing in English is just the continuum of the parallel between learning a new language and settling in a new society. I want to appreciate this little piece of heaven I now live in and to let my mind go beyond the academic and office English. To me, writing is not to make a living, but to own my life. I don't want to pass my time here without noticing. I want to be present in the space. To watch the green plane trees on Bourke Street from The Mess Hall café and appreciate how their shapes, patterns and shades change with the sun's shining and hiding. During spring time, these trees are closest in colour to the tropical greens I grew up with. Seeing them spreading in front of me makes me feel revitalised. I am once more the child me sitting on top of the old slide in front of the long alley to my house, watching the world go by below and waiting for the shape of my mother's bike from the main street, a distance that seemed faraway in my child eyes.

There, on the other side of the street, in large black print 'Job Warehouse' on dirty, thick, cracked, cream paint. Long gone is the person who once put jobs in a warehouse. Things he left behind speak quietly about the ephemerality of our existence. Life here, in its past, present and future forms, will forever have that 'Anglo attraction' to me (similar the 'Oriental attraction' that Western explorers brought back to their homelands). Maybe in discovering and appreciating life around me, I'm becoming part of it.

Reading novels and newspapers is not enough for me. It feels second-hand. I want to be able to express my own thoughts on the daily mundane or living values I observe, in the language that I'm surrounded by. The language

that my children and partner speak. I want to be able to describe the fractal patterns of the bare elm trunks during the winter, the subtle differences as eucalyptus trees sweat in different weathers, or the unusual ways that new shoots push themselves out of some tree trunks in spring. I have now begun to feel settled here. But the air, the trees, the flowers, the colours and the fragrances are all still fresh to me. I still have not grown 'my skin' here yet.

Writing in a public place is a way for me to take notice of life. To feel familiar. To feel comfortable. To feel ordinary. I hope that if I try long enough then one day I may be able to express the 'shadow of my thoughts' so that I won't feel I'm living in paper-mache anymore, but living in my own skin. Being able to write passages like Jill K Conway's descriptions of the Australian outback in 'The Road from Coorain' will be a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.

Also, like other adult migrants from non-English backgrounds, I didn't have a social sandbox to learn and practise human interactions in preparation for adult life in this new society. My views of life and ways of living here have not been based on real-life social interactions but heavily on printed words in self-development and parenting books, and a mixture of sensational media and made-up scenes in movies. They are somewhat unrealistic I will concede. I need to take the real things in to balance things out. To not feel like an astronaut, too far removed from this human life. I need to return to a time when I was a little girl sitting at my desk in the middle of my house, completing literature homework in my best handwriting amid all the shouting, reprimanding, talking and banging that constituted the life of my extended family and neighbours. Life and its language percolate within me.

To me, writing is like letting myself roam the water ponds and rice fields as I did during my childhood. It was the time when I was bare skinned and completely lost in the world around me. I have realised how lucky I am for eternally falling in love with everything around me. With this second language of mine. With the people who speak it. With the khaki eucalyptus tress in the background.

This is probably why a confined room is not my choice for a writing place. One day in July, you may find me sitting bare-legged in the middle of Fitzroy Garden, trying to find words to describe the cold nights when wintry north-east winds blew through my childhood house. My writing place is anywhere in this garden state. Or anywhere on this blue-incubated vast old continent that I now call home. ⑩

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**Dawn Nguyen is a writer (when not crunching numbers to improve health service provision). Her fiction has appeared in recent issues of 'The Victorian Writer' and 'The Lifted Brow'. She is currently working on a collection of short stories.**

# Milestones

**Kit Fennessy's** new book 'Tales of Enlightenment' is being launched in August, with a national book tour mooted – well, a trip to Adelaide anyway. Including short stories, poems and cartoons, it's been likened (by Kit, obviously) to the works of Spike Milligan and James Thurber. Now on sale at Readings in Carlton and Dymocks Books Collins St. For more information visit [kitfennessy.com](http://kitfennessy.com)

**David MA Francis** has won the Ada Cambridge 2019 Biographical Prose Prize at the Williamstown Literary Festival, and received an Honourable Mention in the Fish Publishing Short Memoir Prize 2019 for extracts from his forthcoming memoir 'Between Joy and Sorrow: A Journey of the Hands'. He also recently completed a PhD thesis entitled 'Here Be Monsters: Body Imagery in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath' at the University of Melbourne.

**KH Canobi** is excited about the June release of her debut novel with Ford Street Publishing. 'Mindcull' is a fast-paced futuristic thriller for young adults set in a time when nothing is as real as virtual reality. Sixteen-year-old Eila is in the running to star in a global marketing campaign for a new virtual reality skinsuit, but a fierce battle rages for control of her mind. Amid secrets and deceptions, Eila must work out who her true allies are and how far she will go to protect innocent lives.

**Tony Reck's** latest play 'Broken River' will premiere at Melbourne's La Mama Courthouse theatre in September 2019, as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Directed by legendary Melbourne theatre director Richard Murphet, 'Broken River' is an epic tale about corruption in the Melbourne Underworld. Further details are available via the La Mama website: [lamama.com.au/whats-on/winter-spring-2019/broken-river/](http://lamama.com.au/whats-on/winter-spring-2019/broken-river/)

**Jen Hutchison's** 'Motherling', published by Journeys to Words Publishing was featured by Myf Warhurst on ABC Radio last month. Go to <https://journeystowordspublishing.com/> to listen, or to buy 'Motherling', which will also be featured in the Australian Women's Weekly in August. Also available at leading indi bookstores.

**Hendrik Dierich's** poetry collection 'Dark Spectrum', was published by Xlibris in April. The book is available in soft cover (214 pages) and as an e-book.

**Gerard RM Carvalho's** latest collection of stories, 'O Navio and Other Stories', is now available through Amazon Kindle, Booktopia, Fishpond and Dennis Jones.

**Denise Tobin Shine** has published her new novel 'Jeremiah's Trunk', a multi-generational page-turner covering two centuries. 'Jeremiah's Trunk' is available for purchase in all Readings stores, online or contact Denise at [mdshine@iinet.net.au](mailto:mdshine@iinet.net.au)

**Francesca White's** story 'A Full Heart', entered into the Timeless Wisdom Writing Challenge 2018 via Exisle Publishing, has been selected to be published in the book, 'Human Kindness,' a collection of short stories in October.

# Classifieds

## Let's Talk Books

Sat 17 Aug, Wonthaggi Library

Looking for some good books to cozy up with this winter? Then look no further. Join local authors Kit Fennessy and JM Anderson to hear all about their latest, great books, and about the kind of reads that inspire them.

WARNING: may contain great writing.

Tea and biscuits provided.

## High Infidelity

Journeys to Words Publishing proudly announces the release of Shelley Davidow's new novel, 'High Infidelity'. Go to [journeystowordspublishing.com](http://journeystowordspublishing.com) to purchase or ask your local bookstore. A delicious romantic tale set in Byron Bay, an exploration of self, and stumbling towards the discovery of love and happiness.

## Writing and Wellness Retreat 26-29 August, 3 nights, 4 days

Join writer Cath Crowley and editor Alison Arnold at Lake House Daylesford for the most luxurious of creative reboots. Writing, wellness, magnificent food, like-minded people, deluxe accommodation, a massage, six acres of garden, and walks around the lake. Also included, a session with Ali and Cath to troubleshoot your project/creative life.

More information: [alisonarnold.com.au/wordhousepresents](http://alisonarnold.com.au/wordhousepresents)

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

## Nitpicker (from page 21)

1. who 2. had written 3. reeking 4. More lucid 5. , he said,

# Workshops and Courses

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

## Online

### **Beginner Short Story Clinic** with [Laura Jean McKay](#)

Every story begins with a messy first draft. This beginners' online clinic is a constructive and supportive environment that will help you identify the strengths and weaknesses of your story, learn the elements of your craft and provide direction for your next draft.

Stories of up to 1500 words due Weds 7 Aug, 11 Sep, 16 Oct, 20 Nov, 11 Dec

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Early

### **Intermediate Short Story Clinic** with [Laurie Steed](#)

Writing requires commitment, experimentation in voice, and selective support as one begins to master one's craft. The online clinic is all about finding your feet, and your voice, as a writer.

Stories of up to 1500 words due Weds 7 Aug, 11 Sep, 16 Oct, 20 Nov, 11 Dec

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Emerging

### **Advanced Short Story Clinic** with [Roanna Gonsalves](#)

Whether you're an emerging writer or deep into your craft, this five-month course aims to meet each story on its own terms while exploring non-traditional

narratives and sharpening your narrative intuition as both writer and editor.

Stories of up to 1500 words due Weds 28 Aug, 18 Sep, 9 Oct, 30 Oct, 20 Nov

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Established

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

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

Poems of up to 1500 words due Weds 7 Aug, 11 Sep, 16 Oct, 20 Nov, 11 Dec

Member price: \$240/\$250

Non-member price: \$310

Level: Early and emerging

### **A Webinar on Webinars** with [Kate Cuthbert](#)

Webinars can be a great way of benefitting from professional development opportunities without the expense and hassle of travelling – or even getting out of your pyjamas.

This session seeks to demystify our webinar program and provide step-by-step instructions and experience to allow you to access our webinars with confidence. Come meet us online!

When: Tue 24 Sep, 12-1pm

Member price: Free

Non-member price: \$20

Level: All

## In-person

### **Melbourne Writers Festival/Writers Victoria Masterclasses**

We are delighted to partner with the Melbourne Writers Festival to offer a suite of masterclasses from national and international writers sharing their knowledge and experience. Spaces are limited. Bookings via MWF website ([mwf.com.au](http://mwf.com.au)).

**Ginger Gorman:**  
**Making it Work as a Freelancer**  
Sat 31 Aug, 10am-12.30pm

**Kristina Olsson: Shame and Truth in Memoir**  
Sat 31 Aug, 2.30-4pm

**Sara Saleh:**  
**Poetry and Performance**  
Sun 1 Sep, 10am-12.30pm

**Andreas Harsono:**  
**Building Narrative in Long-Form Journalism**  
Sun 1 Sep, 2.30-4pm

**Daniel de Lorne:**  
**Writing Deep Point-of-View**  
Sat 7 Sep, 10am-12.30pm

**Laura Elvery:**  
**Crafting Short Fiction**  
Sat 7 Sep, 2.30-4pm

**Amal Awad: The Personal and Political in Fiction**  
Sun 8 Sep, 10am-12.30pm

**Sam George-Allen:**  
**Opportunities of Creative Non-Fiction**  
Sun 8 Sep, 2.30-4pm

## **Cops and Robbers**

with Jarad Henry.

In this interactive workshop you'll learn to the ins and outs of real life police drama, as well as how to walk, talk and investigate like an Aussie detective. Most importantly, you'll learn how to apply this to your characters, giving your stories the essential ingredient of every great crime writer; verisimilitude.

When: Sat 3 Aug, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

## **Seduce Your Writing: Self-Editing techniques for writers**

with Eugen Bacon.

Learn how to approach your writing with an editorial eye, taking the raw material and shaping it into a compelling narrative. Perfect for writers of all experience levels looking to improve their self-editing skills

When: Sun 4 Aug, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

## **Launch: Pencilled In: The LIMINAL Edition**

Join guest-editor Leah Jing and editor Yen-Rong Wong to launch issue #4 of Pencilled In: The LIMINAL Edition. To 'pencil something in' is to insist on an instability. Plans made cautiously; the ground you stand on is not stable. To exist in a 'liminal state' is much the same: an existence at the edge, or between two things. Come celebrate the shared desire to carve out space. Featuring performances by Rachel Ang, Madison Griffiths, Sumudu Samarawickrama, Cher Tan and more.

When: Tue 13 Aug, 6.30-7.30pm

Price: Free

Level: All

## **The Ethical Wilds of Writing Memoir**

with Honor Eastly.

There's nothing more terrifying that a writer can do than reveal themselves and their struggles through their work. At one end is the fear of narcissism; at the other, the very real threat of career and personal consequences. Yet personal narrative remains an arresting and powerful tool to engage and change readers. So how do we best navigate the ethical wilds of memoir writing?

When: Sat 21 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

## **Writing Sharp, Satisfying Dialogue**

with CS Pacat.

Great dialogue illuminates character, showcases relationships – and in the best case provides some of book and screen's most iconic lines. But how do you write compelling dialogue? Using techniques drawn from the best in fiction and screenplay, this course will teach you how to delve into your character's voice, create dynamic exchanges, and give you strategies for writing dialogue that feels compelling and true, while also moving the story forward.

When: Mon 23 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

## **Playwriting**

with Diane Stubbings.

Do you find it easy to write dialogue? Do you find yourself imagining actors speaking your words? Do you want to push at the boundaries of your creative writing more generally? Then you might want to explore playwriting. This workshop will give you an introduction to the key techniques involved in writing plays – action, plot, character, dialogue and spectacle – and show you how to use those techniques effectively to develop an exciting play.

When: Tue 24 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

## **Using Diaries, Journals and Personal Letters in Non-Fiction and Fiction**

with June Alexander.

The deeply private practice of diary writing has many benefits that transcend the literary world and enrich the public sphere. Diary writing can be a writer's best friend, as skills honed in the private setting are becoming integral in the book creation process – for example, book structure, content and variation in narrative expression. At this workshop you will learn how the diary can be used in ways beyond a private keepsake to create an interesting non-fiction story that supports self-discovery and renewal.

When: Wednesday 25  
September, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

**Reading for Writers:  
Wayne Macauley on  
'Malone Dies'**

'Malone Dies' by Samuel Beckett is part of the great trilogy written during the post-war 'siege in the room'. It is essentially the monologue of a dying old man, written in one of the most distinct voices in all of literature. Wildly experimental, darkly funny and profoundly human.

When: Wed 25 Sep, 6-8pm

Member price: \$35/\$45

Non-Member price: \$60

Level: All

**The Novella: The Perfect Form of Prose Fiction**

with AS Patric

The novella is a unique form for unique writers. Constantly evolving, the novella is also the most versatile of literary expressions, allowing for fluid movement between genres and encouraging stories that would otherwise not be told. We will study craft and technique, character development, narrative function, voice, tone, ideas and aesthetics specific to the novella, with a focus on how we deploy our skills practically. Move away from mimicry and build an awareness of clichés. Emerge equipped to write a unique and vital novella.

When: Thu 26 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging and established

**Young Writers  
School Holiday Program:  
Building Great Characters**

with Jennifer Down

Strong, believable characters are one of the most crucial parts of good storytelling – and drawing the reader into your fiction. Together, we will delve into how to build a character from the ground-up, touching on description, development, and the importance of three-dimensions. This course will also help you find the right plot and conflict for your character, populate your world with the right secondary characters, and develop the right voice to help them express themselves.

Where: State Library of Victoria

When: Thu 26 Sep, 10am-2pm

Price: \$10

Level: Ages 13-17

**Indigenous Storytelling**

with Claire G Coleman

Priority for this one-day workshop will be for First Nations Writers. Writers who do not identify as First Nations may attend if there are remaining spaces and they have completed the Koorie Heritage Trust Indigenous Awareness Training or equivalent. Alexis Wright, Kim Scott, Melissa Lucashenko; these and other award-winning Indigenous writers show how powerful and important Indigenous storytelling has become in Australia. Learn how Indigenous voices can change the dialogue, how to write your story, why you are the only person who can tell your story and how, perhaps to get published.

When: Sun 29 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging and established

**After the First Draft: The Mechanics of Revision**  
with Les Zigomanis

You've finished writing. You're pleased with yourself. It's a pretty good draft. But what comes next? Lots of writers think their first draft just needs a quick once-over, then it's all ready to send out into the world. But you have only one chance to make a first impression. So your work can't just be 'pretty good'. It has to be 'great'. It has to be 'excellent'. This workshop teaches you tips and practices on how to improve your writing through simple revision.

When: Mon 30 Sep, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

# Membership Form

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

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 Concession \$100  Regional \$90

One-year memberships

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 Regional \$50

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

Melbourne 2019  
Writers Festival

# WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE

30 AUG  
— 8 SEP



New York Times essayist  
Sloane Crosley



Celebrated Canadian  
novelist Patrick deWitt



American fiction  
writer Tayari Jones



Mexican author and political  
scientist Emiliano Monge



Australian artist and  
activist Ben Quilty



Dear Prudence podcast host  
Daniel Mallory Ortberg



Marvel comic book writer  
Eve L Ewing



Television presenter and  
author Yumi Stynes



Former Prime Minister of  
New Zealand Helen Clark



Booker Prize-winning  
novelist Richard Flanagan



Author, broadcaster,  
feminist Jane Caro



Scottish crime writer  
Val McDermid

## YA Day

WHEN Sun 1 Sep  
TICKETS From \$15

### FEATURING

Randa Abdel-Fattah,  
Becky Albertalli, Michael Earp,  
Jenna Guillaume, Amie Kaufman,  
Melina Marchetta, and more.



## A Day of Romance

WHEN Sun 8 Sep  
TICKETS \$25/\$19

### FEATURING

Clare Connelly, Daniel de Lorne,  
Annie Grace, Toni Jordan, María  
Lewis, Maureen Matthews, Jodi  
McAlister, Melanie Milburne,  
CS Pascat, and more.

## Book Club

TICKETS \$60

### FEATURING

Julian Burnside, Sloane Crosley,  
Nazeem Hussain, Judith Lucy,  
Scott Ludlam, Brian Nankervis,  
Daniel Mallory Ortberg, Sami Shah



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