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Editorial

This month, Writers Victoria marks thirty years of supporting and promoting the wonderful work of Victorian writers.

This issue celebrates the breadth and depth of our membership and of Victorian writing more generally: Melanie Cheng, Christos Tsiolkas, Andy Jackson and Angela Savage get candid about their writing lives; Elizabeth Kuiper writes about navigating debut success; Nick Gadd finds a type of inspiration in fonts, and Fiona Murphy writes about coming into identity through memoir.

Also in this issue, we champion emerging voices with our Grace Marion Wilson Prize-winners: 'Acheron' by Benjamin Hickey, 'The Good Mother' by Pamela Swanborough, 'West Footscray Factory Fire' by Mykaela Saunders and 'Ocean Beach' by Michelle Tom.

Thirty years on and Victorian writing is thriving. Truth be told, we've been celebrating this fact all year, with our #Flash30 competition, our recent write-frenzy, 30K in 30 Days, and the excellent Writers on Writers Vic series, which is worth revisiting at writersvictoria.org.au/writers-on-writers-victoria. 

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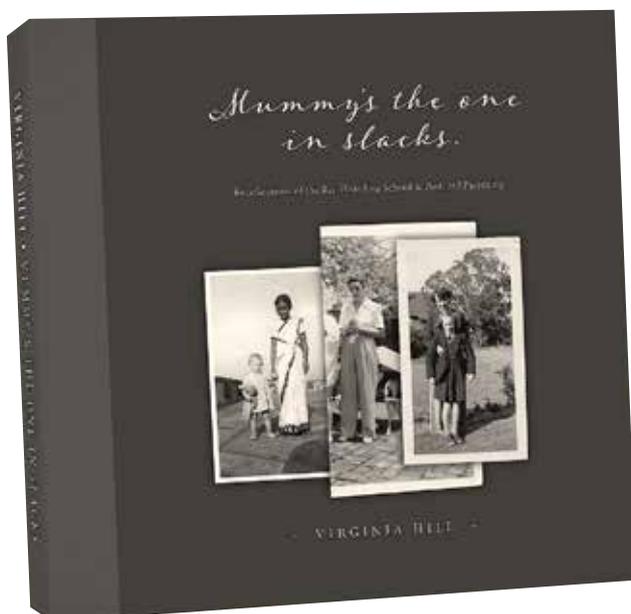
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4 Writers: 4 Questions

Melanie Cheng, Christos Tsiolkas, Andy Jackson and Angela Savage get candid about their writing lives at the 2019 Melbourne Writers Festival.

Melanie Cheng

What was the first piece of writing you had published and how did you feel about it?

The first thing I had published was a creative non-fiction piece about my Chinese grandmother in 'Peril' magazine.

My aunt had sat down with my grandmother and interviewed her about her life and had recorded that. She went on to translate that into English for the benefit of her grandchildren, many of whom couldn't speak let alone read Chinese. I really wanted to do something with that document, so, I wrote this piece, which was not just a retelling of the key moments of her life, but a reflection of my response to her story. It was an enormous thrill for that to be my first published work. My grandmother actually passed away from gastric cancer in October 2013 and the piece was published a month later. I was able to dedicate that to her memory and her life, so it was a particularly meaningful publication.

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

Growing up, I didn't read a lot of Stephen King, but I have to say, his book on writing, to me, was revolutionary. I think I read it as a young adult when I was kind of tossing around the idea of writing. I think for a long time I was just waiting for this [writing] time to be given to me – long stretches of time – and that's never going to happen. King encourages you to think about how much crappy TV you watch, for instance, and he says, just start there, just cut out an hour of your crappy TV and start using that to write. So that's what I did. And you know the first book did take nine years. You can do it – it just takes a bit longer in these short stretches.

The other really great thing that King talks about is writing with the door closed and rewriting with the door open. I really like that advice. I don't show the first draft to anyone because I'm quite sensitive and as little as a raise of the eyebrow will make me think, 'Oh, something's wrong here,' and that can really derail the project before you know what you're trying to achieve. At the same time, once that draft is done, you really want that fresh perspective.

At what point did you think of yourself as a writer?

When people ask me now what I do, I'm quite comfortable telling them I'm a GP and I think it comes down to me having qualifications. I don't have that PhD in writing or any writing degrees at all. I think I do still suffer a bit from imposter syndrome. But, I'm learning. Now I've published two books, I am a bit more comfortable with it. One thing, though, at a dinner party I would rather someone showed me their funny looking mole than their unpublished manuscript.

Thinking about your body of work, what are you most proud of having written?

I would have to say my most recent work, the novel, 'Room for a Stranger'. The reason for that is, as far back as high school, I had listed writing a novel as one of my key ambitions but deep down I didn't think I'd really achieve that ... it was a tongue-in-cheek thing I wrote in my yearbook. So, personally, it's really gratifying to have finally achieved that. Unlike the short-story collection, for which I wrote stand-alone stories after a long period of time, its coming together was almost a happy accident. It was much more deliberate with the novel – the advance, the deadline and a little bit of pressure – and so to achieve that under those circumstances was really gratifying. But more than that, I'm proud that the characters

I portray in the novel are not your traditional protagonists, and, in particular, the older character – like my ‘Peril’ piece – was inspired by someone very close to me: a late aunt who was a carer. I really liked the privilege of honouring her.

Christos Tsiolkas

What was the first piece of writing you had published and how did you feel about it?

I was a high school student in the 80s and the threat of nuclear war was what climate change is for my young nieces and nephews. I joined People for Nuclear Disarmament when I was in high school and we used to meet sometimes in the city in Curtin House and this lovely person Leslie got me to write a film review for ... I can't remember what it was, I think it was for the Socialist Workers Party.

My mum – her family were left-wing in Greece and she used to say to me when I was growing up: ‘Never give the the authorities your real name,’ because her brother had been in prison during the junta – the military junta, there. Her experience of Greece as a left wing person was that the government kept files on you. She said, ‘Never use your name because it will come back to haunt you.’ So, I called myself the name of the boy at school I had the biggest crush on. That first piece – it's just that exhilarating feeling of ... wow, I got a piece in what looks like a real newspaper.

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

There's a wonderful Australian writer called Sasha Soldatow who was a very big influence for me, and he said, when you're at your desk, be ruthless and I've always carried that. Be kind, and be a good person outside but be ruthless at your desk ... that's your time. The other things Sasha said, which I do actually think has the element of truth: Great title, great opening sentence and great closing paragraph.

At what point did you think of yourself as a writer?

Oh, that imposter syndrome – I don't know if that ever goes away. A really good friend of mine, Patricia Cornelius – one of the finest playwrights in this country, in the English language – she still talks about that feeling. I

know that someone's going to tap me on the shoulder and go, Tsiolkas, get out of here, you don't belong.

Maybe that's just a part of ... I don't know how much of that comes from what we all share as writers, or if that comes from class. Patricia and I talk a lot about that.

I guess when I had to make the decision to go down to part-time and treat this seriously, I had to try to learn how to say, ‘I'm a writer’.

When I was working [on ‘Loaded’], I was working at a great job at the State Film Centre but I knew I wanted to write. I was talking to my partner, Wayne. He just said, ‘What is it you want to do?’, ‘I want to write,’ I said, and he said, ‘Well, go down to part-time, we'll make it work.’ I am forever grateful for his generosity.

Thinking about your body of work, what are you most proud of having written?

‘Dead Europe’, my third novel, because it was such a struggle to write. Not that I think it's an overly successful novel, but I really challenged myself as a writer with this book. And I think success had something to do with it. After ‘The Jesus Man’, which is a novel that is still important to me, there was that sense of, ‘Will I ever write again?’ And ‘Dead Europe’ taught me that I can. The best thing it did was challenge me as a writer.

Because I think writing for my family was such a frightening thing ... I told you that thing about my mother and the idea of going public with your name. There's a chapter in my novel that is written from the perspective of a character of my father and mother's generation. My father, who has passed away, found reading my work when it wasn't translated quite difficult. But he said me he was so proud of me for writing that chapter. That is for me the best critical response I've ever had.

Andy Jackson

What was the first piece of writing you had published and how did you feel about it?

I found it recently ... I was published in little zine called ‘And’ or ‘Ampersand’, which was published in the late 90s by a poet named Adam Ford, and this was in the day when you would print your poems out and put them in an

envelope with a stamped addressed envelope and send them and wait and check the letterbox.

He didn't know who I was – he just saw one poem I wrote and thought it was worth publishing. So, you kind of think, 'Maybe, just maybe, I'm all right.' But also, you think, 'I sort of snuck in. Somehow, I've bluffed my way into the club.'

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

I'm going to say the worst advice I was given. When I was putting together the manuscript for my first published book, I gave it to a poet who I respected – and still respect. And their advice was ... not necessarily advice ... that I needed to do more work and I needed to read more, kind of suggesting I go back to the canon and read all the important poets.

What occurs to me now is that the best advice for other writers is you need to develop your own canon. Your own biggest hits mix of other writers who challenge you and comfort you and unsettle you and you don't find that by reading what you're meant to read. Some of that is worth reading but I really found just wandering the aisles of libraries and finding what really jumped out at me, what maybe no one else had heard, I really found that more useful.

At what point did you think of yourself as a writer?

I think it is a kind of horizon. You always feel like it's somewhat impossible. And that energy's useful because there's always this sense that if you keep going, the next thing will prove that you know what you're doing, so you're always partly there.

It's a progressive thing. With each book it's ... maybe this is something that I can do. There was a stage where I thought, I was a writer who writes poetry, and now I realise I'm a poet.

Thinking about your body of work, what are you most proud of having written?

Related to that thing about the horizon, the thing I'm most proud of is the thing I haven't written yet. There's something out there I want to get into ... But that's slightly pretentious, so I think I'll go with the most recent book, 'Music Our Bodies Can't Hold'. It is my entry into non-fiction poetry, biographical poetry ... You know, I got into poetry because of being physically different, deformed, disabled. And it really felt like my career kicked off because I was doing something about myself. But this book is much more about solidarity – it's about affinity. The book is a set of biographical

portraits of other people with the same condition, and it really allowed me to kind of be true to my own sense of who I am, but also step outside myself and write in the voices of other people who haven't got a lot in common, apart from a genetic condition.

Angela Savage

What was the first piece of writing you had published and how did you feel about it?

When I was about ten years old, my late grandfather signed me up to the Gould League magazines, which were produced by the Birdlovers Association. I wrote a letter to the editor of the magazine which described me standing in the backyard of our family home in Camberwell watching as Major Mitchell's cockatoos roosted in the pinetrees around our house. And that was published. In fact, they weren't Major Mitchell's cockatoos, Major Mitchell's cockatoos are those really beautiful, striking pink cockatoos with the flame white crest. They were just the ordinary white cockatoos, sulfur crested cockatoos but I didn't want to let the truth stand in the way of a good story. And the fact that nobody at the Gould League of Birdlovers questioned why it was that a precocious ten-year-old in Camberwell was seeing birds that were pretty much arid zone, made me think that if you could tell a good story, you could get away with murder. I was very chuffed to see my letter in print

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

I had the great fortune to land in Canberra at the same time as [Christos Tsiolkas]. He was working on 'Dead Europe' and I was working on 'Thai Died' as it was called then, which became 'Behind the Night Bazaar'. We had known each other from university and reconnected in our twenties. So, Christos was my writers' group. We used to meet each other at one of our houses that were a short walk from each other in what passed for the inner suburbs of Canberra. So the best advice I ever got was just get the story down. At that stage I would spend hours with the thesaurus trying to finesse the perfect opening line and the perfect opening paragraph. Notwithstanding the advice about a strong opening and a strong closing, but I was just piss-farting around and I didn't understand as a new writer that the first draft is just the first draft and all the magic happens in the rework. So, Christos' advice was essential and I've since said to other writers, you actually can't write the perfect opening until you've written the whole thing at

least once through, because you don't know what happens at the end until you get there and really, the best openings are the ones that foreshadow the endings, so you sort of need that time.

At what point did you think of yourself as a writer?

What Andy says about the horizon is so true. You write your first ... my first novel was a crime novel, then I wrote another one and another one after that. Then I thought, 'I need to try my hand at something other than crime.' So, you know, 'Can I pull this off?' 'And short fiction, that's really fun, can I pull this off?' So, I think there is that constant challenge. But again, I keep coming back to Christos, because he's been such an influence in my life. He told me I was a writer. In Canberra, you said to me 'Well, you are a writer,' and you said it with such conviction, and that was before I was even published. So, I think this tiny little part of me thought if that extraordinary man, that extraordinary writer, sees me as a writer, well I'll just give it the benefit of the doubt. It's that little bit that gets you through all the doubt and all the rejection.

Obviously, because I'm living proof of this, I'm a bit down on the whole demarcation. If you write one thing or another, I'll still think you're a writer. I think writers of genre and writers of literary fiction use a lot of the same techniques ... I just think you write. If you make time in your life to write because not to write would ... what does Kafka call it? 'The non-writing writer is the monster courting insanity.' We're just writers.

Thinking about your body of work, what are you most proud of having written?

Like you, Melanie, I want to talk about the latest, I think, because it was a challenge for me to write something really new, but also this is a very fictionalised story but there are characters in it who borrow a bit from my CV and there are real bits in the story as well. And I really wrote this for my daughter, to whom the book is dedicated. And I just wanted a way for her to have a kind of document that might explain some of my vanities and some of the real gifts that I've had in my life, and also some of the troubles I've had. So, that leaves an important legacy, I guess. 📖

Melanie Cheng is a writer and general practitioner based in Melbourne. Her debut short story collection, 'Australia Day', won the 2018 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Fiction. 'Room for a Stranger' is her debut novel and second book.

Christos Tsiolkas is the author of six novels: 'Loaded', 'The Jesus Man', 'Dead Europe', 'The Slap', 'Barracuda', and 'Damascus', which has just been published, as well as the collection 'Merciless Gods'. He has been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and his works have been adapted for film and television.

Andy Jackson has featured as a poet and a performer at literary events and arts festivals in Ireland, India, the USA and Australia. His most recent collection, 'Music Our Bodies Can't Hold', consists of portrait poems of other people with Marfan Syndrome. 'Human Looking' is forthcoming.

Angela Savage is an award-winning Melbourne writer, who has lived and travelled extensively in Asia. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing and is Director of Writers Victoria. Her fourth novel, 'Mother of Pearl', was published by Transit Lounge in 2019.

This piece is an edited transcript of the Writers Victoria and Melbourne Writers Festival event, Celebrating Victorian Writers, held 1 September 2019.

Fresh Words: Elizabeth Kuiper

Emma Cayley speaks to Elizabeth Kuiper about her debut novel, 'Little Stones'.

Elizabeth Kuiper's 'Little Stones' has had an incredible journey to publication. It was first published as a short story in 'Voiceworks' in 2014, then in 2015, long-listed for the Richell Prize. I spoke to Elizabeth about navigating labels, developing a writing practice and the idea of 'Little Stones' being a meeting place of memory, reasearch and fiction.

How did 'Little Stones' grow from a short story into a novel'?

'Little Stones' began as a series of vignettes that provided a snapshot of life in Zimbabwe. The reader was immediately immersed in the day-to-day of my protagonist, from petrol queues and power cuts to bare supermarket shelves. These vignettes were gradually consumed by a greater narrative, but they provided a solid foundation for what I set out to achieve with my novel. As I expanded the work, I was able to flesh out some of the secondary characters and provide them with the depth and nuance that couldn't exist in a 3000-word piece. This also allowed for a focus on plot and dramatic pacing in order to create a satisfying build-up to the climax of the story. However, despite the changes, I believe the novel has retained the intimate connection with the everyday and the things that made the original short story special.

Choosing to tell the story from the perspective of Hannah, an eleven-year-old, must have posed some challenges in untangling the political situation of Zimbabwe. How did you approach that?

When choosing to inhabit the perspective of a young person, you are necessarily limiting yourself as a writer. Your protagonist may not

be privy to, or fully understand, a great deal of what is taking place within the world of the book. While I did experience the occasional temptation to imbue Hannah with a wisdom beyond her years, I refrained, not only in the name of realism but because I believed the story would be more powerful through the lens of childhood naiveté. In 'Little Stones', the reader is presented with different, often conflicting, pieces of information that they must process and discern along with Hannah. They are encouraged to join her as she gradually begins to learn more about the people in her life, the state of her country and her place within it. In that sense, the story is less about 'untangling' or making sense of a political situation, but closer to a coming-of-age tale in which a young girl is beginning to realise that life is messy and complex.

What research did you do?

A great amount of 'Little Stones' was inspired by my own childhood experiences in Zimbabwe. All the sensory descriptions in the text, from the sights to the smells, were pulled from my memories. I revisited Zimbabwe in the summer of 2016-17, at which point I had already started work on the book in earnest. The observations I made as an adult merged with those from my past, which enabled me to draw on a wealth of material to evoke a sense of place.

The research I conducted was about the historical/political developments that formed the background context of the novel. I didn't personally set out to write a history book, or an authoritative account of Zimbabwe – there is no denying that the book comes from a very particular perspective. I made a

conscious effort not to cram in each and every interesting tidbit into the text, instead letting my knowledge of the historical context bleed into the characters and their surroundings, and only letting these details slip into dialogue when it felt natural.

Could you tell me a little about balancing memory, research and fiction – the idea of the book as a meeting place of these elements?

Hannah and I are so similar that I occasionally forget where she ends and I begin. My mum, who has read the book three times now, shared with me that there's events within the text that she knows didn't actually happen but that she is starting to feel as if they did. There's no science to it. I know that I mined many of my personal experiences in order to evoke a sense of authenticity and realism in the book. That said, it is not an autobiography. Even in the early stages of the writing process, I never considered turning to memoir; I always felt that the story was bigger than me and that there were elements I wanted to explore that couldn't be achieved in that format – which is where the research came in. Although the book is constrained to one perspective, it was important that it resonated outwards.

Would you say you've developed a particular writing practice or process?

I don't believe I have a particular practice. I know that I am definitely a 'pants' writer in the sense that I find myself following a thread of inspiration, then worrying about how it connects to the plot later. I'm also not particularly fussy about where and when I write – I don't think you can afford to be when juggling other demands in your life. The legal and the publishing sectors are both competitive and require individuals to make substantial time and emotional commitments in order to excel. However, in some ways they tend to balance each other out. If I am feeling drained by the prospect of engaging in highly analytical statutory construction, disappearing into a creative task feels like a beautiful reprieve and vice versa.

You were featured by The Wheeler Centre as a 'Next Big Thing' – how do you navigate labels such as these when you're emerging as a debut writer?

I've actually been labelled a 'Next Big Thing' by The Wheeler Centre twice. The first time was in 2014, off the back of my short story in



'Voiceworks'. The second time came by way of

after 'Little Stones' was published this year. I think the fact I've been a 'Next Big Thing' for half a decade says something about my writing journey, and potentially that of many other emerging writers as well. After I was first assigned the label, I didn't suddenly emerge out of my writer's chrysalis in order to re-enter the world as a 'Big Thing'. The process has been a lot more slow-moving than that, perhaps more akin to caterpillar than a butterfly. At each step of the journey, my mind has only been focused on the most immediate goal, be it the next 10,000 words or getting up the nerve to send my manuscript to a publisher or going through first and second and tenth round edits. In short, while the labels are lovely, I haven't put too much stock in them. Perhaps they signal more to future readers than the writers they're ascribed to.

Elizabeth Kuiper is a writer and a law student living in Melbourne. Her debut novel, 'Little Stones' (UQP), was released in June 2019. Elizabeth grew up in Zimbabwe before emigrating to Perth with her mother. She is currently completing a Juris Doctor at the University of Melbourne.

Habits of a Writer

For Fiona Murphy, writing memoir has been a process of coming into identity.

Before he died my grandad had the story of his life recorded and transcribed. A local historian had contacted him and explained that she was keen to write his biography, and so, being a man inclined to chat, my grandad readily obliged. The resulting book is a slim volume of stories about rural Ireland, neatly bound and typeset with a series of photos of Grandad ploughing fields in tweed trousers and a well-pressed shirt. And while my grandad was proud of the book, whenever he pulled it off the shelf, he was always quick to reassure the family that the book was the happy version of events.

'Don't worry,' he'd say. 'I left out all the hardships. Besides who'd want to read about those? Let's just talk of the happier times.'

This version of his life doesn't mention the Irish War of Independence, the generations of grinding poverty, or even The Troubles. Instead, his stories home in on gentle memories of fattening cattle; summers spent harvesting hay; the dense cold and sharp frosts; eating hunks of buttered soda bread with raspberry jam; conversations next to the hearth; and Sundays spent in church.

For years, I thought it was absurd to shoehorn sorrow out of a life story. Having only met my grandad a few times, I wasn't sure if he was motivated by a high-voltage optimism or fierce family pride. But now, I wonder if he was really just protecting himself. Perhaps, by focusing on only the lighter moments of a life makes writing memoir a better, more bearable, process to endure. I think about this often, as I have been writing a memoir of my own.

Despite being born deaf, I had kept it a secret for over two decades. I was afraid of being labelled deaf and dumb, or considered unreliable. Prior to learning about Deaf culture in my late twenties,

my sense of deafness had been almost entirely formed by the medical model – a framework that defines deafness as a deficit, a malfunction, a liability. And so, through school and into the workforce, I tried to pass myself off as hearing.

Writing about deafness hasn't felt cathartic. Instead, the process has been more complex and unnerving than I anticipated. It has meant giving language to feelings and memories that I had once been determined to suppress. At times it has felt fraught to write about stigma, secrets and shame, and yet, it has, in almost equal measure, felt enlivening. Does one cancel out the other? And if so, does this make the process a zero-sum game?

After a year of trying to write about my experiences in full and frank ways, I read a definition about identity that feels firm and true: identity is formed, maintained and modified in communication. And this, I realise, is what has been happening each time I open my manuscript. Memoir writing has been, for me, a process of coming into identity, both as a writer and as a Deaf woman. Not just in the act of putting words on the page, but also in the countless conversations that have occurred since starting the manuscript.

I have been fortunate enough to be one of the Writers Victoria Publishability Fellows, which has included a mentorship with Fiona Wright and Jax Jacki Brown. Our conversations haven't just been about the craft of writing, but also the craft of being a writer. Specifically, being a disabled writer. Over coffee, Skype and email, we talk about what it means to live in bodies that aren't readily accommodated or given equal access. Bodies that have only been written about diagnostically. Bodies that are used to create melodrama and moral dilemmas in films and television. We talk

about how our bodies actually move in the world. And how these are the stories that are rarely told.

By writing about deafness, I hope to normalise the experience, as it is, after all, an extremely common one. Currently one in six Australians have some form of hearing loss, and yet, stories about deafness continue to fall into broad categories of tragedy or triumph over adversity. Had I known that deafness is so common, perhaps, I wouldn't have spent decades feeling so fearful, so isolated, and in some ways so desperate to be heard.

Having mentors to closely read each draft has made me aware of my writing habits, which include a keenness for flinging commas about and creating spectacularly mixed metaphors. I have also learned about my tendency to approach most subjects, especially the past, matter-of-factly. These recollections are exacting in every way except emotion. To have someone ask, 'Why did you do that? How did that make you feel? What happened next?' has prompted me to excavate the emotional terrain of each event. And then, once everything is on the page, to figure out how to shape it into a story.

The real kicker, though, has been realising how much I self-edit, even when I am writing just for myself. For the longest time my manuscript was dense with research. I used scientific facts to envelop any discomfort or uncertainty I had about my Deaf identity. You see, the habit of secrecy is a difficult one to break, the state of concealing oneself is as much physical as it is psychological. To appear on the page in unguarded ways, in messy and human ways, has taken me countless drafts. With time, and conversation, I am loosening up and letting myself onto the page. Not all of this will be included in the final version of the manuscript, nor does it need to, but it has allowed me to clearly and consciously determine what boundaries I want to keep.

Lately, I have been writing about deafness in ways that feel both ordinary and true: the surety of deep, undisturbed sleep even when staying in hostels; the satisfaction of accurate and artful captioning; the taste of sound; the

whole bodied intensity of conversing about even the most mundane topics; and how traffic sounds like the sea.

The artist, Agnes Martin once said 'Artwork is responded to with happy emotions. Work about ideas is responded to with other ideas.' My grandad recorded his life as he wanted it to be remembered. It wasn't the wide sweep of Irish history, war and economic strife. Instead, he focused on moments of quietude, tending to the land. These pages breathe with strong lasting emotion. And this, to me, feels like art. 📖

Fiona Murphy is a Deaf poet and essayist. Her work has appeared in 'The Griffith Review', 'Overland', 'Kill Your Darlings', 'The Big Issue', among many others. In 2019, she was awarded The Monash Prize for creative writing.

Fiona will be guest editing the next issue of 'The Victorian Writer'.

Fonts and Fiction

Nick Gadd explores different types of inspiration for his latest novel.

The first type I cared about was produced by my parents' Remington Quiet-Riter, a 1950s machine on which I smashed out my earliest stories as a child. The not-really-very-Quiet-Riter, laughably described as 'portable' although it weighed roughly the same as the family car, was a standby of office typing pools in the mid-twentieth century and the weapon of choice for thousands of novelists, poets and journalists.

The Quiet-Riter had its quirks: there was no zero or numeral 1 (you had to use a capital O or I for those) and the exclamation mark had to be assembled from a fullstop and an apostrophe. The capitals were scarcely taller than the lower case letters, a quality that typographers refer to as 'large x-height'. Certain letters had huge serifs: the lower case i and l looked as if they were standing on a diving board, while other letters which you might expect to have serifs had none. The ribbon provided two colour options: black and red. I used red to emphasise key words like WAR or MUST, but I suppose in offices it came in handy for OVERDUE and PRIVATE, or possibly (in the world of John Le Carré) TOP SECRET. You had to hit the keyboard with force to imprint the type on the paper: I developed a four-fingered stabbing technique which I still use today. If I made a mistake there was no way to fix it in that pre-Tippex era, so the choice was to type another letter even more forcefully over the top (my method, aged ten) or to start all over again.

At the time, I paid little attention to the actual shape of the letters on the page, apart from noticing their resemblance to little mechanical insects. My focus was the story, and I accepted the quirks of my Quiet-Riter as a fact of life. I realised that my typed and stapled books

with their hand-drawn covers and Sellotape spines were not exactly like the books I read (and Douglas Adams probably didn't have to ask his mum to write the foreword) but I considered them pretty professional. I imagine that publishers' slush piles used to be heaped floor-to-ceiling with manuscripts not unlike the ones I was producing. It may have been basic by today's standards, but the Quiet-Riter's typeface was the font that made me feel like a writer.

Later, with rows of orange and green Penguins on my shelf, I unconsciously absorbed design principles while I devoured the words. Those pages, with their centrally placed headers, justified text, and pleasingly spaced lines, were set in classic fonts like Granjon, Bembo and Garamond, variants of type in use since the Renaissance. I paid no attention to that: I simply accepted that this was what literature looked like. I didn't notice the subtle touches that typesetters use: the ligatures of letter combinations like 'fl' and 'ff', and the careful kerning to avoid unsightly gaps between letters; though I may have noticed typographical oddities like the use of '&c' instead of 'etc' in nineteenth-century novels. The fact that I missed all this proves that the type was doing its job. Beatrice Warde wrote that type should be like a 'crystal goblet' - it's the wine that matters, not the vessel that's holding it. But without the expertise of those unknown typesetters, my reading experience would have been more arduous, less pleasant.

With the advent of word processing, thanks to Steve Jobs, who famously studied calligraphy before turning to world domination, every part-time typist gained access to thousands of fonts. However, being able to choose from a plethora of options from Aldus to

Zapf doesn't mean that users understand the principles of good typography. As Robert Bringhurst puts it in 'The Elements of Typographic Style', 'Like oratory, music, dance, calligraphy – like anything that lends its grace to language – typography is an art that can be deliberately misused.' We've all seen texts with a smorgasbord of ill-chosen fonts vomited onto the page. All the same, people who have spent time in the company of books have an instinctive sense of what a well laid-out page looks like, even if we can't explain why.

I learned more about these matters when I became friends with typographer Stephen Banham. As a young man, Stephen was hunched over a desk in Berlin, cutting letterforms from magazines and kerning late into the night. By the time we met he had his own typography studio, Letterbox, and was described as a 'typographic evangelist' by the design magazine 'Eye'. Over the course of many conversations he taught me a little about the ways that fonts intersect with politics and economics; the cultural stories embodied in letterforms; the sheer obsessive detail involved in constructing a typeface. Thanks to Stephen, I paid more attention to the fonts around me. Why does Mistral look right for a rustic French bakery; Didot for an upmarket magazine? Why does airport signage use Helvetica? Why must your resume be in Times New Roman, not Comic Sans? Did Gotham help Obama win the presidency? I began doing my own reading, and ventured into the seductive world of swashes, serifs and glyphs.

I learned that the world of type harbours obsessives and eccentrics like Cobden-Sanderson, publisher of the Doves Press, who was so determined that his business partner should not inherit his precious type that he tossed it into the Thames, from which the exquisite letterforms are still being fished out a century later. There are tragedies, like that of the Italian poet Carlo Guidi who dropped dead when he noticed a typographical error in a book he was about to present to the Pope. Type has its heroes too, among them Jan Tschichold, a refugee from Nazism, who designed in the late 1940s the Penguin books I loved so much. There is no shortage of excellent non-fiction about type, but it struck me that this intriguing world with its rich

culture and language has a lot to offer a novelist. I decided to combine fonts and fiction.

When I told people I was writing a novel about typography, a surprising number confessed an emotional attachment to fonts. A lawyer, passionate about human rights, told me with equal fervour that she can only write her PhD thesis using the great Renaissance font Garamond. Nick Earls declared that he prefers his books set in Bembo. A friend whose dad was an advertising man feels a tug on her heart when she sees the label of 'Peck's Tasty Spread' with the lettering (in Bookman Swash) he designed using Letraset. For me, the sight of Johnston Sans evokes memories of my time commuting on the Underground, and I can hear 'London Calling' in the background. (In contrast, Melbourne suburban stations lost some of their character when the signage changed from Goudy to the ubiquitous Helvetica*). Consider your own favourite fonts: what stories intertwine with those letterforms?

When the time came for 'Death of a Typographer' to go to print, it was obvious that the book needed to look typographically impressive, so asking Stephen to design the cover and select the type was a no-brainer. He picked out 26 fonts for the chapter headings, each representing a nuance of character and plot, from something called Bo Diddlioni Stencil to Graveblade, while his designs for the cover and internal pages evoked the classic 1960s Penguins that we both admire. The text was expertly typeset by Anastasia Buryak and Wayne Saunders in Mercury Text, a new take on a classic serif. Most pleasingly, the cover draws a line directly from my younger to my older self. I hear the Quiet-Riter's clatter across the years when I look upon the author's name, set in Typewriter.

Nick Gadd is the author of 'Death of a Typographer' (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019). Find him at nickowriter.com

*There is hope, though: Stephen recently alerted me that a new font has been spotted on the Hurstbridge line.

Finding Your Tribe

Louise Zedda-Sampson has some advice to help you to find your writing people.

I'm a social person – I love connecting, networking, talking: all things communication. I also love meeting others and learning more about them. I'm also a sucker for volunteering! I've been a volunteer membership officer, general committee member and mentorship coordinator at various writing and editing organisations. I've been a slush reader, judged awards, hosted presenters for talks and seminars from interstate and organised regular local catch-ups for some of the Aussie horror-writing community. I also do short courses when I can because I like to learn about my craft.

In my previous working life I was a customer service officer and debt collector. What a change in career! These days I'm a writer and editor. I edit fiction and non-fiction and write feature articles and short stories that are generally speculative.

But that's all about me. This article is aimed at helping you find your people: the writers you gel with and the ones that make you feel like you belong.

There are so many ways to connect, happening in so many paces – online or offline. I realised, after feeling unsuccessful and intimidated by all these successful writerly people, that the only person stopping me from finding people I connected with was me! Fancy that. So, here's a how-to guide to get you out of your shell and to take some risks. There might be some hit-and-miss attempts, but don't worry about that. It's part of the journey. And it changes. As I meet more people, my tribe stretches in

different directions and in different ways, always adding value.

1. One of the best places to connect with other writers is at writerly events. Writers Victoria has a comprehensive list of Victorian events available on their website: writersvictoria.org.au/resources/writing-tips-and-tools/writers-festivals-victoria
2. If crowds turn you off, try a smaller get-together like a writer talk or workshop at the writers centre or your state or local library. I've seen amazing presenters at some of these sessions.
3. Consider joining an association that supports writers of your genre. A few examples are Romance Writers of Australia, Australian Crime Writers Association and the Australasian Horror Writers Association. Many of these associations have member events, another way to meet people.
4. Make connections on social media. If you have an interest in a particular genre of writing, there are many Facebook groups that are genre specific and very welcoming to those with similar interests. Once you have joined one, you could even take a punt and invite others to join you at a writer talk or event as a way of meeting some new people.
5. Subscribe to various writer centre newsletters, your local library updates and Facebook pages to see what's happening nearby and in other parts of the country. When attending the bigger events you might meet people from interstate or even overseas, extend your network and find out about other events you might want to attend.

6. Volunteering is a great way to meet people. If you are considering volunteering, you can attend an organisation's events and watch things a bit before putting your hand in the air to volunteer. Ask other volunteers about their organisations and roles. Or, you can just be like me, jump in blind then wonder what on earth you have taken on! I, however, don't regret any volunteer role I have done. I've enjoyed them all, made some great friends and learnt so much.

7. Some writers make connections through study, so you may want to look at further education as a way of learning and connecting with other writers. If not a degree, why not consider a short course in an area that suits you?

Lately I'm keeping in touch with my community by participating in writer and editor Facebook groups, attending a social catch-up here and there and attending writer conventions. For instance, in June I spent a wonderful weekend at Continuum 15, a speculative fiction convention hosted in Melbourne, listening to writers talk about writing, books and all sorts of things. I met old friends and made new ones.

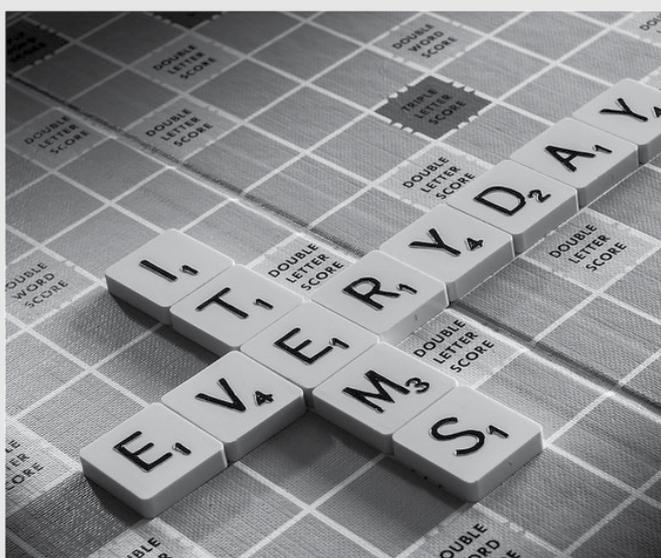
Each path is individual and can take time. It's taken me about five years to build my current network – a network that keeps expanding as I attend more events and participate in other writerly things. For some people it will take less time, others more. But hang in there and keep pursuing it. And don't be too hard on yourself if sometimes the networking doesn't work. It will – just get up, brush yourself off and try something else.

Mixing with other writers fills that empty spot inside me that I think comes from working on my own. Writer buddies have enriched my life personally and professionally. And in writing this article, I wish the same thing happens for you.

Louise Zedda-Sampson is a Melbourne-based freelance editor, and author of short stories, flash fiction and non-fiction. She professionally edits for publishers as well as independent authors of fiction and non-fiction across diverse genres. Louise also facilitates writers retreats in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs. Find Louise at novelsolutions.com.au

Nitpicker

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



CC image courtesy of John Bugg on Flickr.

1. Susan, aka Seraphina Summers, would (of/'ve killed to escape the rut of writing romance.
2. Despite Susan's (ambivalent/ambiguous) feelings, her publisher was expecting yet another bestseller.
3. He blustered that the (number/amount) of authors successfully traversing genres was minimal.
4. Susan thought another pseudonym might help with (reader's/readers') expectations.
5. She just couldn't shift the image of a shy PI who (drank/drunken) too much kombucha and had more on their mind than nabbing a life partner.

Answers on page 34

Acheron

Grace Marion Wilson
Winner ~ Fiction

By Benjamin Hickey

Winner of the 2019 Grace Marion Wilson Prize for Fiction.

*The other with mighty roar rushes fiercely on,
rolling down rocks in its flood, Acheron, that
cannot be recrossed.*

– Seneca

The sun is a melting raspberry drop hanging in the wrong, orange sky. The tram walls rock. The wooden seat sweats. It's stinking hot but Mum made Flo wear her petticoat anyway; over her swimmers and under her second-favourite dress. Her pigtails stick to her neck. There aren't many smokers on the St Kilda tram, but the whole world's been smoky since Flo woke up, like God's lit a burner to boil water for His bath.

Flo's fifteen-year-old sister sits across from her. May's big, nailbitten hands are folded on her bag, on their towels, on her lap. She stares out the window, shoulders hunched over.

'Can I carry it?' says Flo.

May blinks. 'What?'

'Can I carry it, please?'

'Oh. Nah. You heard Mum – it's for after.'

'Nah, not to drink. I just want to hold it cos its cold.'

May gives a fake laugh and fishes the quart of soft drink out of her bag. Mum borrowed next door's soda siphon especially. She even took money out of the treats jar to buy limes.

Flo takes the bottle from her sister and puts the wet glass against her face. It was right up the top of the icebox. She looks through it and everything is green. Flecks of lime bounce and dance with the bubbles.

'May?'

'Yeah?'

'Is there gonna be another war?'

May sits up straight. 'Who said that?'

'Everyone.'

'Everyone's lying. Anyway, they won't want Dad again, he's too old.'

'Mum said he was too old for the railroads. But they still wanted him.'

May looks across the aisle to a pretty lady with a fancy fan and whispers, 'You don't know anything.'

Her sister is stubborn and graceless. Flo clenches her fist and looks at the bottle. 'I'm having some now.'

'No! You heard Mum.'

'I'm thirsty! You made me walk all the way to the tram, I felt like the Hebrews.'

'What are you talking about?'

'In the desert.'

May laughs – really, this time. 'We're nearly there. You'll feel better after you have a swim.'

Swimming is stupid. Last summer, school made her do twenty-five yards to get her Herald certificate. She couldn't stop the water getting in her mouth. Mr Gunning made her try two more times, but she never got more than halfway.

'Can we just put our feet in?'

'Do what you want,' says May. 'I need a swim.'

Flo wipes her forehead with her sleeve. The tram stops. A man in a stringy yellowed singlet gets on. He's so skinny he could be made of cigarettes. The other passengers go quiet. He staggers down the aisle, talking to himself.

There were more deros when Flo was little, before she went to school. She saw them when her and Mum went round the neighbourhood looking for bottles. But now it's nineteen-thirty-nine and things are on the mend. Mum says to never tell anyone Dad was on the susso. There are things you should only speak about with your own people.

The ciggie man stops and sways. His eyes roll 'round like dice, like Dad's do when he's sick. The dero must be shell-shocked, or an alco, or both. The dice land on Flo. She doesn't turn away. He totters towards her. May stiffens. His vinegar pierces the fireplace air. He tries to mould words with his clumsy tongue – they dribble, unfinished, from the sides of his mouth.

'Jaavanerthin tudrink?'

No one else looks at him. Flo's more grown up than the grown-ups are.

'Hello, I'm sorry, what did you say?' She pricks her ears, feeling May's huge eyes on her.

'I sed, d'ya 'av anythin' to drink?'

There's something stuck in Flo's throat. Thou shalt not lie.

'Nah,' she says, 'sorry.'

The shaking man nods and leans towards her. Flo's hands and neck are drenched. He has seven teeth, and his skull pokes through his skin. He tries to tell her some secret. It just comes out as noise.

'I'm sorry,' Flo whispers. 'I dunno what you ...'

His face rips open, like he's going to cry.

'This is our stop' May declares. She stands, grabs Flo's arm and pulls her up out of the tram. May glances over her shoulder at the lady with the fan. The quart swings heavy in Flo's hand. Did he see it? The tram rattles ahead: they'll have to walk the last few stops. May isn't talking. The sun is getting redder and a brownness stains the sky. The scarecrow's noise turns into words: Blokes boiled alive in their water tanks trying to get away from the fires.

Grown-ups talk about the fires when they think Flo isn't listening. They use the same voice for Chamberlain and Chinamen. Mostly, it's boring. She's worried that the holidays are nearly over and she still hadn't done hardly anything.

But soon she'd be in Form Four, and doesn't want to sound stupid. This morning she looked at 'The Argus' before Mum snatched it away. The front page said 18 PERISH IN FOREST FIRE TRAGEDY. There was a picture of a bunged up car, burnt out by a tree.

JAMMED AGAINST A TREE WHICH BLOCKED THE ACHERON WAY, the charred remains of the car in which the Kerslake family made a desperate but unsuccessful flight from the fire were found about half a mile from the bodies of Mr and Mrs Kerslake and their daughter, Ruth. They apparently had run half a mile through blazing timber before they were overcome.

Flo guessed perished meant like milk, but didn't know what acheron was. It looked like a path in a forest or something. She looked it up in the fat yellow dictionary where Mum kept their birth certificates.

'A body of water in Hades', it said, 'the river of sorrow, or woe.'

And Hades was the underworld, or a name of the god Pluto. Pluto was her favourite planet because it was the littlest one and they only found it when she was a baby. The scientists had a competition about what to name it and the girl who won was ten, like her.

Flo watches her Roman sandals. If only she had a car, like the Kerslakes did – she wouldn't have to walk the rest of the way to the beach. Her tummy does a summersault. You should be grateful for what you have. A fat fly buzzes by her ear.

†

There's a dark shape in the corner of the yard. Step, step, lift, down. The feet of her walker crunch the grass. Step, step, lift, down. The garden is dry beyond salvation. Step, step, lift, down. She's stopped calling the mower man. The council sends a girl to help with the house. Step, step, lift, down. Not for long though – they're privatising the service.

God knows what she'll do then. Step, step, lift, down. The sun never used to be this heartless. She's shielded by the shadows of unit towers. Step, step, lift, down. All the neighbours, gone to God. Step, step, lift, down. The air has smelled like smoke all day. It can't be eighty years, it can't. Step, step, lift, down. Gray waves of progress roll past. Pompeii people, rotting in concrete. Hollow shapes of dogs and men and cities. Step, step, lift, down. She reaches it: a dead little fruit bat, shoe-leather dry. Its wings are up over its face, as if to shield it from the heat.

†

St Kilda lighthouse is a chess piece. The ocean is purple, and the waves dump their fat little bodies on the shore. The world is so wide at the beach. The horizon, which Mr Gunning taught Flo how to spell, stretches out forever, straighter than a ruler except that it's curved. There's almost no-one else here. They put their things down under a tea tree.

Once they're just in their swimmers, May rushes to the water. Flo runs after her, but her lungs start to burn. She stops to catch her breath. The sea's too big: you can tell it drops off into nothing. Flo sits down cross-legged. She forgot how hot and clingy sand is.

When she was little she built castles and dug holes to China. But sand's just dirt, really. She brushes it off her legs and picks up a seagull feather to draw a river. May's out too deep.

'May,' Flo shouts. 'Come back!'

'Come in!' yells May. 'I'll meet you halfway.'

Flo stands up, pauses, then walks towards the water. Bits of shells like scales stick to the bottom of her feet. The sand changes colour where waves touch it. Flo just puts her feet in, then feels fizzy bubbles in her chest.

'Deeper!' says May.

She thinks about drowning. The bottle glints under the tree. Flo takes a step, then

another. A school of tiny silver fish slip around her knees. They move as one without needing to talk. She's nearly reached May. A shock of cold. May's splashed her! Flo shrieks, goes all the way in to her waist and gets her sister back with a double-hander. It's been ages since she's seen May laugh like this. Flo dodges the next shot by diving underwater. The ocean takes back her sweat.

They float with the breathing waves. Flo is a bubble and the current of the world rolls and swirls around her. The red sun glances off the waves. She decides to go back to the beach. May stays. Flo wants to swim. She must look stupid doing doggy paddle, but that thought floats away with all the rest: Mum, Dad, Mr Gunning, Ruth Kerslake and the war. When she doesn't struggle the water holds her up.

Flo tastes salt. Her lungs are full of glass. She gasps, flails and kicks — at sand. She stands.

The water's already lower than her waist. That must have been much more than twenty-five yards. Flo laughs and walks back to the shallows where little crabs scatter and the sand is slimy-solid. She buries her feet in the lovely muck and watches the place where her legs end.

The water pours in and the water pulls out. The beach is moving or Flo's moving and she's dizzy but standing and steady as all of it spins. She giggles at the fishes and she giggles at her feet until a speck of ash lands in her throat. She coughs. Chokes. Racks. Spits salt. She's thirsty. She's been so thirsty all day, it's so hot, how had she forgotten?

The smoke pours in. It rips right through her: skin, breath, thought. Flo jerks to run but her feet are stuck. She wriggles loose, sprints and kicks up sand. Pigtails whip her face. The ground gives way and a spiral of pain twists up her ankle. Flo scrambles back up and limps to the twisted tea tree. Their towels, sandals, dresses and petticoat are all still there, but the bottle is nowhere to be seen. Her eyes burn. She falls to her knees and starts to dig, scraping and flipping up sand like a dog, then slumps back down in the dirt.

May trundles back up the beach.

'Mum's right,' Flo says. 'You're a whale. You'll never get a husband.'

May's faces collapses, then curls into hatred. She kicks a cloud of sand, some gets in Flo's eyes. 'Who said I want a husband?'

†

The shoebox sits on her kitchen table. She couldn't believe it when she read it in the paper: a third of Victoria's fruit bats dead in a week. Did May die last week, or last decade? Odd to think she's the older sister now. May was happy at that last convent, though. No habits, no priests. She fought until the bitter end: letters and fundraising for refugees, endless stews for homeless people.

Lonely though, poor dear. Not many at the funeral: Florence, her brood, a dozen nuns, three bored priests and a monsigneur. Things could have been different for her, would have been different for her, these days.

The kitchen bin overflows with plastic. We've taken and taken and taken from the world,

and soon there'll be nothing left. She heaves herself up, picks up the box and puts it on the seat of her walker.

†

Flo's mother's cutting onions, jaw jutting tight. Even in the heat she's made of countless layers: blouses, petticoats, singlets, corsets, chainmail, fish-scales and skin. There's a skeleton under it all, wound up like a toy in the ancient past, which one day will judder to a stop. Flo watches the potatoes dance as they boil alive in their water tank.

'How was the beach?'

'Good,' Flo says. 'Could I please have some milk?'

Flo pours it into a pink anodised mug then pours it down her throat. It's too sticky to quench her thirst. Flo pours out more but it's like throwing water into a fireplace.

'You seem parched,' Mum says. 'Did Ruth Kerslake get thirsty, when it happened?'

'Someone pinched the soft drink.'

'What?'

'We left it on the beach.'

Mum puts down the knife. Her nostrils flare. 'May!' she says, 'come here!'

Her big sister plods into the kitchen; sweaty, doughy and red. She doesn't look at Flo because they argued on the tram. Flo shrinks back into the corner to watch.

'What?' May says.

Mum rises like a storm. 'That was a good glass bottle! D'you know how much limes cost? D'you reckon we've got so much money we can leave treats lying around?'

'I'll pay for it.'

'Too right you will. You're careless.'

'I'm sorry.' May looks at Flo with hatred.

Mum sniffs. 'I'm surprised you didn't lose your sister too.'

That's when the tears come up. Salty, gulping sobs. It all pours out: foam, glass and ash. Flo runs to the bathroom and kneels at the bath. She can't find her breath. Her eyes are on fire and her face is wet and she wonders if they cried when they boiled alive in their water tanks.

'Florence,' Mum sighs from the doorway. 'It was only a bloody drink.'

Flo chokes on snot and turns to Mum. She's a little wet thing on the floor. Mum lifts her to her feet, then hugs her tight. Her sobs shrink into hiccoughs, then subside. Mum pulls away. She takes Flo by the hands. Her eyes are old and sad and she talks in a slow, low voice: 'Florence, you're ten years old. You can't carry on like that – it's only safe to bottle it up. Promise me you'll never, ever let anyone see you cry again.'

Florence promises. She's a good girl. She does what she's told and stoppers her tears in her chest. Later in the year, when Menzies comes through the radio to tell them they're at war, the river of sorrow is dammed. When they bury Dad beneath a sky as blue as lips, the river of sorrow is dammed. When Mum goes, her husband goes and May goes the river of sorrow is damned. And later that night, when she stands on the porch and watches hell glow orange on the horizon, Florence tries to weep but finds that she can't, jammed as she is against a tree which blocks the Acheron way.

†

Bloody arthritis. It took her forever to get the pink dish gloves on. She didn't even need to: it's petrified, odourless. It's little tiny feet curled up. Slowly, shaking, she swaddles it in tissue paper. She lays it in the box. Step, step, lift, down. She shuffles across the carpet. Step, step, lift, down. It doesn't seem right to throw it in the bin, so she puts the shoebox under her bed. They'll probably think she's batty. Florence laughs – really, this time – then feels something in her eye. ⑩

Benjamin Hickey is a Melbourne-based writer of fiction and essays, currently working on a book of interconnected short stories. His writing has been published in 'Visible Ink' and can be found at benjaminhickey.org. Benjamin thanks his grandparents for their contribution to his research for this piece.

The Good Mother

By Pamela Swanborough

Runner-up of the 2019 Grace Marion Wilson Prize for Fiction.

She barely remembered the coupling, had no reason to associate it with what was happening now as her abdomen lurched and pulsed; paused, lurched again. There was fear at this lack of control over her healthy muscles, but at the same time something felt good. Like the instinct to vomit; a cleansing, a lightening. She raised on her forelegs, shifted again and dragged her hindquarters around into a more comfortable angle. She could smell blood and her own shit; she dragged a bit further to a clean patch of grass. One of the lords was calling her but she did not want to respond. She needed to focus on here and now.

She whimpered again. Moved her legs, fell back on her spine, rolled onto her belly, fell back again, sat, slid and curled round the pain. A great ripple and clenching from her ribs to her loins, and a new smell arose. A sweet smell of blood and heat. Instinct took over and she nuzzled down her belly, found the wet sticky bundle that smelled so ... right. Began to nudge and lick until she felt independent movement, a responsive pushing and sniffing. A second huge clenching, and the new sweet smell grew stronger; she pushed her muzzle further into the wetness and her curling downwards movement prompted more waves of clenching, releasing, clenching, releasing. Small wet things were spilling into the space between her legs, wriggling and feeble; smelling of blood and something so right she was filled with comfort.

As she licked the slime from their sticky faces and nudged them to movement, the five tiny puppies blindly rolled and blundered their way to her belly, latching on to a nipple where they could. Their warm heads butted her body, their little muzzling jaws sucking and pulling. Her milk let down and she lay back, allowing this new reality to fill her head.

A young lord found her and raised a shout; she looked at him and slowly wagged her stumpy tail but didn't move: 'Look what I've got'.

The other lords and the old lady came from the house in great excitement. She smiled at them all but, for once, didn't get up; she was so tired and cautiously peaceful. They made much of her, stroked her head and back, spoke good words in gentle happy voices. One of the young lords picked up a puppy.

Her head snapped up! No! She showed her teeth, conflicted; against her loyalty to the dominant lords she knew she must defend her babies. But they repeated the good words, stroked her head with much kindness, put the puppy back with her. Yes.

They took another! What? She again thrust her head up, tried to move but was held down by the tiredness of her loins, the babies feeding on her belly. Again, the lords and the old lady soothed her, put the puppy back; took another and another one at a time and then gave them back ... slowly, she relaxed her jaw. She licked each puppy from head to tail, cleaned them and then cleaned herself. And then, for the pleasure of it, she repeated the full-body cleaning of each little round-bellied wriggling baby. This love was different from the love for the master. Someone came with a large basket, a blanket – not her blanket from the shed; this smelled of lords and ladies, not her own smells. She was lifted with her babies into the basket and brought inside; she could hardly remember being inside ever before, but it was lovely. So warm. So bright, so rich with smells of people, smells of food – a lot of food! – and other things she couldn't identify. She slept.

Food and a dish of water were left next to her. She ate, slept again. Later she got up to go outside to toilet and the young lords opened the door for her, watching her move in and out the

rest of the day. The puppies mostly slept but she was able to nudge them about, examine them one by one, identify their smells one by one – alike but not identical. Perfect little babies. She relaxed into a routine of feeding, cleaning and toileting, bemused by the warm kitchen and the kindly voices, the lack of orders. Sometimes they picked up a puppy, but always gently and always returning it; she resumed her trust of the lords and lowered her guard over her babies. On the second night, the young lords gave her warm food, and she slept.

The third day, she woke from sleep slowly; she had never felt like this before. Her head ached, she couldn't focus, something was wrong. There were a lot of lords in the house and the confusion of smells and noise hurt her senses, things were strange.

The puppies were all gone. All. Their smells cold in the blanket and her belly uncomfortable with engorging milk; they'd missed a feed. How long had she slept?

She leaped up, snarled, snapped; whimpered at the nearest lord, barked. The old lady came and laid soothing hands on her head and neck, then increased the firmness on her throat; dominance. She was ordered back to the basket, but conflict sat like a stone in her brain: yield to the dominant one, find the babies; yield, find. Yield.

She was moved back to the basket by force. She shivered, her teeth slightly bared, then covered, bared, then covered, as she tried to process what was happening. She could smell her puppies nearby, but something was very wrong. She whined in distress, swallowed her growls. The young lords laughed at her, but she didn't want to play.

Later, the puppies were brought back. She sniffed them as they were returned in a lump together. They smelled of the lords and other strange smells, and she was anxious and snarled quietly to the empty room; the puppies were hungry and began to feed. The light went out. The house grew quiet. She nuzzled her little ones. She bristled alert in the dark. This puppy wasn't right; this puppy was wrong. There was something so wrong with this puppy. She nudged, pushed, examined with nose and tongue. The puppy was damaged and smelled of blood. There was just a bloody stump where the tail should be. She knew what she must do to conserve her milk for the healthy puppies but even so she was distressed. With a sad heart,

she bit the puppy's throat and threw the dead wet thing out of the basket.

She smelled the same wrong smell on another puppy; again there was no tail, just a bloodied stump remained. This puppy was damaged and had to be removed for the sake of the whole group. She threw the wet dead thing from the basket. And again. And again. Again.

With an emptiness she couldn't remember ever knowing before, she lay her head on the edge of the basket; the sad metallic taste of her tribe's blood cooling on her jaws, the swelling of undrunk milk around her nipples made hard lumps under her skin. She whimpered in her sleep.

At morning light she woke, felt the fullness behind her nipples, but felt empty. She paced the kitchen, looking for release from this stuffy hot place of too many smells. She returned to the basket and wanted her own bed in the fresh air outside. A young lord burst into the room, came to her with a smile. Which dissolved into a shout, another longer shout, calling for the old lady and running backwards away from her in fear and distress. So much noise that she ached.

They all came running, and then suddenly, silence. She looked up, waiting for a clue, what response they wanted she had no idea. She was both surprised and not surprised when the first blow fell across her back, nearly knocking her down. She jumped back, took up the posture of yielding: head down, throat vulnerable. She backed away, stumbled on the edge of the basket while holding the gaze of the strongest lord, covered her teeth. The second blow caught her across the head, knocked her sideways. A kick to her belly winded her and sent stabs of pain shooting through her whole body. The blows came from all of them at once, from all sides; the noise and shouting clouded her head, as if blinding her; their smells of rage and fear were strong in her nostrils. She barked, snarled; could they not see she had yielded?

She rushed in self-defence at the smallest lord, leapt through the gap of his falling and away across the room, looking for escape, cover, understanding. Nothing. She was cornered. Someone came towards her holding a wooden thing out. She shook her head in confusion: was this a game, did they want her to catch and fetch? No, they wanted to hit her again. They wouldn't respond to her yielding. There were too many of them. She had to run now.

She braced against the wall, pushed into the air, leapt across the flat things in the room and out the high clear space in the other wall. The air cracked in front of her eyes. Sharpness hit her head-on and raked her sides and legs. But she was free and running, blood and pain in her feet and muzzle, tears in her eyes. Emptiness filled her. She ran on.

When the dark came again she stopped running. She had chewed the painful places in her feet, and they were a bloody mess but not as sore as before. She had run through the river to clear her scent, and had grabbed a few quick gulps of water, but this was the longest she had been without food that she could remember. The night air was damp; sounds and smells were complex and unfamiliar, and she missed the comforting smells in the pile of her bedding, back with the family. The light was low and shifting, shapes were unclear. At first she was unable to tell the direction or distance of the noises she could distinguish, but the need for food sharpened her focus. She smelled rabbits. Running with her nose to the ground, she found the earthy place and started to dig, furious with hunger as the dirt got into her torn legs and feet. A movement and her jaws snapped at air, missing the rabbit as it bolted away. A second ran under her legs and she missed it too. A third ran off ahead of her, its white tail signalling the alarm into the dusk. She kept digging, and found some small rabbit kittens, damp and wriggling blindly in the fallen dirt. She snapped at one, caught it by the head.

The fresh hot blood and scent of damp fur in her throat, the size and the wriggling fight against her mouth was too recent, too familiar. She gagged and threw the body to her side. Then hunger rushed back, and she snapped at another, thrashed it against the ground with a manic pitch of her aching head. Gulping the small body down in almost one bite, pausing only to pull the soft skin partially away, she reached for another. And another. The hot warm blood and meat sickened her as much as she craved it, and she killed and ate without pleasure. Then she vomited again, and ran on, away from the river and the rabbit bodies. Unknown, as she ran, a microscopic piece of filth entered her bloodstream through the cut in her left forepaw.

She woke with a confusion of sounds in her head; she was hot and thirsty, weak with hunger, surrounded by unfamiliar shapes and smells. Always the hunger, that's what life is:

a chase for food, a chase for warmth, a chase for food. She panted fast and feebly. When she found the bandage on her foreleg she started to gnaw at it.

An old lord – not family, a stranger – came into her view and she tagged several of the smells to him: old food, old tobacco, old blood, old dirt. He spoke the nice words, put his hand out towards her. She tried to jump away in self-defence, but her body failed and she fell back again onto the soft thing beneath her. He brought her food and water, placed them where she could reach, stepped back into a no-threat position. She gulped the oily food and drank deeply. Then she slept again, fitfully whining and twitching. Days passed. Her belly filled, her leg stopped hurting and she was cool again. Her milk dried up.

Months went by. She had no ability to count time, but had filled her unmarked days learning the old lord's voice and words, learning his times: when he hunted in silence at night, when he slept in daytime sunshine, when he lit the fire and when he gave her a share of his food. They slept by the fire together. The fire was good, the small draughty house was good, the old lord was good and she was content.

One day he brought another dog into the house. A male, a smell and a presence new and alarming. Her recent smouldering restlessness suddenly burst into flame, later forgotten; the other dog was taken away. In due course she found herself nursing four small wet bundles by the fire. She couldn't remember why this seemed familiar, nor why she was so anxious. But there was nothing to be alarmed about; the old lord left her alone with the babies in her familiar space with the familiar smells and the fire for warmth.

She licked each puppy from head to tail, cleaned them and then cleaned herself. And then, for the pleasure of it, she repeated the full-body cleaning of each little round-bellied wriggling baby. This love was different from the love for the master.

Pamela Swanborough has lived in urban and rural Victoria and the UK and enjoyed varied careers. Currently poetry editor for 'Extinction Rebellion Global', she is also exploring new approaches to non-fiction and literary fiction.

West Footscray Factory Fire (an Apocalypse)

By Mykaela Saunders

Winner of the 2019 Grace Marion Wilson Prize for Non-fiction.

We walk out of our house. Disturbance.
Eruption.

An apocalypse is here.

Black plumes of smoke spew dust up into heaven, polluting the home of god. My lover holds my hand as we stare at this beast of holocaustic consumption.

The sky is on fire. Smoke black as pitch vomits violently into the sky. It gulps in the air and gobbles the wind, spitting out thick plumes; it is terrible and beautiful, everything darkened in its rage.

The sky is on fire.

The sky is on fire.

This breaks all of Bunjil's laws: to keep mind of people, of wildlife, of future, of water, to never harm children, to, to –

The sky is on fire.

An apocalypse is here.

Black smoke flumes high in the big western sky and angles across Birraranga, out over to Narrm. Snaking tendrils whip across the sky and leave bold streaks over industrial suburbia, and afterimages of smoke, where poor people live, but now can't afford to leave.

More and more people flood into the streets and stand gaping, recalling the insistent sirens from the small hours before waking, alarming us dreamers for the carnage to come. The puzzle pieces lock into place with this sight.

Bunjil sweeps the sky with authority, bears witness to the damage.

He summons cumulous clouds from near and far to rally over the burning factory, heavy-bellied monsters coalesce and squat overhead, making a soft wet ceiling over black belching smoke, smothering its escape. The clouds suck up the particles into their moist guts, absorbing chemicals into wetness.

Bunjil, conjurer of rain, invokes the clouds to weep for him, to water his land with tears.

When their low hanging bellies are full, the clouds pull themselves apart and break their own waters, releasing their captive cargo to the earth. The downpour rains down and drenches the earth with chemicals; onto houses, onto schools, onto the earth it drips, into the creek, over people, onto wild animals and birds and pets and children.

The runoff swims into the creek and sinks into the ground, filling up aerated soils where the soft skin of worms absorb the acetone. It sinks in and makes everything stink, makes us all itch and feel crook at the smell of the air.

As brave fighters battle the fire, particles fly into their lungs and make their homes there, and wait for future opportune times to make blood pour from their noses.

When the sun sets on this terrible day, mandarin light streams across the land from the west, brightening gold under the darkest of canopies.

The hospital groans, anticipating the onrush.

Acetone is a clear and colourless organic compound, a volatile, flammable liquid that is

miscible with water. Tonnes of it are produced worldwide every year, mainly for use as a solvent, used in cleaning, in laboratories, as an ingredient in nail-polish remover and paint thinner. It is used in the production of methyl methacrylate and bisphenol A (BPA), whose presence in plastics can leach into food.

Acetone is normally present in blood and urine; it is produced and disposed of in the human body through normal metabolic processes.

Stony Creek swims from the west to meet the mighty Yarra under the West Gate Bridge, which then rushes out to the ocean in Port Phillip Bay. Its upper reaches emerge near Sunshine. The water has been redirected underground until it springs up at Matthews Hill Reserve. In its inland form it's a concrete stormwater drain, then becomes an avenue lined with trees before running through industrial areas.

Stony Creek runs through the place where the factory fire wept tears of smoke into the air, then runs through Cruickshank Park, near our house; a wild verdant haven in the middle of the west's industrial and suburban sprawl. I walk through Cruickshank Park to get to work every morning, and I used to go to the park for pleasure, as does a multicultural community of dogs and their owners who make use of all the space and the air.

Along Stony Creek's route, acetone sticks to the banks and evaporates into the air. Everything smells like fancy nail shops where skilled artisans paint stamp-sized works of art on the talons of their clients, perched up like queens being fussed over.

Near the outdoor gym equipment in Cruickshank Park, officials in hi-vis yellow vests and hardhats set up a white marquee over white plastic table and chairs, and they sit there all day and night, intermittently scooping up samples of the water in test-tubes and checking the levels and chemical composition. They set up huge floodlights, ungodly bright, that shine into our kitchen window all night; our feeble aluminium blinds can't block out the glare. As long as the clean-up is underway, it never gets dark enough to sleep properly.

Dogs and their owners are replaced by scientists in white contamination suits who patrol the creek, netting sludge out. Their inhuman suits frighten me: a lifetime's

consumption of science through fiction tells me it's unsafe to be near the creek without wearing one. I can't see their eyes so I don't know if they're hopeful or just going through the motions.

They cordon off the creek banks with bright orange tape. They hammer in signs warning English and Vietnamese readers not to drink or swim or fish from the waters, and to not let pets play in them too. They lay sludge booms across the width of the creek at strategic points; these are covered in fabric net, and snake like, and supposed to absorb the chemicals as the water threads through them.

Spacesuits stalk the creek as black smoke belches its last into the heavens.

Acetone sinks into soft skin, inflames pores and oozes, absorbed by capillaries, fed into bloodstreams from vein to heart, then pumped around bodies through arterial highways.

My lover's skin flares with red scaly patches, breaks out in splotches that crust and scab. My urine smells dark, my bladder can't hold much for long anymore. My lover's scalp cracks and blisters, then weeps from nails too long to handle its itch.

Our young neighbour's eyes cry yellow pus; her father's loud lungs are rent through and rusty. Whenever I walk past nail shops or fresh street art lurking bad smells I feel sick and tired. Neighbourhood dogs bark all day and rub themselves along fences, and possums scratch their fur coats inside our walls. Cats prowl the streets and fight when the sun goes down. Fish die, frogs die. The proof of life — bird song — stops.

On my way to work every morning, I stop on the bridge and watch the water. Green moss trails lazily in the acid creek. Sludge forms shadows that hide away the sins of genocidal industry; oily scum on the water refracts rainbows in the gentle sun. The weeping willow, ancient tree of Babylon, hangs its head in shame beside Stony Creek. Its long hair drips into the water. Its leaves grow pale, colour leached by sun and chemical bleaching.

Suspended over the creek, between solid ground, the tears I give burn my eyes and scratch my skin as they spring from their ducts. They water the creek, a sacrifice, absolution. I walk away from the park, lungs grieving for cleaner air.

On my commute I listen to podcasts that talk of ecocide and apocalypse. All day: I read and write about capitalism and colonisation and climate change. Most of the words I consume and excrete are horrifying histories and terrifying futures. These things are part of me, bodily, and they poke old wounds and open up new ones. But I was brought up in community and I take my cultural responsibilities seriously, so every day I summon the will and the imagination to write my people into the future – something that many authors haven't given us the common courtesy of doing.

Every day I walk home through the park and my tears itch ravines through my cheeks. At home, my lover wipes my face; my tears burn those gentle hands.

I begin to walk the perimeter of the park at dark. I walk the creek and breathe in the acetone, take it into myself to heal the water. The more in me, the less in the air, the less inside children and dogs. I walk alone so my lover does not have to see my tears; I walk in dark so I can cry properly.

This time last year I moved to Melbourne. Wattles burst brightly; I'd fallen in love. This is a time of plenty. Flowers everywhere. Water-plants put on green leaves. Snakes and lizards are active. Birds migrate home from the north.

I study Boon Wurrung seasons to align myself with country; they are different to the greener Bundjalung seasons I've moved away from. Aboriginal seasonal patterns are intuitive and emergent, so different to western European seasonal maps imported here and imposed.

In early spring, people moved slowly towards the lower lands as the temperatures rose. Once upon a time, mountain flow to the floodplains refreshed the waters but the flooding was stopped long ago. The ghosts of unborn tadpoles swim in the ponds under the sludge that blankets the stream.

Acetone holds no colour until it bursts into flame, till it erupts from stable nothingness through chemical reactions of heat and friction, the way it consumed the building that had hidden it away. Acetone itself is harmless, but only takes on the shape of the actions that own it. The intentions of those responsible for this fire infused it, it was their choices that ignited it.

This is the evil of lazy industry, the careless storage of chemicals that owners need not care for because they live too far removed from the consequences of their inactions. This is badly stored mistakes that ignite and cost lives, made of refusal to do the right thing: to store danger safely, to keep mind of others. Another notch on the belt of fat capital swollen over the fruits of community labour.

The carelessness of maniacal capitalists let industry's monster sit for years, to seethe and stew in its own flaming potential, to simmer and bubble then burst into possibilities for destruction. This is what colonises the creek, holds life in a chokehold, with the power to drown water itself in its waste.

In the coming months, acetone and worse circulates around the sky and the waters, in the bodies of people and fish and pets, in the roots of trees and vast webs of fungi; the chemicals will be inside these systems for years. The water stinks like apocalypse, the smell makes me wild.

Any change in weather refreshes it anew. The sun heats it, releases it: the chemical smells sit still inside the air. The rain touches it, releases it: the creek fills up and brings the smell on afresh. I smell the death of life for years to come. I think violent thoughts whenever I breathe.

Whenever I walk past nail shops or fresh street art lurking bad smells I feel sick and tired.

Frogs don't ribbit on the creek banks anymore. The silence of the frogs and the birds has been grim. The lands that the creek sluices through are now mute.

In dreams I trace this back to its beginning:

I slide out of bed, crawl through the house and slither out the kitchen window, fly over my fence and splash into the creek. I follow the water upstream like a terminal salmon making one last stand, I jump and throw myself up rocks to make it. I bruise my soft belly and break brittle bones and graze my protective scales to trace this disaster back to its source.

When I get there I grow, I stretch and I stand. My shape shifts to orangutan, long-armed spectre of burning palm forests. I bare my long teeth, I scream and I leap. I bound over barbed wire and bounce onto the grass, roll under the

doors and into the warehouse. I sniff out the rogue tubs of fuel easily – I know their smell better than my own lover’s skin.

I gather them inside my long arms and crouch then lift off, breaking through the ceiling to the sky and beyond, and fly them like superman into the sun, away from the fragile carpet of grass run through with bubbling creek below.

I explode in white flames, melt away to nothing.

When I wake up I go on with my day.

A brief timeline of Melbourne’s factory fires at the time of writing*:

2018

Feb 19, Springvale: Firefighters stumble upon a giant cannabis crop in a factory fire.

Apr 13, Wantirna South: Fire at the Knox Transfer Station is so fierce it starts spot fires in nearby paddocks and sends smoke billowing over EastLink.

Jun 2, Somerton: Fire destroys family-run pasta factory.

Jul 7, Coolaroo: Huge fire at SKM Recycling, the same plant that was the scene of a 2017 blaze that blanketed Melbourne in toxic smoke.

Aug 23, South Melbourne: Almost fifty firefighters needed to bring blaze under control at multi-storey warehouse.

Aug 28, West Footscray: More than fifty schools and childcare centres close as toxic smoke billows from massive factory fire after illegal chemical dump site was set alight.

Sep 25, Campbellfield: Nearby residents told to stay indoors to avoid smoke and ‘strong odour’ from fire at nut processing factory.

Oct 4, Highett: Fire at furniture removal business.

Oct 6, Wantirna South: More than four hundred mattresses catch alight at Knox Transfer Station.

Oct 12, Kilsyth: Man suffers serious burns to his face in an out-of-control fire that destroys factory.

Oct 14, Thomastown: Fire guts factory.

Nov 4, Brooklyn: Fire at waste management centre.

Dec 12, Mordialloc: Fire tears through food processing factory.

2019

Jan 19, Campbellfield: Residents heard explosions coming from a factory used for recycling batteries and other machinery.

Feb 7, Maribyrnong: Cars found ablaze in suspicious warehouse fire.

Apr 1, Dandenong South: More than a hundred firefighters battle to contain a fire at a converted factory that houses the Star Entertainment Complex.

These fires have many histories and futures.

History isn’t linear: multiple threads from the past converge to the singularity of now, and what we imagine as ‘the future’ are multiple strands of possibilities that emerge from the present.

An apocalypse is less a singular event, more the ramifications that continue destroy and decay. This is end times, apocalypse, small one but long one, reverberating down the years like all the others have done. It’s just another small horror in a long line of the same – another poisoning of country, another killing of cultures. Just one end time of many, and there are many many many more end times to come.

This apocalypse echoes around the continent, around the world.

This is the future.

This is the past.

This is the future.

Rivers are the veins of country.

All over this continent, the veins of country have been collapsed, drained, and poisoned for hundreds of years.

In some areas, the Murray-Darling is dry as the bones of the cattle that starve nearby; in other places, fish suffocate and float in mass graves.

For the first time in tens of thousands of years, Brewarrina’s fish traps are seeing the light of harsh sun.

Water needs to be shipped in for the people of Walgett because their own has been stolen from them.

When I drive up north I camp at Gundagai, where the Murrumbidgee once flowed mighty. Where I camp it is no more than a green puddle for ducks to splash in.

All over, artesian waters are siphoned off by the pythons of late-capital and marketed as artisan water, filling single-use bottles destined for landfill. This mass extraction dries the land in preparation for coming bushfires.

The plum blossoms bloom late this spring. Green buds of stone fruits sit tight, hard and small. Fruit grows precariously, the struggle of wood to become flesh. Possums and birds patiently await the juicy plum meat. Bunjil builds his nest.

In high summer, I leave the plums on the trees for the possums. I am able to buy food from the supermarket, but their food and water have been poisoned. The possums wage war over the plums, in screeching shaking battles of life and death. They scratch in our roof, but we don't tell the landlord because we know they'll be killed. As the summer advances, the land dries out, and people flock to the bay and beaches following the blueprints laid out by the Boon Wurrung.

After the dry hot, the late summer rains arrive and the days became cooler and longer, but the ground is still warm and new growth stretches green. Wattle gum, banksia, honeysuckle, long-leaf box and silver-leaf stringy-bark come into blossom, providing sweet nectar, attracting birds who flock and feed before heading north for the winter, to be replaced by other birds who will soon start to arrive from Tasmania. Bunjil circles the air in a ceremony of healing.

At Ararat, we form blockades to protect sacred Djab Wurrung trees. At home, possums make love in our roof and wage wars. Their noises seep into our dreams.

One silver morning I am cutting up store-bought fruit in my kitchen. It is lightly raining outside and a small bird of prey alights on the seat under the smallest plum tree, holding something in its talons. Through the kitchen window I watch the bird tear into its with its fierce beak. The tearing and chomping sounds reaches my ears through the glass. When I go outside that afternoon, pieces of possum fur and bloody sinew are stuck to the seat.

Some people oppose the poisoning of the Great Artesian Basin, but more people vote for it to happen; I learn for the millionth time that democracy is violence. Direct action will be the only option for justice because electoral

politics have failed us again. This is firmly in the hands of the people.

In cities across the world, children flood the streets with righteous rage, refusing to accept their futures being poisoned away from them. The power of the young people gives me strength.

Late autumn rains clean the soil and the creek. I rub healing salves into my lover's dry skin and dream that the people who care are enough to make up for the people who don't. ⑩

Mykaela Saunders is a Koori, Lebanese, working class, and queer writer. She grew up between her ancestral Dharug lands in Western Sydney, and Tweed Heads, as part of the Bundjalung community. She studies and teaches at the University of Sydney.

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I donated most of my prize money to Wangan and Jagalingou Traditional Owners, to the Djab Wurrung Heritage Protection Embassy, and to FIRE's Support for Walgett and north-west NSW communities. I strongly encourage everybody to support them in their fights too. Indigenous peoples make up less than five per cent of the global population yet our caring for country practises are responsible for eighty per cent of the planet's biodiversity. This is not a coincidence: our cultural life ways are regenerative, not merely sustainable. Any serious climate action must therefore centre Indigenous peoples and our knowledges. In your commitment to climate justice, please prioritise Indigenous efforts to assert sovereignty and protect country. Pay the rent by showing up: with boots on the ground where possible, or otherwise with financial aid.

*From 'Massive Campbellfield fire at factory where chemicals stored causes toxic smoke plumes', by Rachel Eddie and Hanna Mills Turbet, 'The Age', April 5, 2019: theage.com.au/national/victoria/melbourne-express-friday-april-5-2019-20190404-p51aq0.html

Ocean Beach

By Michelle Tom

Runner-up of the 2019 Grace Marion Wilson Prize for Non-Fiction.

Grace Marion Wilson
Runner-up ~ Non-fiction

(1975)

'Danger, steep grade' reads a sign at the top of the cliff as we descend a switchback section of gravel road before it gives way to a rugged coastal track. In the low evening light our car headlights trace the shoreline through high golden grass and we roll in and out of deep gravelly potholes. To our right a steep cliff face looms and to the left rolling surf pounds a rocky shore. Waves thump and withdraw in relentless motion. I am eight when our parents drive the family an hour south most Friday nights to spend weekends at Ocean Beach, an exposed and brutal stretch of coastline at the bottom of the North Island, New Zealand. Even as a small child I wonder at the uninspired name of this place. What else would be at the beach, but ocean?

We stay in our illegal bach, a low class version of a holiday home that is one of a dozen or so on this stretch of coast. It will be years before I understand that most beach houses are an oasis from the routine of drudgery, a salve to the stress of lives that exist beyond sun and white sand. Ocean Beach has neither sun nor sand and the bach itself is a two-room shack built on Crown land with little in the way of home comforts and no official consent. It is pale blue in my memory, the kind of colour you paint something when you have a few tins left over from something else and don't want to shell out for more. Every time we pull up outside I think how lonely it looks, desolate in the lee of the towering cliff behind. Inside smells stale. Mouse shit is sprinkled on the table and among the few basic provisions we leave in the cupboards. Occasionally we arrive to find the door forced if local kids have broken in since our last visit but there isn't much to steal, only mismatched crockery and a beat up Scrabble game. We don't call the police because we don't own this place in any legal sense. We are squatters and when I overhear this information it is almost too much for me to comprehend.

How did you get it for us, if it's not allowed? I quiz my father one morning as he cuts squid bait on the open lid of his tackle box just outside the back door. The squid stinks, a fishy odour I associate with this place. My father's thick fingers are coated in its oily stench and I crinkle my nose.

I just knew the right people, he says. Someone at the pub. He chops another slippery chunk. Your mother's family used to own the one next door. He gestures toward a similar building back up the track with the knife but doesn't look up. He uses the word own loosely and doesn't acknowledge its fallacy. He finishes cutting and wipes the rusty blade on his shirt before he tosses it in the box with a clatter.

So how do people know that it's ours now?

They just do. Bluebottle flies hover and he waves them away before he wraps the bait in newspaper and gathers the rest of his fishing gear. Come on, let's go and catch some fish, he says and I trot behind him down across the rough track at the front of the bach. It continues on to Wellington around steep bluffs to the west but is little more than a goat track further on, around the point that juts out into Cook Strait. Before the bluffs are two washouts, streams that pass through cuttings in the cliff face. After rain the gravel track softens where it crosses the streams and my father is often called on to tow out strangers whose vehicles are mired. Sometimes I wonder who would help them if we weren't there because although the city is close as the crow flies this beach feels disconnected, loose from the world. It is a harsh, barren place where southerly winds blow hard and cold off the Antarctic. Our bach is only prevented from shifting off its foundations by a windbreak, an enormous angled wall to the west that diverts gusts like an oversized aerofoil. My mother jams cotton wool in my ears to keep out the cold, a vain attempt at preventing ear infections, and during storms I wonder if waves will carve their way inland as far as the bach. The roar of surf keeps me awake at night as I imagine being

drawn from my bunk into the icy ocean still enveloped in my thin fluoro pink sleeping bag.

My father's feet crunch through gravel ahead of my own on our way to cast his lines. He is a hard man, controlling even, but I sense I am more like him than my mother, who is a mystery, an enigma. He doesn't engage with me so much as he lets me hang around, so together we fish and work on car engines. When things go wrong and he cusses I retreat and stay quiet. For the rest of my life raised voices will lift me to my feet and move me to flee. Today though, he is quiet and I skip every second or third step to keep up with him as he strides across the wide beach, fishing rods in one hand and tackle box in the other. We approach the shore as enormous waves curl and dump ahead of us.

The wind teases spray from the leading edge of the breakers and sprinkles us with salty mist I taste on my lips. Stones rattle as the undertow sucks them down. The ocean floor drops away fast and steep on this part of the coast. On one of the first trips here our father had stood over my younger brother, sister and me in a huddle between the beach and the ocean, his face lowered toward ours. Surf smashed against the beach behind him in explosions of foam as he pointed an index finger at us.

If you're sucked in, no one will be able to save you. Not me, not anyone else. You'll be dragged under by the tow and drown. His voice was hard and he had frowned as I tried to imagine being consumed by water. You understand? This ocean is unforgiving.

And then maybe he decided that word was too big for kids.

Just stay well back, okay? We had all nodded dumbly and looked past him to the monster waves as they leapt and sprayed as if to emphasise his message. We didn't need telling twice. Ocean Beach demanded respect.

*

I am a grown woman with a family of my own when I live through the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. After years of warnings and drills the ferocity of the earth reveals itself in a tumult of sound and fury – quakes of six and seven magnitudes – and our house is broken. We wait with thousands of others to learn our fate as decided by the insurance company and in the meantime ride out

almost daily aftershocks in a state of perpetual trauma. I nurse a growing awareness of our place in history and later I wonder about the biggest ever quake in New Zealand. Where had it happened, and how had those people fared? A few minutes searching online yields answers. It happened at 9:11pm on January 23, 1855. Just fifteen years after settlement by colonists, an earthquake since estimated at between 8.2 and 8.4 magnitude rocked the settlement of Wellington. Several people were killed, many buildings collapsed and there was a significant uplift of land from the ocean at the coastline. My interest piqued, I dig deeper.

Near Wellington, where the Wairarapa fault line emerges from the southern end of the Tararua and Remutaka Ranges is an impressive upthrust, a visible vertical slip between the two sides of a fault that continues to the sea and is an outlet for a stream. It is one of two in the vicinity that flow from the mountains into Palliser Bay and Cook Strait, the body of water that separates the North and South Islands. These are the Wharekauhau and Wharepapa faults and both emerge from a steep cliff face formed during the last ice age. Atop the cliff is a stately home named for the area, the creek and the fault. My mother loved to say its name – Wharekauhau (Fuddy-Ko-Ho). She said it over and over with an exaggerated Maori intonation that rolled off her tongue as she mimicked the indigenous language. The translation from Maori is 'place of knowledge' because this was where senior tribal leaders went to learn from elders. As it turns out, it is a name of some prophecy.

Both faults originate adjacent to the Tararua Ranges, the hills that erupt from the plains in a north-south direction and stand like sentries to the west of Carterton, the town where my parents made their home. My mother was raised in a town just south of there and my father, just north. In a rare compromise they settled between the two and when I am very small, too small to know the words, I distinguish my grandparents by pointing either way up the highway. The ranges oversee all three towns. They are the hills into which my father escapes my mother when they fight, the same hills in which he scours the bush for the missing and dead when called on as a volunteer by Search and Rescue.

I bring up a map to pinpoint the Wharekauhau Thrust and recognise the familiar terrain

immediately. It is the same washout just up the gravel track from the bach where my father so often came to the rescue of stranded motorists.

Holy shit, I breathe as I track the line of the creek with my finger along the map on my screen. One-hundred-and-twenty years after an enormous quake we unwittingly holidayed atop a geological time bomb. It seems poetic and analogous that the place where I found so much to fear was the epicentre of destruction. Perhaps I could feel that crouching potential for devastation just beneath the surface. Perhaps we all could.

Before the 1855 quake, the importance of the faults beneath the Tararuas was unknown. After, they attracted the interest of eminent British geologist Charles Lyell, who interviewed three local men, witnesses to the quake and its aftermath, at his home in London. Their reports helped him refine the relationship between earthquakes and fault rupture. He subscribed to the uniformitarianism principle, that geological features of the landscape can be explained as the cumulative sum of small, sometimes sudden, incremental changes. Lyell believed the key to the present is in the past, that the results of past seismic events inevitably bring us the landscape we see in the present. Before this theory it was widely thought mountain ranges were formed by single catastrophic events.

The 1855 Wellington quake was seen as the breakthrough event that led to the 'first recognition of active fault tectonics on a large scale and changed the course of geological thinking and understanding.'

Events at Wharekauhau became the basis of a presentation Lyell gave at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in London on the evening of March 7, 1856, and at the end of that lecture he stated the quake was 'the latest event of the kind, yielding to no other in magnitude of its geological and geographical importance.'

*

Aged eight and unaware of my dangerous proximity to a fault line of historical significance, I squat on the beach and stack smooth stones in delicately balanced towers.

My father fishes but I stop playing long enough to stand and watch as he casts a long bamboo rod high overhead. The nylon thread sings as it leaves the reel and I trace the path of the lead weight and rubbery squid flesh until there is a small splash beyond the surf. He winds the line tight and drops the rod in a holder he has driven into the gravel shore before he begins to bait the next hook.

It is only then that I notice my mother make her way down the beach. She moves quickly and is yelling at him, her face contorted. He turns to face her but I can't make out her words before the wind carries them off. This scene has played out many times before.

When you grow up in violence you don't understand that it isn't normal to see adults lose control. I have learned to be small and quiet lest the stream of rage find me so I hunch back down and watch my parents with the hectic attention of a backyard blackbird that knows there is a cat in the undergrowth.

My mother is an actor in a silent movie set against the brutal coastline as waves continue to pound and drain. Her arms flail in anger and her wavy hair is drawn off her face in the relentless frigid gale. He stands to listen, his posture curious as he wipes his fingers with a rag and then puts his hands on his hips. His posture questions her. She stops yelling and puts her hands together – I can see she is pulling at her rings – I know there is a wedding band, a diamond engagement ring and one with garnets she calls her maternity ring. Years later when my first husband offers to buy me an eternity ring I realise my mother's joke. My father has given her the garnet ring to celebrate my birth.

Years later she will discover they are not real garnets and won't speak to him for two weeks. The rings come loose over her knuckles and she throws them in the gravel beyond my father, who yells back at her, although I cannot hear the words through the wind and cotton wool. He gestures what the hell? in the direction of the rings and she stomps away, her skirt whipping against her legs.

Beach stones give way slightly under each of her steps but I can't take my eyes off the spot where the rings have landed because I know if my mother isn't wearing them – if they are lost – it might mean my parents are no longer married. 🕒

Michelle Tom began life as a print journalist in New Zealand. She now lives in Melbourne and is working on a memoir, 'Ten Thousand Aftershocks', about family estrangement and the 2010-11 Christchurch earthquakes, in which she lost her home.

The Ministry of Truth



Writing the truth is under attack but we as writers must resist, writes Paul Morgan from PEN Melbourne.

We live in days that are a chilling reminder of the 1930s. Authoritarian leaders are taking power in every quarter of the globe. Under the banner of 'balancing the budget', austerity measures attack the poorest members of society, while taxes are reduced for the rich. The unemployed and disabled, immigrants and asylum-seekers are blamed for all the troubles in the world. Scientists are mocked and demonised if their findings contradict the pursuit of profit. Yet, who do these authoritarian regimes, from Uganda to the United States, fear most? Who do they regard as their greatest threat? Who is it that they attack and try to silence every day?

The answer is that they fear people whose profession is to tell the truth: writers and journalists. In the words of John Ralston Saul, novelist and past-President of Pen International: 'People say that writers are powerless ... But if that were true, then why would writers be arrested? Because the spoken word is powerful.' There are many organisations working for human rights, but PEN has a special focus on this simple yet revolutionary right: that people should be able to speak the truth. As George Orwell put it with typical economy, 'Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.'

Yet, authoritarian governments know the near-magical power of words and covet them for their own purposes. In the UK, Brexit was won on the great lie of just three words, 'Take back control'. In the US, the media are labelled 'fake news' and 'enemies of the people' by the government, just for relaying verifiable facts. Others pay a higher price. Anna Politkovskaya shot in Moscow. Jamal Khashoggi butchered in Istanbul. Daphne Caruana Galizia bombed in Malta. There are

many more. So far in 2019, 29 journalists have been killed according to Journalists without Borders. Elsewhere, thousands of writers and journalists are tortured, imprisoned or harassed by their governments every day for simply doing their job.

Writing the truth is even under attack in Australia, as we now know. News Corp, Nine, the ABC, and other media organisations joined together this year to condemn the shocking police raid on the ABC and on the home of respected journalist, Annika Smethurst. Orwell's Ministry of Truth in '1984' rewrites the news every day because 'Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past'. In 2019, it is the duty of every writer to support and join their colleagues in a real-world ministry to tell the truth – not only journalists, but writers of all form of fiction too, which can have a deeper and longer-lasting effect. 'The Handmaid's Tale' tells sharper truths than a hundred articles on news sites.

To find out more about the work of PEN Melbourne and how you can join and support our work, visit penmelbourne.org. You'll also find details of our Writers in Exile event in October on the website or on page 34. 📖

Milestones

Nean McKenzie's debut middle-grade novel 'Cryptosight' is coming out with MidnightSun Publishing on 1 October. 'Cryptosight' is an adventure story about cryptozoology (creatures that may or may not exist) set in country SA and Victoria. Available at good book stores!

Juliet M Sampson's debut picture book, 'Grace's Mystery Seed', published with Ford Street publishing, has been awarded a Finalist in the 2019 International Book Awards and has also been shortlisted for the 2019 Speech Pathology Award.

Kaye Baillie's picture book, illustrated by Narelda Joy, 'Message in a Sock' (MidnightSun, 2018) has been shortlisted in the NSW Premier's History Awards in the 'Young People's History Prize (\$15,000) section.

Bill Bateman has just published 'You're Never The Same', medical crime fiction and is a sequel to 'Hard Labour.' Dr Vince Hanrahan is still in exile down on Victoria's southwest coast, serving out his time before returning to his wife and family and reclaiming his status as a big shot metro OBY/GYN. Well, that's the plan. Personally, and professionally, Vince is facing oblivion. Maybe DC Elena Genovesi can help on both fronts ...

John Bartlett's Chapbook 'The Arms of Men' was recently published by Melbourne Poets Union as part of its Union Poets Series.

Gayelene Carbis' first book of poetry, 'Anecdotal Evidence', was awarded Finalist in the International Book Awards 2019, sponsored by American Book Fest. Gayelene was also shortlisted for the ACU Poetry Prize.

Mary Jones has had a short story, 'Graffiti', shortlisted in the Wyndham Writing Awards, and it will appear in the competition's anthology. She also has two poems in Issue 27 of 'Original Work', and one in the Ginninderra Press anthology 'Mountain Secrets'.

Classifieds

Editorial Services

Euan Mitchell offers editing, proofreading and rewriting services for writers of fiction and non-fiction.

For extended manuscripts (20K+ words) a free sample edit is included.

Typesetting of pages, cover design, as well as print and ebook options, can also be arranged. To discuss your project, email Euan via euan@euanmitchell.com.

PEN – Writers in Exile

The Writing in Exile series of talks at the Wheeler Centre in partnership with PEN Melbourne, draws on the double vision of some incredible international writers living and working in exile here in Australia. What are the dangers, sorrows, and consolations of writing about home, away from home? How can distance warp and focus a writer's perspective? And what do Australians need to know about the freedoms denied to citizens of other countries? Hosted by Sami Shah – himself an exiled writer originally from Pakistan – we'll hear from journalists, authors, and poets denied their freedom of expression in their homelands and living and writing in exile in Melbourne.

10 October – Roza Germian

Journalist Roza Germian lived through war for most of her childhood. In 1991, when Germian

was ten, she was one of more than one million Kurds who fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq. She is the executive producer on SBS Radio's Kurdish programme, where her earliest experiences of terror, persecution and prejudice continue to inform her journalistic work.

14 November – Panel

Our three featured writers-in-exile and our host Sami Shah will come together for a panel event to end the series.

penmelbourne.org

Call out for The Australian Fairy Tale Society Anthology

Submissions are welcome for the Australian Fairy Tale Society's illustrated anthology 'South of the Sun - Australian fairy tales for the 21st century' (Serenity Press), 17 September–14 November 2019. What is an Australian Fairy Tale? We seek inventive, intercultural new Australian fairy tales/ poems/ flash fiction for YA+adults. Guidelines, news, enquiries: australianfairytales.com

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

NITPICKER (from page 17)

1. 've 2. ambivalent 3. number 4. readers' 5. drank

Workshops and Courses

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

Plot, Story and Theme

with [Anne Gracie](#)

A story is the idea, the plot is the sequence of events (and characters) you construct to give life to that story, and theme underpins both story and plot and gives meaning to the novel. It's a big part of what makes a novel resonate with a reader long after they have finished reading.

When: Friday 4 October, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

Young Writers School Holiday Program: Slam, Rhythm and Poetry

with [Mantra](#)

An exploration of rap, poetry and performance with Mantra, one of Australia's most respected Hip-Hop artists. Don't miss this exciting and engaging opportunity to learn from one of the country's finest wordsmiths and performers.

Where: State Library of Victoria

When: Friday 4 October, 10am-2pm

Price: \$10

Level: Ages 13-17

Exploring Global Markets with or as a Professional Translator

with [Christine Yunn-Yu Sun](#)

Celebrate how words are enriched and empowered from culture to culture. Participants will have ample opportunity to practise translating between English

and a language of their choice, while discussing the challenges and triumphs in capturing an author's voice accurately, fluently and gracefully.

When: Saturday 5 October, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

How to be a Successful Ghostwriter

with [David Brewster](#)

Ghostwriting non-fiction can be an effective way of putting your writing skills to use while earning some, or even all, of your living doing so. Experienced ghostwriter David Brewster will pull apart the 'art' of non-fiction ghostwriting, revealing potential sources of ghostwriting work, the types of work that are available, how to price your work and how to work with clients productively.

When: Sunday 6 October, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

Writing to Save the World

with [Jessica White](#)

The last five years have seen a boom in cli-fi, or climate fiction, mirroring our anxieties about the sixth mass extinction and a world in which extreme weather events are increasing in frequency. Through cli-fi, we can imagine the trajectories of human and other-than-human populations, devise positive futures, or compel our readers to think about our circumstances in radically different ways.

When: Sunday 6 October, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Ask...About Getting Noticed (For the Right Reasons)

with [Alaina Gougoulis](#), [Clare Forster](#), [Sam Cooney](#)

Whether it's at a pitch appointment, in the slush pile, or in the bar at a festival event, all aspiring and emerging writers want to get noticed. But there are good ways to get noticed... and not so good ways. We've compiled a panel of industry experts to help navigate the murky waters of finding a place for your work, and they're willing to share all the dos (and the do nots!) of getting noticed.

When: Thursday 10 October, 6-7.30pm

Member price: \$18/\$25

Non-member price: \$40

Level: All

Conflict and Tension: Essential Elements of 'Page-Turning' Fiction

with [Angela Meyer](#)

You've heard that conflict moves the story forward. But why, exactly? And how do you generate conflict that reads as authentic, that is right for your story and characters? This workshop unpacks the idea of conflict in fiction, and the ways the obstacles you place in a character's way (externally, and also from within) create tension and maintain the reader's investment in the story.

When: Saturday 12
October, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: All

Perfect Pacing

with [Jodi McAlister](#).

We all know that a good story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end – but getting from A to B to C in a way that won't leave your readers bored or confused can be harder than it sounds! In this workshop, author Jodi McAlister will teach you about how to pace your work so that you grab your reader and never let go.

When: Sunday 13
October, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: All

WEBINAR: It's Elemental: Finding the Detail to Enhance Your Description

with [Emily Bitto](#).

A carefully chosen detail can do so much work; whether in fiction or non-fiction, it can build character and setting, evoke a host of symbolic resonances, and bring your reader into the world of your writing. But getting the balance between too much detail and not enough is tricky. This online webinar will help you achieve that balance in your own writing.

If you haven't done a webinar before, it's easy to join in: a few days before the webinar, you'll be emailed the details.

When: Monday 14
October, 6-7.30pm
Member price: \$20/\$35
Non-member price: \$45
Level: All

State of the (Writing) Nation
with [Maxine Beneba Clarke](#)
The second annual State of the (Writing) Nation Oration will be delivered by the redoubtable Maxine Beneba Clarke. In partnership with the State Library Victoria.

Where: State Library of Victoria
When: Thursday 17
October, 7-8pm

Member price: \$30/\$40
Non-member price: \$45
Level: All

Developing Your Picture Book

with [Maxine Beneba Clarke](#).

Writing picture books seems deceptively easy. In this workshop, you will explore successful children's picture books and analyse what makes them work, examine and workshop different narrative techniques for picture books, develop your own picture book text or concept, explore appropriate illustrators or illustration styles, and learn how to pitch your book to a publisher.

When: Saturday 19
October, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: Emerging

Screenwriting for Authors

with [Dave Cartel](#).

A workshop for any writers who are thinking of tackling their first screenplay. We will cover what the similarities and differences are between writing a novel and a script, the story challenges unique to screenwriting, and a bit about how the film and television industry works.

When: Sunday 20
October, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: All

Instagram for Writers
with [Kasi Collins](#) and
[Melissa Kayser](#).

Book publishing may be old-world, but publishers have adapted to the tech-savvy 21st century, often pursuing authors with large social media followings. Learn how to take advantage of Instagram in your pursuit to become a published author, build your profile and also consider how to convert online material into book form.

When: Sunday 20
October, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: All

Cooking Up a Synopsis

with [Laurel Cohn](#).

Encapsulating your writing project in one sentence, a short blurb or even a 500-word synopsis can feel more difficult than writing a book-length work. This workshop offers tips and tools to help frame your work in a variety of ways relevant to different publishing opportunities.

When: Saturday 26
October, 10am-4pm
Member price: \$135/\$145
Non-member price: \$195
Level: Early and emerging

Structural Editing for Writers

with [Laurel Cohn](#).

This workshop explains structural editing, what role it plays in manuscript development, how to go about it, and how to survive it. The session will offer strategies and tools to guide writers through the process, and explore the challenges that underlie critical engagement with your work. For writers of fiction and narrative non-fiction who have a completed manuscript draft.

When: Sunday 27
October, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

Reading for Writers
with [Emily Bitto](#)

Alan Hollinghurst's 'The Line of Beauty' is one of a handful of books that helped sow the initial seeds of inspiration for 'The Strays'. It is an outsider novel, and a piece of historical fiction that wears its research lightly. It is also masterful in its handling of time, memory, character, dramatic irony and moral ambiguity. These are just some of the things we will discuss in relation to this exquisite novel of class, sexuality, aesthetics and Thatcher-era British politics.

When: Wednesday 30
October, 6-8pm

Member price: \$45

Non-Member price: \$60

Level: all

LAUNCH: We Are Here: Stories of Home, Place and Belonging
with [Meg Mundell](#), [Claire G. Coleman](#), [Ayub Abdi-Barre](#), [Jody Letts](#), [Roderick Waller](#)

Celebrate the launch of a new anthology by writers who have experienced homelessness. A collection of true stories and poetry themed around PLACE, 'We Are Here: Stories of Home, Place and Belonging'. Hear readings from the book and learn about the process of putting it together at this celebration of survival, place and belonging.

When: Thursday 31
October, 6.15-7.15pm

Price: FREE

Lunchtime Bites: The Business of Being a Writer
with [Nic Brasch](#)

Having the ability to write well is not enough if you wish to be published or make money as a writer. Indeed, it can be argued that it's not even the most important element. In this workshop, you will learn how to conduct your writing career like a small business, including pitching, marketing, and much, much more.

When: Friday 1
November, 12-1pm

Member price: FREE

Non-member price: \$25

Level: All

Getting the Most out of Trove and PROV
with [Helen Morgan](#)

Discover how the National Library of Australia's Trove discovery service can support and enhance your research and writing projects through digitised newspapers, archives, pictures, maps, full text sources and more. This hands-on workshop will also introduce you to archival research principles, with a focus on Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), and explore how Trove can help you make the most of PROV and other archival collections.

When: Saturday 2
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Building Character
with [Tania Chandler](#)

What comes first: character or story? In this workshop, early and emerging writers will discover that if you create a character you will create a story. Through discussion, activities and inspiring writing exercises, learn tools and techniques for building complex, vivid characters; deepening characterisation; uncovering

all-important character motivations; choosing the best point of view; and writing convincing dialogue. We will breathe life into our characters and also let them surprise us.

When: Sunday 3
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Newsletters and Tiny Letters
with [McKinley Valentine](#)

Newsletters allow you to grow a community around your unique take on the world. There are other benefits for writers: a newsletter will also help you build up a regular, just-enough-pressure writing habit, and give you the opportunity to test out ideas and develop your voice in a benevolent environment.

When: Sunday 3
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

First Draft: It's All in the Details
with [Karen](#) and [Sherylyn Dunstall](#)

You've eliminated all the plot holes in your manuscript, every scene follows from the last and the ending works. Now you're ready to do a final copy edit before you send the manuscript away. Right? Actually, there's another layer of editing before that. This workshop covers that middle layer of editing. It goes beyond structural edits all the way down to line editing.

When: Saturday 9
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

The Post-Publication Hustle
with [Kate Mildenhall](#)

So your words are out in the world (or soon will be!) and you want to know what's next. In this workshop, we'll explore strategies and tips to create the kind of creative career you want: keeping audiences engaged with your published works, stretching yourself with new creative projects, working out how to keep all the balls in the air and knowing what will help if you end up dropping some.

When: Sunday 10
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Emerging

Fear Itself: The Elements of Writing Horror

with [Kirstyn McDermott](#)

We will explore contemporary horror, along with its significant subgenres, and look at employing various craft elements in the specific context of writing horror fiction. There will also be an emphasis on short writing exercises and peer discussion.

When: Saturday 16
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: Early and emerging

Writing Fearlessly

with [Koraly Dimitriadis](#)

If you are looking for a prescriptive workshop on the correct way to write, then this is not for you. This intimate workshop will require participants to be fully open to the experience of their truth, and sharing their writing and/or performance with the group.

When: Sunday 17
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Writing Place

with [Meg Mundell](#)

Whatever your genre, place can help drive plot, trigger action, amplify conflict, evoke mood, stir emotion, mold character, underscore themes, and offer a valuable way in to stories for both writers and readers. Tapping into the subtle powers of place, we'll explore a range of practical techniques to enrich your writing.

When: Sunday 24
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Taming Scrivener

with [Alison Stuart](#)

Looking for a computer program to help you organise your writing project? Tried Scrivener and been overwhelmed by the interface? Multi-published author and experienced Scrivener user and tutor Alison Stuart will provide you with a basic working knowledge of the main tools Scrivener has to offer and the confidence to use and adapt the program for your next bestseller.

When: Sunday 24
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Reading for Writers

with [Favel Parrett](#)

'Per Petterson is my favourite author and although I love all of his novels, 'Out Stealing Horses' was the first one that I discovered. It holds a special place in my heart! There is probably not another writer who has influenced me more than Petterson, and I find I

can read his words over and over and never grow tired.'

When: Wednesday 27
November, 6-8pm

Member price: \$45

Non-Member price: \$60

Level: All

Mad is Not Bad

with [Anne Buist](#)

Mental illness is diverse and complicated – and should not be a shortcut for dangerous, mad or bad. (Bad) fiction gets mental illness wrong, misses the subtleties and complexities and perpetuates negative stereotypes. This workshop will focus on the person first, dispelling mental health myths, and provide tools for accurately representing the many ways that our brains and minds can function.

When: Saturday 30
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

A Creative Approach to Family History Writing

with [Josiane Behmoiras](#)

This workshop will address the many creative possibilities of recording a family history, and encourage thinking about it not as a challenge, but rather as an opportunity to be delighted and enlightened, at your own pace. We will include lecturing, writing tasks, and a convivial discussion with an emphasis on workshopping participants' own stories.

When: Saturday 30
November, 10am-4pm

Member price: \$135/\$145

Non-member price: \$195

Level: All

Membership Form

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*We will not supply or sell your information to a third party.

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