

# imprint

Northern Territory Writers' Centre Journal | December 2016



# Imprint

NORTHERN TERRITORY WRITERS' CENTRE JOURNAL

## ABOUT

*Imprint* is a publication of the NT Writers' Centre. It is devoted to NT writers and writing.

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*Imprint* is edited and produced by NTWC staff.

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## ABOUT NT WRITERS' CENTRE

The NT Writers' Centre encourages vibrant literary activity in the Northern Territory, developing and supporting writers across all genres at all stages of their careers. We value quality NT writing as a unique component of Australia's literary wealth and recognise Indigenous writers and storytellers as a core component of this.

As well as our ongoing member services, we offer a program of workshops, opportunities and showcase events across the NT including an annual Writers' Festival.

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### Guest Cover Artist

Talea Pattermore is a young graphic designer/illustrator living and working in the Top End. She is a lover and a contributor of the NT arts scene, including traditional arts.

## EDITORIAL:

SALLY BOTHROYD, NT WRITERS' CENTRE

### Welcome to this re-launch of the Northern Territory Writers' Centre Journal *Imprint* (previously Write Turn).

It's been about 18 months since a new team took the driver's seat at the NT Writers' Centre.

There have been challenges, but the Alice Springs program manager Fiona Dorrell and myself feel we've now managed to get things back on track, so we can best help our members while also promoting writers and writing in the Northern Territory.

The NT Writers' Festival was held in Darwin in May, and came hot on the heels of the 2015 Alice Springs Festival in September (postponed due to the staff changeover). We've hardly had time to catch our breath, but it's been a fun time.

Both festivals were a great success. Huge thanks go to Fiona Dorrell, and our Alice festival director Dani Powell, Darwin festival co-ordinator Cora Diviny, and our many volunteers who stepped in to lend a helping hand. Thanks also to the NTWC's board, and bookkeeper (and brains trust) Hamish McDonald.

We've also managed to get the workshop program up and happening again, and have been pleased to see so many people taking the opportunity to exercise their creative writing muscles. We're hoping to offer another program of inspiring workshops in 2017, and to be able to take them further afield.

The NTWC has also been happy to support numerous literary events and opportunities: including the NT Literary Awards, the Young Author Awards, the Red Dirt Poetry Festival, the Darwin Poetry Cup, and the National Poetry Slam Championships, and St Vinnie's Write Away Poverty competition for school children.



The NTWC would not be able to operate without the funding we receive from Arts NT, and thanks must go to them for their continued enthusiasm and support. We are grateful to also have continued funding from the Australia Council, and the support of other funders, including the Copyright Agency, the Alice Springs Town Council the Catalyst Fund, and the Community Benefit Fund and to our sponsors including Channel Nine Darwin, Charles Darwin University and the Darwin International Airport.

### Sally Bothroyd

Executive Director  
NT Writers' Centre



## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: PROFESSOR MARTIN JARVIS OAM

I am sure some of the members of the NT Writers' Centre will have wondered why I became the new President? So I would like to take this opportunity explain. Also, as some members will already know of me only as the former conductor of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, and others not at all, so I think it is appropriate to introduce myself to you, as a writer, as well.

I have been a writer in various formats most of my professional career (as a musician). My first professional writing engagement was for the Hobart Mercury in 1982, when I became their new music critic. Since that time I have been a concert reviewer for the British Arts Council, written books (two published and two still in preparation, including a novel), and I have written many journal articles. So, when David James, a Board member of the NTWC, asked

me if I was interested in standing for a position on the NTWC Board, it was not hard for me to answer in the affirmative; and, I immediately joined the association via the website. The following Monday I attended the AGM, and, much to my surprise I found myself volunteering to take the role of President. And, thus began my involvement with the NT Writers' Centre! Besides being very experienced in arts management, I believe that I am suitably qualified, as a writer, to be President, and to act in support of all the writers who are members of NTWC and represent the association in an appropriate manner.

So far this year the NTWC has presented many fine events and opportunities for writers, but two key events deserve a specific mention, they are, the 'Wordstorm Festival'

in May, which was highly successful; and the inaugural Andrew McMillan Memorial Retreat at Larrimah: Kylie Stevenson was the first writer to benefit from this initiative. Also worthy of a mention are the biennial 'Territory Read Awards' for published NT authors: The Book of the Year was won by two authors, Clare Atkins and Mary Anne Butler, and the other category winners were Irena Kobald and Derek Pugh – congratulations to all of them.

The new funding round is already underway, and Sally Bothroyd, and her team in Alice Springs and Darwin, plus the Board, have done a great job in developing a new 5-year plan. So there are many exciting plans in the pipeline for the future of the NT Writers' Centre as we head into 2017 and beyond.

## FROM THE ALICE OFFICE: FIONA DORRELL

I was thinking recently about how arts workers, and indeed writers, are a bit like trees. Perhaps it was because my housemate recently ordered a copy of *The Hidden Life of Trees* and it arrived in a plastic satchel in our bleached shopping basket strapped-to-the-fence as a mailbox, and then appeared, unwrapped on the kitchen table.

In the book, forester and ecologist, Peter Wohlleben presents research to suggest that trees in fact have needs and behaviours uncannily akin to humans, preferring to grow together in social networks, and interacting and communicating in complex and nuanced ways.

It may seem banal to flip this research back onto writers (we are humans after all) but if you are somewhat of an introvert, a recluse, or even one of those roguish cowboy types that I often encounter in these parts, it may be useful to remind yourself of this similarity with trees. In fact, you may even find it an easier, more gratifying task.

It's no secret that writing can be a lonely practice. Similarly, being the only worker in a shoebox office, 1500kms from Sally, my other lone permanent colleague based in Darwin, has been sometimes taxing.

So what is a Writers' Centre? I get asked the question often. By taxi drivers; by workers at Coles; by my Grandma. And why do I love it?

It seems to me that it may have something to do with Wohlleben's forests.

If you live in the desert then perhaps it's more useful to think in terms of something like the low-lying Mulga scrub. In the Blue Mountains where I am from, it's Eucalypt and Acacias—or the wild Blue Gums forests that Archie Roach sings about. Rather than dealing in sugars, electrical signals and scent compounds, our economy of entanglement is through the written word.

It strikes me that the success of our little office in Alice Springs is largely due to the shifting writer-forest that, over the years has worked hard to generate humidity, maintain a canopy, to store water, to moderate the extremes of heat and cold—in short; to hold the ecosystem. Securing an office; a permanent part-time position; a festival; local festival directors; an advisory committee.

In some ways though the community is small here, it punches above its



weight in passion, thoughtfulness and participation, cardamom cupcake baking, and definitely in community consultation meeting hours.

In the year and a half since I began my role at the Writers' Centre, I'm lucky enough to have encountered and worked alongside writers who have just found publishers for their books, writers trawling through old diaries, writers completing PhDs and masters degrees, writers carefully unfurling the first draft of a poem, writers taking their work overseas, writers struggling to find a voice, writers winning national awards and prizes.

Even here in arid country there are certain tiny ferns and lichens that miraculously persist, and that in my experience, seem to prefer to grow in the Mulga scrub; amongst groups of trees.

Perhaps it's useful to remind ourselves from time to time about our similarity with trees.

## JUDGES REPORT:

# Northern Territory Book of the Year

PETER BISHOP

**The first thing to say is that these book awards are an excellent institution and a splendid way to draw attention to the quality and range of writing being produced and published in the Northern Territory. The two judges – Jennifer Mills and myself – had a stimulating and exhilarating time reading, pondering and re-reading before sending each other our shortlists.**

We came up with a strong shortlist for the Book of the Year —  
**Mary Anne Butler** *Highway of Lost Hearts*  
**Meg Mooney** *Being Martha's Friend*  
**Chris Raja** *The Burning Elephant*  
**Claire Atkins** *Nona and Me*  
**Derek Pugh** *Tambora*  
**Irena Kobald** *My Two Blankets*

A strong shortlist –and a splendidly varied one: a play, a collection of poems, two young adult novels –one set in India and one in the Territory, a richly informative travel adventure and an illustrated children's book.

Each of these books does the thing that only exceptional books do – which is to create a wholly individual world where readers are startled to find themselves wonderfully at home. And they make the world a better place –richer, livelier, more remarkable and interestingly new.

The shared winners of the Book of the Year award in 2016 were

**Mary Anne Butler** *Highway of Lost Hearts*  
**Claire Atkins** *Nona and Me*  
 For the Non-Fiction category  
**Derek Pugh** *Tambora*  
 For the Young Adult/Childrens category  
**Irena Kobald** *My Two Blankets*



Mary Anne Butler gives us a stunning vision of Australia in *Highway of Lost Hearts*. It's also a stunning story of the human heart –how it can be bludgeoned and

withered – and the miracle that is the wounded heart's regeneration. This is a piece whose bold and bitter metaphors speak to so many of the doubts and conflicts that come at us wherever we are in today's Australia –and it's a powerful reminder that writers will always be at the forefront of cultural imagination and change. This is major Australian writing.



Claire Atkins' *Nona and Me* brilliantly uses the genre of Young Adult Romance to point up the central dilemma of the character who is the Me of the title – that the apparently desirable life isn't always the authentic life – that the authentic life takes courage – and that courage doesn't have predictable outcomes. A book that should be in every Australian high school – multiple copies!



Derek Pugh's *Tambora* is the kind of book we can never get enough of –an enthusiast taking us into enthusiasms with admirable knowledge and brio. Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein's Indonesian connection –how the victory of Waterloo was soured by an Indonesian volcano – you'll leave *Tambora* with a wider and livelier idea of how history and the world actually work.



Irena Kobald's *My Two Blankets* is a quiet book –but a true friend. It's a moving experience to sit with it –to think of the role kindness plays in alleviating the sufferings of the world –the quiet way's kindness can change things, and what it means to a human being to feel safe.



Meg Mooney's *Being Martha's Friend* is that rare and valuable thing: a sober luminary. I think of her as the best guide a reader could have to the country and communities of Central Australia. I've known these poems for some time –and I speak of my first knowledge of them on the cover. Renewed acquaintance brings renewed admiration –to quote myself in 2014: *this one's permanent*.



And about Chris Raja's *The Burning Elephant*: Every sentence is vivid, every sense engaged – every detail on the canvas carefully placed and memorably articulated. This debut novel is an

astonishing evocation of a child's world within an adult world that's spinning completely out of control. And so many images will haunt your mind with their power and sadness.

It was not possible to shortlist every book that was of value and interest. I would particularly like to commend Russell Guy's *Dry Crossing* as another engagingly eccentric, compelling and truth-telling read from a writer who as long ago as 1978 gave us the cult classic *What's Rangoon to You Is Grafton to Me*. Guy's sense of time and landscape are uniquely Australian and yet unique in Australian literature. I hope it's not another 40 years before we hear more from Russell Guy!



# On Writing: A Handful of Sand

CHARLIE WARD

**Charlie Ward, author of *A Handful of Sand: the Gurindji Struggle, After the Walk-off* (Monash University Publishing, Aug 2016), on the process of writing his first book.**

If I am what I eat, I am also what I read, and what I write. I am not only a bibliophile but a bibliotroph, consuming and expelling the written word. My first memory is of learning to read. One book led to another and my responses to them taught me about who I am in the world, and what my interests are—and aren't. My metabolic processes may explain why I've spent eight years writing my first book, but they don't explain why I wrote *A Handful of Sand: the Gurindji Struggle, After the Walk-off*, instead of a gardening guide or bodice-ripper.

*A Handful of Sand* is both a history and the book I had to write. After decades of bibliotrophic discovery, I came inevitably to a gap in the lettered and literal landscapes, imperceptible to others. I was in Kalkaringi in 2006, organising the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk-off celebrations. On the one hand, my Gurindji friends were telling me of old times on Wave Hill station, and their current battles. On the other, I had Frank Hardy's 1968 classic about the Gurindji Walk-off, *The Unlucky Australians*. How could I reconcile the two? It was not so much a case of choosing a topic, but of following my schtick until the topic chose me. It grabbed me by the throat.

Years of inquiry began. While I spent my days exploring the minutiae of the Gurindji land rights campaign in 1970, for instance, at times my obsession became unhealthy. On weekends I would poke my head up, and find that most people seemed preoccupied with the rather thin, one-dimensional reality of the new millennium. Finding

motivation to research and write for eight full-time years was never an issue, in other words. I was just lucky that I could organise my life around it.

In my time-traveller's cocoon, the hardest task I faced was...well, the writing. Who would be a historian?! Thousands of contradictory, undated sources, being forced to rely on whitefellas' interpretations of historic Gurindji voices, and reconciling multiple perspectives. These challenges were all interlinked. How to create an account that makes sense *and* is factually accurate? One that conveys complexity, as well as being compelling and easy to read? Composing each sentence and paragraph of 300 pages, I was a juggler with a dozen balls. That was my highwire act. Reading *A Handful of Sand* now, I can see where I teeter, though I don't think I fall.

That last ball—of being easy and compelling to read—sets me apart from some in my guild. I am a writer first, and a historian second. *A Handful of Sand* actually began its life as historically-themed memoir of my experiences on Gurindji country. The advice I received back then was in this vein—'more personal voice! This is where the story comes alive! As my inexhaustible enthusiasm for research continued though, historical material began to outweigh my personal account. I entered the tunnel through a Masters in Creative Writing, and will emerge from it with a PhD in History. 'Your little anecdote about attending Mick Rangiar's funeral is quite distracting', later readers would say. 'What are you, the author, doing in the story? Take it out!'

Identifying, finding, and talking to all the people involved in the story was a huge buzz. Their memories were fascinating, though the oral history

**“It was not so much a case of choosing a topic, but of following my schtick until the topic chose me.”**

component of my book created extra challenges. I interviewed approximately 100 people. To keep peace, I chose to share my written accounts of their actions with them, before publication. Most people were content, though I learnt early on that some would not be satisfied with anything I wrote. Racing against death and Alzheimer's, I had cause to reflect on the truism: dead people don't answer back.

Researching and writing in the NT is unique, and a fantastic—if little supported—indulgence. Learning more about Dexter Daniels' role in the Walk-off, for instance, took me to Ngukurr more than once. For me, visiting a place like that is a treat, which is lucky because on one trip it also destroyed the engine of my Hilux. I sat on a remote stretch of road for 36 hours and returned to Mataranka on a tow truck. The NT History Grant paying for my fuel on that trip was never going to cover the huge damage done to my car.

Sadly, gladly, now the journey is over. What *A Handful of Sand* contributes to the place that inspired it is for others to judge. I remain an unrepentant bibliotroph.

**Charlie Ward** is a writer and historian based in Darwin. His work has appeared in *Griffith Review*, *Meanjin* and *Southerly*. *A Handful of Sand* is his first book.

# You're Always a Winner to Us

MARY ANNE BUTLER

**The NTWC asked Mary Anne Butler to tell us how it felt to win a national award for literature, and this is her response.**

On January 28 this year, my play *Broken* received two major awards: The Victorian Prize for Literature, and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama. I had been forewarned of the latter, but when they announced 'The Big Kahuna' as my friend Luke called it [it's Australia's richest Literary Award], I was utterly stunned. Things happened in slow motion. I have no idea what I said to the gathered throng. I have no idea how long – or short – I spoke for. It was all just too overwhelming. What I do remember is standing down from the podium, finding my way back to my family and friends and feeling them close around me with love and pride. And feeling safe because they were the real world; and I knew they would have still been there, winner or not.

Since that night *Broken* has received a swathe of awards and nominations. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't delighted, humbled and honoured by the massive local and national recognition it's received. And I'd be lying if I said it isn't life changing. It is. National recognition in particular has seen me settle. It's let me sit inside my own skin in a way I've never been able to. On a purely practical level, the associated award money has bought me writing, reading and breathing time along with some level of financial security which I was beginning to despair of ever obtaining.

However, 'Winning a Big Award' is also an event I'm conflicted by. Tom Stoppard said: "I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you might nudge the world a little..." And I think the problem with awards, is that they often position the writer as sacred, rather than the words. To single a 'Winning Writer' out of all the others is problematic. It skews the focus away from the many other generally excellent works in an often-massive field. As Susan Lever argues; with Literary prizes "Writing begins to look like a competitive sport, with losers eliminated in each round ...the winner will, indeed, be as much lucky as deserving... because judges will always have subjective taste."\*

I write because I love it. Because it calls me. Because it gives me purpose. I write because the actual act of writing is joyous for me. It's the process, not the product which keeps me here. Yes, it's hard sometimes. And frustrating. And a constant challenge. But I always did like a challenge - so I guess we suit each other.

A few weeks ago *Broken* was up for another major award, which I knew it hadn't won. I resisted the phone calls urging me to fly to Sydney for the ceremony, and instead held a 'Losers Award Night'. I got a bolt of red cotton from Spotlight, rolled out the red carpet, put some fine bottles of Australian sparkling on ice and invited a bunch of mates around. We drank

**“I'm a firm believer in the adage that 'You're only as good as your next work'. So I'd better get cracking.”**

bubbles, took red carpet photos and they presented me with a 'Moo' award – a cow's plastic rear end mounted on a diamanté-clad tea saucer with ribbon attached, so I can wear it as a medallion. It's awesome.

As the award winner's name came down via Twitter, someone said to me: 'You're always a winner to us. And I felt my friends close around me with love and pride, safe in the knowledge that they will always be there for me, winner or not.'

Finally - I'm a firm believer in the adage that "You're only as good as your next work". So I'd better get cracking. The last one's about to run out of novelty value, and the new one's not even half way there yet. And boy, is it a challenging one.

...but then again, I always did like a challenge...

**insidestory.org.au/on-literary-awards'**

**Mary Anne Butler** is a Darwin-based playwright and fiction writer. The NTWC hopes to offer her popular workshop series *Story in Six Weeks* in the first half of 2017.

For all current workshops visit our website [ntwriters.com.au](http://ntwriters.com.au)



# In Search of Pixie

GLENN MORRISON

**The Blue Mountains are cold in autumn. The shaking in my hands, however, is a tremble of fear. Of my chronic inability to get out of my own way and simply write. More pressingly perhaps, to write simply. Writing is about process, I remind myself. Steinbeck. Diary of a Novel. The scribbling. First the scribbling. Then the work.**

The day ahead fills my window. A deep bay affair, framed in white enamel over a wide bench seat, a cosy nook of the sort found in *Home Beautiful*, where a dog may once have curled. I peer through the glass as if to a shark aquarium. But there are no sharks. Only the silence of a garden. Calm. Raised beds of lilac crocus, each in its own way a-bloom. In the early half-light, a mist drifts through a maple and a breeze stirs several natives beyond, outside, where the world continues to turn. A young mango I pushed past on my way from the kitchen reaches skyward through an aged timber pergola, greying wood no match for the resolute push of its branches. The push of loneliness, I whisper to no-one. Here in this writing studio, a few short steps from the house, I am light years from everything and everyone. And so I cut myself some slack. Greenly defiance, I'll call it. Not loneliness. Greenly defiance.

A complete set of the 1922 edition of the *Historical Records of Australia* line an oak shelf to my left. The hefty volumes weigh heavily over a timbered credenza. Gold letters dress the olive drab spines, officious, military. Dictionaries crown the shelves. To my right, through a smaller, stripe-curtained sidelight window—framed once again in the same honeyed oak—is Varuna, The Writers House. Its proximity brings thoughts of last evening: my flight from Alice Springs, the

train from Sydney, the short walk uphill. And here to this rambling mansion, for a fortnight's retreat. No phone. No internet. Writers' heaven. And perhaps, for all of this, also a torture chamber, as I try to extricate my writerly self from the research in which I have become so deeply embroiled this past year.

Light from the bay window fails to dissolve the shadows dressing the remainder of the office. Twilight. In which I yearn for the presence of one-time owner of the home, author Eleanor Dark. For the umpteenth time since hauling open the heavy door on her private writing studio, I realise I am to sit where she sat. To write where she wrote. Here Eleanor penned *The Timeless Land*, an epic of Australian literature, one that critic Humphrey McQueen characterised as having 'performed two miracles': to enliven a day—26 January, 1788—whose 'basic events were too well known to Australians,' and then to turn the arrival of the First Fleet on its head, to pull it inside out, see it from an Aboriginal perspective. Impressive for 1941. Controversial some 75 years later.

On my desk is an Imprint Classics paperback edition of *The Timeless Land* and I open it. Six-year-old protagonist Bennilong is at the sea cliffs with his father. The Aboriginal boy is sleepy and cross, sitting in the shade of a rock, copper-coloured legs thrust out in front. The sky is blue, not a cloud in sight, down to where the sea 'joined it in a silver line'. As for his father Wunbula, he is stillness itself and towers above Bennilong, only 'his hair and his beard, blowing in the sharp sea wind.' Wunbula is recalling the time long ago when there came a 'boat with wings', a 'magic boat', one that Eleanor's whitefella readers would recognise as a sailing vessel of the Europeans. For only a few days later

a smaller boat emerges, bearing to shore 'mysterious beings with faces pale as bones'. And then, as mysteriously as it had arrived,

One morning quite early, when the creamy film of fog was just lifting from the bay, their boat had spread its wings again, and made for the open sea.

Through the window dawn spills quickly, and on its rays I sail past the mango tree in a boat of my own imagining, on through the mist with the English. Will Eleanor reach through to haul me back? How would she write her book today? What might she make of Australia's bitter identity politics, the likely allegations of cultural appropriation? Did she write it here at all? Maybe (like me) she couldn't resist the pull of the house's rambling kitchen, the desire to make a cup of tea, find another biscuit? Eleanor's 1923 introduction to the house plays out behind my brow. Dark hair billowing on a Katoomba wind, she arrives several days behind husband Eric, respected doctor, a 'red-headed bloke with eyebrows like steam-shovels.' She settles in to the room. Arranges her books. Hangs her pictures.

Beside my window and to the right, Eleanor hugs the wall from a portrait no doubt popular in its day. Another hangs below, offset, showing her with a fiendishly weighty manuscript. She is outside a house, possibly even a hidden corner of this house, but some turn of its myriad stone paths I am yet to discover. The Eleanor Dark biography<sup>1</sup> (borrowed from the house library) tells me I had barely finished university by the time she died in 1985. Born a school teacher's daughter in 1901, Eleanor was small, impish some said. Family called her 'Pixie'. Here in her room, surrounded by her things, I strain to imagine this shy woman some call a genius.

For Pixie was painfully shy, shunned her public, loathed publicity. She once wrote to her American literary agent Nellie Sukerman: 'If I could arrange the literary world to my satisfaction writers would never be photographed, and would be known by numbers instead of names!'

At left and behind me, a black and white photograph of Eleanor's husband Eric as he climbs a rock face. With his back to the camera and no date on the shot I cannot tell if he is young or old. Eric met the biographer in his 90s, perhaps too late for memories of youth, after Eleanor's death, shortly before his own. Perhaps climbing was why they located themselves near the ancient chasms of the Blue Mountains. To be far from the madding crowds of Sydney, perched on the fringe of their culture. Like many left-leaning intellectuals of their time, perhaps they felt pressed to take shelter there.

The need to clear from my mind the life of Alice Springs comes upon me like a triple-0 call, barging through any feeling of having 'crossed over' to a much-needed liminal space. Here, among the traces of another's life, I had sought a way back to my own consciousness, perhaps to places *never* visited. Can the emergency of life wait? Can I mentally wander this garden? Find my bearings? Retrace footsteps along paths well worn, but somehow become so foreign? Clearly, this is Eleanor's place. Pixie is everywhere. Breath rises fast and sudden in my chest. I try to quell it, to be still. To breathe. Just breathe. It is a year since my last severe panic attack. Since then, I have learned how to deal with them. But time is what I need. Time to observe the world without judgement. To find what I find. As it comes. So I make a vow: Each morning, at least until the light becomes too clear and fixed, I will

write like Steinbeck. On the left-hand page of my notebook. Where the dross of the mind collects so readily like scum on the tide.

And in the embrace of this easy half-slept feeling, consciousness comes fresh and in fragments like pilfered fruit cake. To where portions of the whole are, occasionally and purely by chance, fused magnificently, impossibly together. For inside each of us, I believe, there is a canvas upon which is painted the portrait of our life, a snapshot of individual truth. That truth is, of course, fated to be obscured by age, grief, happiness and trauma, the detritus of life. Yet underneath the dust and the mildew, the original portrait lies unaltered. Our task as adults is to slowly uncover pieces of that image, using whatever tools we may find. Our job as artists—a toil to which Pixie so steadfastly devoted her time—is to assemble such glimpses into a best-guess replica, probably without ever seeing the full canvas.

And so I write. In search of Pixie. To find my canvas. Until the hazy half-liquid of the early gels, crusts and crumbles into the late. Until day has exerted its reason and purpose onto the room. Until, with no forewarning, the moment is gone. And once again, I brim with the sense of my own inadequacy, the chimera of possibility broken, and there hovers any number of reasons to doubt the work. Then I must walk. Swim. Eat. My gaze wheels once again to Eric the climber. A powerful man. White shirt billowing, sleeves rolled for the climb, the rope looses away up the rock face, a tight-knitted beanie crowns his head. Baggy street trousers finish with sturdy shoes; a charmer with the ladies, the biography says. A guy who has your back. I almost feel a breeze on my left cheek as, in my mind, I press it once more to the cool of the rock. Above me, Eric speaks gently, in

**“Here in her room, surrounded by her things, I strain to imagine this shy woman some call a genius.”**

sepia tones I don't quite hear. Then I lose hold of the rope. Eric slips from view. As melting butter, I fall. Pixie is nowhere to be seen. And I start to panic. But a hand reaches down, out of the mist. It is Eric's. He has me. Gladly, I accept his grip.

## Acknowledgement

In 2012, Glenn Morrison won a Varuna Retreat Fellowship and in April the next year spent a fortnight writing in Eleanor Dark's writing studio near Katoomba, courtesy of the Eleanor Dark Foundation. Notes made there formed the basis of this personal essay.

*Glenn Morrison is an award-winning journalist, author and researcher living in Alice Springs where he writes of Central and Northern Australia, its people, landscape and politics. Glenn divides his time between a weekly newspaper column, media and cultural research, and producing for ABC radio. In 2015 he earned a PhD from Macquarie University, and in 2016 lectured in journalism at the University of Sydney.*

<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Dark: A Writer's Life, by Barbara Brooks (with Judith Clark), McMillan: Sydney, 1998.

Image: Eleanor Dark from wikimedia creative commons.



# On Still Emerging

MEGAN MCGRATH

**BACK when I was just a no-name kid from a patch of sand in Queensland, I had big dreams of making it as a writer. I wanted to be the kind of author who inspired other aspiring writers to create something meaningful. Penning stories about overcoming adversity, nature versus humans, and (of course, because I was a teenager) big love was how I spent my free time. I filled notebooks faster than my little island newsagent could restock them. I was definitely, no doubt about it, going to have my first book published while I was still at school. Then I graduated.**

Though I look back and laugh at my naivety, those were my salad days, and the beginning of my apprenticeship. I was doing the best thing I could as an aspiring author: I was writing. And I mean actually writing. Not just thinking about writing, or talking about writing (or

talking about why I wasn't writing – that would come later). I was doing the work by getting the words down. Stephen King is famously hardnosed about getting the words down. He says, "Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work."

I wanted to go to work, but I'd finished school with an average score and though I desperately wanted to study writing, the Creative Industries was new and popular, and required a genius level OP for entry. To my advantage, because I had been writing so much, I'd also been submitting. I'd won a few writing competitions and had my work published in the local rag. With some small-time success, and my ample portfolio, I was accepted into QUT's Fine Arts program. I was definitely, no jokes this time, going to have my first book published before I was twenty-five. The real work began.

Everything I knew about writing then (and honestly, it wasn't much) implied that writing was an artform, a craft. This, I found out, was a lie. Writing is, really, a trade. Like any trade, you have to take it seriously and build a skill-set. You work hard, learn more, and improve. I've been publishing work for ten years now and I still learn something new each time. I'm active in my creative development. I have a creative writing degree, but I still attend writing workshops. I go to festivals and events where I participate by listening to other authors. I read. I read everything. I read powerfully. Ernest Hemingway sums it up best when he says, "We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master." I have so much more to learn.

My outcomes in the past few years can be categorised in two ways: periods where I was writing and submitting a *lot*, and those when I was not writing at all. This came down to some bad habits I'd picked up along the way. I was great at starting stories. Terrible at finishing them. I've wasted a number of opportunities by looking forward instead of keeping my head down and seeing something through. This is why I still don't have a novel out (and now I'm thirty). Instead of knuckling down and committing to the long game, I'd drop my novel draft after writing forty thousand words to go after a quick buck by publishing an article or submitting to a short story competition.

This habit was fuelled by the explosion of online journals and new print magazines. When I was an aspiring writer, there were about four places to send fiction in Australia. Then the rules changed. With the ease of online submission portals, I was no longer restricted to the local market (nor did I have to pay for whale-mail postage across the Atlantic). This access to new markets meant there were so many places to send work, especially short-form fiction and articles, and I got power-drunk on the possibilities. (If you don't know where to start looking for places to send your work, regularly check in with the Opportunities page at *Writing Queensland*, sign up for The Australian Writers Marketplace, and be sure to read the tips on submitting you work on the QWC website).

Now don't get me wrong. As an aspiring writer, going after these short-term milestones were a great way to build up a portfolio. But I'd already had my share of success, my portfolio was solid. Compulsively submitting short work became detrimental, personally, because it meant I was continuing on the same path, rather than advancing.

And OK, I have been *emerging* for a while now. It's so clear to my peers, that I've been insulted about it a few times recently. Oscar Wilde was right when he said, "A true friend stabs you in the front." On all occasions, the insults were well-intentioned, mis-delivered congratulations on my Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award win. And I'm glad my industry 'friends' pointed this out. From this, I have come to understand the significance to finishing the draft of my novel.

By publishing short stories, I moved through the rungs from aspiring author to emerging writer. Then I solidified my status by selling *more* short stories (to more prestigious journals) and for winning awards for, yep, short stories. I *love* writing short fiction. But I can't stay in this pond forever. Neil Gaiman says, "Whatever it takes to finish things, finish. You will learn more from a glorious failure than you ever will from something you never finished." This is the lesson I am learning now. There is nothing more valuable than persistence.

Part of the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award prize was professional development and support, which has afforded me a bit more time to write (actually write), and allowed me to attend The Novelist's Boot Camp at QWC (see, even I'm still learning). The ultimate test will be seeing my current novel manuscript all the way through to The End. And then I will definitely, absolutely, no doubt about it, have my first book published...soon.

**Megan McGrath** is an award-winning fiction writer from North Stradbroke Island. She is the author of the novella, *Whale station*, and winner of the Queensland Literary Awards 2015 Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. More from Megan at [Megansfictions.com](http://Megansfictions.com)

This article was first published by Qld Writers Centre [qwc.asn.au](http://qwc.asn.au) on WQ Online in March 2016 and is available at [writingqueensland.com.au/on-still-emerging](http://writingqueensland.com.au/on-still-emerging)

Image from flickr: Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium

Amsterdam: Voor den auteur, als ook by G. Valck, [1705]

[biodiversitylibrary.org/page/41398744](http://biodiversitylibrary.org/page/41398744)

**“Whatever it takes to finish things, finish. You will learn more from a glorious failure than you ever will from something you never finished.”**

# The Asian Festival of Children's Content

SANDRA KENDELL



**The Asian Festival of Children's Content (AFCC) is an annual festival held in Singapore that celebrates and promotes the creation and appreciation of children's books and content. It encompasses a Writer's and Illustrator's conference, Teacher's and Congress, Parent's Forum and a Cross Platform Summit for literary and media professionals.**

This year I was fortunate to be able to attend this welcoming, mind expanding festival and important cultural exchange of ideas, thanks in part to some generous funding from the Northern Territory Government's, Arts NT Quick Response Scheme. The country of focus for the year was Japan and the Festival also featured children's book luminaries from around the globe. Notable presenters included; Tadahiko Motoyoshi, The Director General of International Library of Children's Literature in Tokyo, renowned picture book historian and reviewer from *The New York Times* Leonard Marcus and Deborah Ahenkorah, CEO of The African Bureau for Children's Stories and founder of

Golden Baobab, an organisation that nurtures emerging African children's book writers and illustrators.

The festival was also teeming with talented established and emerging authors and illustrators, inspiring company for this humble picture book creator from the NT!

Given the quality of the program my dilemma was deciding which sessions to attend. Some I found useful were entitled "If we don't support authors and illustrators who will" (incorporating festival directors from Singapore and Australia and representatives from children's literature support and promotional organisations) "The Editors are Your Best Friends" and "Where are the Parents?", all offered insights into the broader ecosystem of children's content. Also interesting were sessions delving into the craft and psychology of writing for children and the challenges of meeting demand for both local and globally relevant stories. I was enthralled by sessions examining 'classic' children's books from the western tradition and educated in some classics from

Japan, Indonesia and Singapore. A lively author's debate: "Where to Draw the Line? Adult Content in YA and Children's Books" highlighted the differing cultural taboos of represented countries. In Australia, it seems almost anything goes, for Young Adult Fiction at least.

The festival also offered opportunities for rights exchange, "speed pitching" and one on one manuscript and portfolio reviews. For a few brave souls there was a public critique session of the first pages of their unpublished manuscript. Added into the mix was bunch of book launches, a skype conversation with Shaun Tan, collaborative story wall, "duelling illustrators" and the chance to meet a gaggle of passionate children's book enthusiasts from around the world, complemented by Singaporean style catering. The Festival truly provided nurture for the mind, soul and palate, I can't wait till next year!

*Sandra Kendall is a Darwin-based author and illustrator of five published children's picture books. She creates stories that celebrate some of our most fascinating native animals.*

[afcc.com.sg/2016](http://afcc.com.sg/2016)

# Copyright 101

JO TENG

**As a writer, you want to protect your work. It's your creation, the shining product of your countless coffee-or-tea-fuelled hours, and valuable not only in terms of money, but your name and reputation. As a lawyer at the Australian Copyright Council, I see a lot of questions from writers, established and aspiring, about how to ensure their work is protected while 'putting it out there' to agents, to publishers, and ultimately, to readers around the world. Here are some of the most common questions writers ask.**

**How do I copyright my manuscript?** Automatically! One common myth is that you need to pay fees and file paperwork to register copyright (and there are scam websites that exploit this myth). In Australia, you get copyright automatically the moment you express your writing in material form. You can save your manuscript as Word document, hand-write it on paper, carve it into stone—the method doesn't matter; as long as your writing is recorded in a form a person can read, it is automatically protected by copyright. No fees or paperwork required.

**But how do I prove that I wrote it?**

You can put a copyright notice on your manuscript (eg., Jane Leong © 2016). Although this notice isn't a legal requirement for copyright, it's a good idea to use it as it will give rise to a legal presumption that you own the copyright. Keeping records of old drafts and dated notes will also be valuable in the small chance that this presumption is challenged.

**Can I copyright an idea I share in a writer's group?**

Although copyright will protect your manuscript, it will not protect the ideas behind it. Nor will it protect facts, information, titles, or your writing style. There are laws regarding confidential information, but in the context of a writer's group, if you have a particularly juicy story idea, it may be best to keep it to yourself.

**Is it safe to send a manuscript to agents or publishers? What about putting my manuscript online?**

Copyright gives you the exclusive right to deal with your manuscript, including its reproduction and publication. This means that if an agent or publisher deals with your manuscript without your permission,

you can take legal action against them. Generally, but, it's highly unlikely that a professional agent or publisher would risk being sued and damage their reputation by 'stealing' your manuscript.

The internet is another matter. Although copyright does protect your manuscript online, given the nature of the internet, if someone copies your manuscript without permission it can be difficult to take action to stop them, particularly if the infringer is overseas. If your manuscript is valuable and you want a publisher to publish it, don't put it online.

**Where can I get more information?**

The Australian Copyright Council website has a large number of free information sheets on various aspects of copyright. We also provide online training and a free legal advice service. Our book *Writers & Copyright* is a comprehensive 'how to' guide for writers, publishers and editors alike, and is available via our online bookstore ([copyright.org.au](http://copyright.org.au)).

*Jo Teng is a Copyright Council senior lawyer with a background in and passion for intellectual property and the creative industries.*

# Representing the NT in Ubud

CHRISTOPHER RAJA

**This year I had the opportunity to attend and promote my novel *The Burning Elephant* at The Ubud Writers & Readers Festival, Southeast Asia's leading festival of words and ideas that was conceived of by the charming Janet DeNeefe, as a healing project in response to the first Bali bombing.**

The theme for this year was Tat Tvam Asi or 'I am you, you are me' and I found this idea to be very relevant at a time when we are experiencing so much division and conflict in the world.

This extraordinary, vibrant festival afforded bringing together many ideas and thinkers and readers from

around the world but at the same time while it promoted diversity it also celebrated difference in language and culture and religion.

There were many highlights for me at this festival but most important of all, I have forged many new friendships. This Festival certainly attracts the finest writers from all over the globe and I met writers from Austria to India to Nigeria.

I had a busy schedule and so when I wasn't being star struck or falling in love, I was on two panels "Imagining India" and "I, Migrant". I was also part of a special event where readers met some of us writers over delicious food and drink and I delivered a sold-out



workshop called "The Elements Of Story". This was a once in a lifetime opportunity that was made possible by the support of the Northern Territory Writers' Centre and the Australian Government's Catalyst Fund.

# Push Your Book

ELLEN VAN NEERVEN

**YOU are in the fortunate position where you have secured a publishing contract, survived the editorial process, and now your book has gone to print. What happens next? What do you have to do to give your book a fighting chance to be noticed?**

If you're a first time author, it's important to realise you can't rely solely on others – you're going to have to push your book yourself. You are the biggest seller of your book: through what you say, what you do and where you do it. After the release of your book, your life will change, even in small ways. You'll have to make time for administration that could interfere with your writing, work and family life.

Since the publication of my debut *Heat and Light*, I have been involved in more than fifteen festivals, and have travelled across Australia and Canada, India and the US. These are my top tips to make the most of the journey.

## PUBLICITY.

Your blurb and cover are two of your biggest marketing tools, so make sure you have input in this process. Your publisher might work with you to develop a plan of attack leading up to the release date. This could include a media release and a list of key media contacts that you may add names to. Review copies of your book will be sent out to media and reviewers, and your publisher will pitch you to festivals.

## PHOTOSHOOTS.

Before you seek out a photographer, have an idea of other author pics you like. Most will have a headshot on their website. Wear what you'd usually wear. Be comfortable. Smile (if you want to).

## INTERVIEWS.

These could be for radio, television or print. Print interviews could be conducted on the phone or by email. Radio and television could be live or pre-recorded. Get ready by writing down prepared responses. Have a friend practice with you. Some questions will be a given e.g. What inspired you? How long did it take you write? Some might take you by surprise.

## LAUNCHES.

Each publisher has a different budget, but it is likely they will help support a launch in your home town or city. Choose a location like a book store or café that you like. Invite everyone you know. You might have to explain to friends and family in advance that you only receive a small amount of complimentary copies, and they will have to purchase a copy of your book themselves, but you will happily sign it, and there will be free drinks or food at the event.

Some authors provide warm touches when autographing to create a connection with their readers. Sunshine Coast author, Inga Simpson has a personalised set of stamps for her books which she marks reader's books with.

## FESTIVALS.

You might be invited to a small regional festival, or an event in a major city. All exposure brings you closer to readers. You could be invited to be on a panel, to read from your work, or to teach a workshop. Make sure you feel comfortable doing what is asked of you. Don't be scared to ask questions, the earlier the better. Do your homework on the writers or moderator you're interacting with. Put yourself in your audience's shoes – what would you pay money to see? Come prepared for anything.

If you have the chance, see if you can tie in a visit to local bookshops. Send an email in advance, and offer to sign your books. This industry is an industry of relationships. Kindness and consideration to others will pay off in the long run.

## SCHEDULE.

Keep a physical diary as well as a planner you can carry with you on your devices with key dates. This way you will not forget an interview and you can see your year of publication visually.

## EMAILS.

There will be a lot of emails, and if you do not yet have a system for filing and sorting emails, create one. Emails could include contracts, flights, invoices and media requests. You will be asked to

do things for free: appearing at a local event, writing an article or contributing a blog. For a number of reasons, you may need to say no to paid or unpaid requests. Make a criterion to see whether these opportunities will be helpful and make sure that they align with your career goals.

## SOCIAL MEDIA.

It is recommended you have an online presence by having one or more of the following: an author website, blog, Facebook, Twitter or Instagram page. This is a good way to connect with readers and showcase your work, but don't feel you have to engage in ways you're not comfortable with. This will show in your interactions, and may cause more harm than good.

## WRITING WHILE TOURING.

American author, David Vann keeps the mornings to himself when he's touring, but travel can set your normal writing routine into wack. Public demands can be tiring. You may lose focus. And meanwhile everyone is asking: 'what are you working on next?'

There's no golden rule for writing your second book. It will be your biggest challenge. Continue to write through self-doubt, even by just keeping a diary.

*Ellen van Neerven is a Mununjali woman from South-East Queensland and the author of the David Unaipon Award-winning Heat and Light. She works as the senior editor of the black&write! Indigenous writing and editing project.*

*This article was first published by Qld Writers Centre [qwc.asn.au](http://qwc.asn.au) on WQ Online in April 2015 and is available online at [writingqueensland.com.au/push-your-book](http://writingqueensland.com.au/push-your-book).*

# Botanic Gardens Retreat

LEONIE NORRINGTON

You know, the botanic gardens residence in Darwin was the best retreat I have ever done, and there was a time when I was a retreat junkie. The house is filled with louvres and surrounded by giant rainforest trees. It was like being in a cubbyhouse with all the amenities. Beautiful walks, a garden to play in if I needed time away from the book to think. The house in the Gardens is just secluded enough so that you can't see and be distracted by the wider world, but still within walking distance to a gorgeous cafe and a deli. My residency took place during the Darwin Festival, so it was also just a short pushbike ride to great entertainment.

Why retreat? My friend Kim Caraher once said that characters are like fairies, they never appear when anyone is around. Even if I go out to my studio which is fifty metres from the house, I can hear what is going on and don't have the courage or discipline to ignore potential fun. So at home I am constantly on the lookout for



distractions; have even been known to dust and mop, clean fridges and of course I can always be self-righteous and get out in the veggie garden. Writing seems so self indulgent that anything else can easily legally take precedence. If you don't have visitors, you can visit someone. If no-one rings you can always ring someone.

It takes me such a long time to get into a story and then incredible amounts of discipline to stay inside it. At the botanic gardens retreat I was

able to keep the story in my head for weeks. I could write till late at night, go without food or have an apple for dinner, even go out for dinner and still keep writing, wake up in the middle of the night, turn on the light and write in bed till I fell asleep again. It was a perfect place to write.

**Applications for the annual George Brown Botanic Gardens retreat open in April.**

**Details via our website [ntwriters.com.au](http://ntwriters.com.au)**

# 25 Years of KROW

KATHERINE REGION OF WRITERS

In 1991, a group of Katherine people with a common interest in literature decided to form a writers group – to encourage each other, bounce ideas off each other, and generally have a yarn about writing.

Initially known as the Katherine Writers Guild, the group later evolved into the Katherine Region Of Writers group (KROW for short), and although some members have moved away, new ones have arrived, the group is still active 25 years later.

KROW's first anthology of work by its members was *The Wanderers*, published in the 1996, and since then there's been a steady program of events and publications.

Numerous KROW members have had their work recognised by the NT Literary awards, including: Toni Tapp Coutts, Kathleen Donald, Ron Ball, Jill Pettigrew, Michael Whitting, Bruce Hocking, Marion Townsend; and several have made their mark on the publishing world, notably Ron Ball for *A Pom in the Outback*, and Toni Tapp Coutts for *A Sunburnt Childhood*.

KROW members name as a highlight the writer retreat weekends held at the Emerald Springs Roadhouse, and next year they're planning another one.

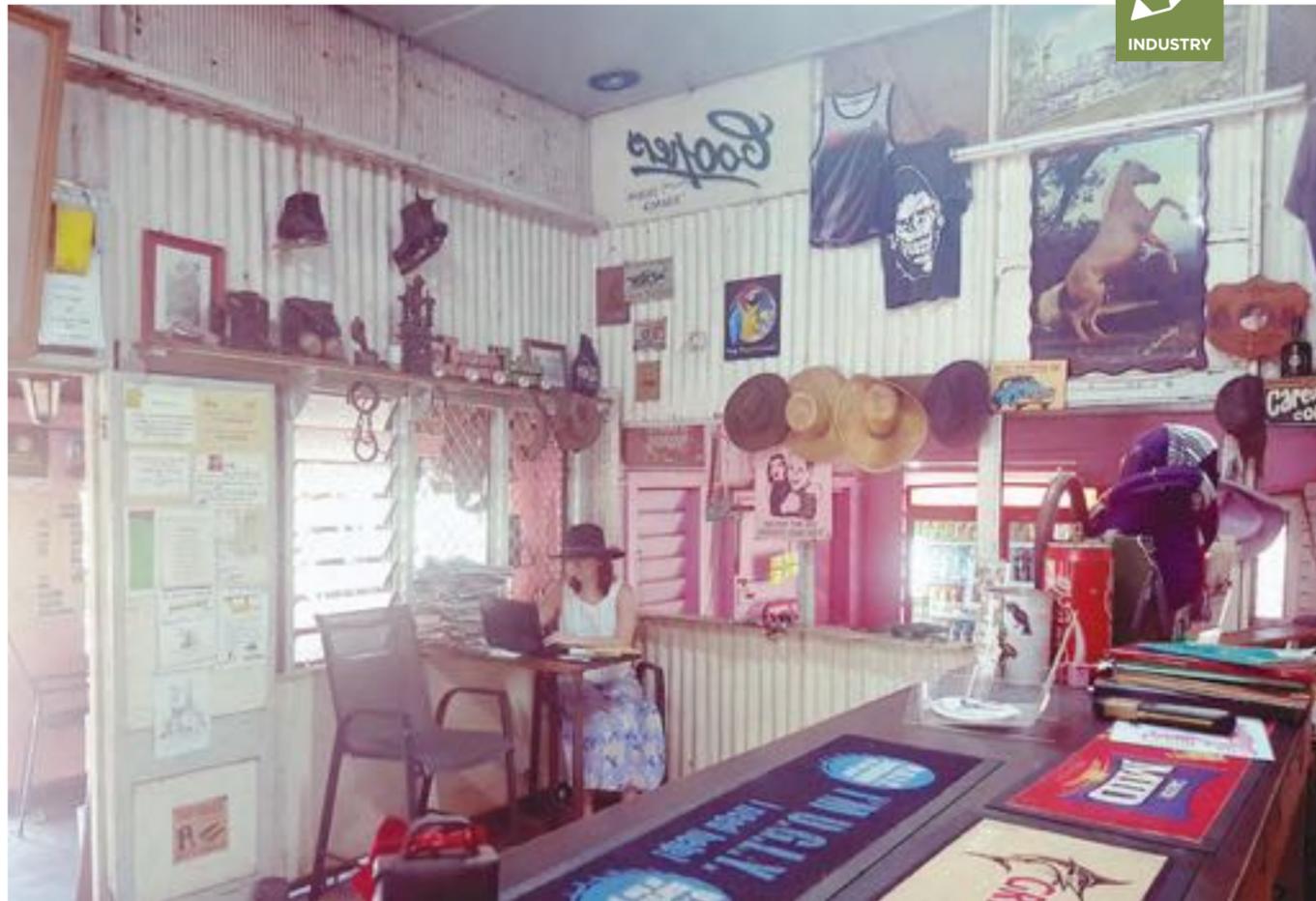
Here's to the next 25 years!





# Larrimah Retreat

KYLIE STEVENSON



I am in the outback, miles from civilisation, in the scorching midday heat with three men I don't know all that well, five dead people, and a large mob of flies.

These men have brought me into the scrub to meet Andrew, who I only know by reputation. He is the man responsible for my current living conditions at an odd outback pub, where a crocodile lurks 5 metres from my door and the threat of a death adder slipping into my room always sits in the back of my mind.

But it's not as sinister as it sounds.

This is all part of what could be Australia's most unusual writer's retreat - the Andrew McMillan Memorial Writer's Retreat at the Larrimah Wayside Inn, also known as the Pink Panther Pub.

Today the pub's owner Barry has driven me out to this peaceful bush cemetery where we are erecting a tombstone on Andrew's grave.

We heave the monument onto the tiles, mix the glue and assemble.

"Here we go Andrew, give ya head a wash," Paddy says, as he pours water onto on the grave to wipe off the excess paste and shine up the tombstone.

"Yeah mate, clean yourself up, would you?" Barry chimes in.

Both are old friends of Andrew's, a well-known author and journalist based in Darwin, who passed away in 2012, leaving money to the NT Writers' Centre to establish the retreat in Larrimah, a minute speck of red dirt on the vast Territory map, 497km south of Darwin, population: 11.

This was where he used to come to write, and after two weeks in this desolate furnace I can see why. There is nothing much else to do. But in the same breath, there is so much going on.

Drover Dave from Kununurra, our other tombstone accomplice, tells me I should burn the book I'm working on and write his story. He could be right.

This tiny town might be home to more wild donkeys than humans, but there are a trillion stories here - and that's without even delving into the area's fascinating WWII history or the town's own long-running civil war, which Andrew wrote so eloquently about.

The offbeat locals - most of whom still do not speak to one another - are a novel waiting to happen.

Barry Sharpe owns the pub and its attached wildlife park, which is home to 500 birds (some who swear), 20 squirrel gliders, three crocs (one with no eyes called Ray), two emus and a handful of wallabies.

He's been here more than 20 years, owned the pub for 12 and seems to have a wardrobe exclusively comprised of sleeveless khaki shirts and matching shorts.

"I just stopped in for a drink one day and I never left," he says.

There's a sign on the bar proclaiming it's the "highest bar in the Territory".

"What does that mean?" I ask Barry.

"Well, it's according to the latitude and longitude," he says pointing to the painted numerals. "But is it true?" I ask.

He looks surprised and shrugs. "No one's ever asked me that. I dunno. It was there when I came here. No one's ever disputed it. People always get photos in front of that sign."

Paddy lives on the other side of the highway and when not erecting tombstones can be found melting into a bar stool at noon each day with his dog Rover at his feet.

Bill turns up each night for a beer and the 7 o'clock news.

Lennie, a collector of monogrammed glasses, comes to the pub one morning looking dishevelled - his favourite Black Douglas Whiskey glass has taken a tumble and shattered. It's really shaken him up.

Karl and Bobbie's house is over the road. "Woke up the other night with a death adder in my bed," Karl tells me when I pop over to say hello. "Felt him crawling across my chest and flung him across the room."

Back at the pub I tell them the story and how I doubt I will sleep tonight. Instead of putting me at ease, they recount every death adder story they have. Drover Dave tells me a snake got in his swag two nights ago. While he was in it. "It was OK," he tells me. "The thing is you don't panic."

More recent arrivals include Five-Cokes-A-Day Karen and her husband Mark who manage the pub, and soon-to-be-20 barmaid Tessa, who was working as a ringer on a local station. She came in one day to collect her mail and never left.

The pub is a character unto itself, painted pink and decorated with blushing panthers, rusty old ice-skates, a triple-tandem bike, crusty saddles and dusty kettles. A network of spider webs overhead completes the ambience. Owner Barry is a hipster ahead of his time.

And then there are the trickle of tourists, the ones who haven't got the memo that the dry season is over and it's too hot up here now. Heat that in practical terms means a light jog is a near-death experience and if you want to eat an ice cream you need to do it in under 10 seconds or risk the entire thing dribbling down to your armpit.

A bloke from central Australia saunters over after seeing me take a million snaps of a brilliant sunset overwhelming the bush. "Like sunsets do ya?" he asks. Sure. Who doesn't? "I've got some good ones on here." He hands me his camera and makes me scroll through a year's worth of family photographs to get to an outback sunset. I pause on a picture of some boggy grass. "Crop circles," he says matter-of-factly. "Heaps of 'em out there."

Although it's tempting to sit in the bar and listen to the parade of peculiars all day, many things conspire to keep me indoors and writing - the 40-degree temperatures, the pair of hostile wasps that live outside my door and ambush me any time I leave. And, of course, the desire to finish my first novel so perhaps one day I can send another budding author on a bizarre bush adventure.

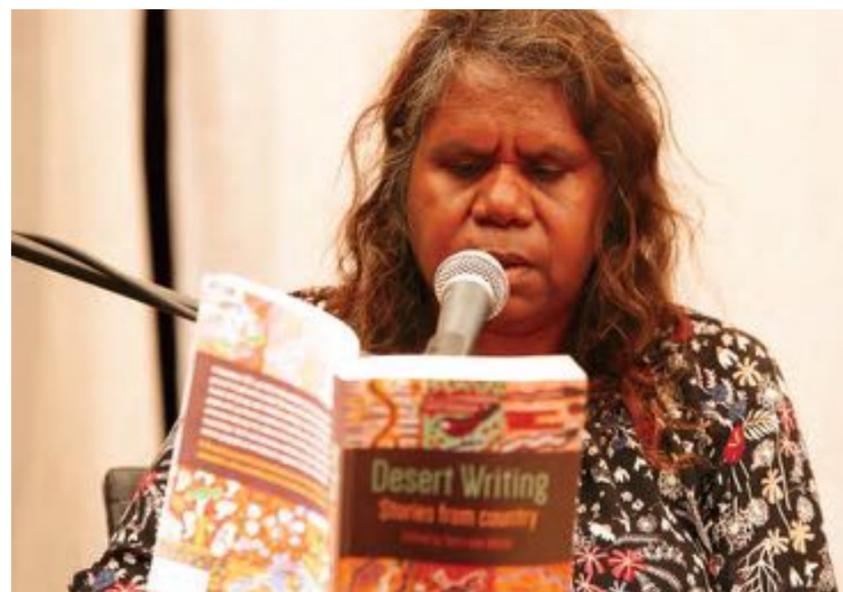
As I sit in my room contemplating my time in Larrimah - the solitude, the greatly-needed space and time to write and the people I've met - I'm pretty sure I hear laughter brush through the trees on the sultry afternoon breeze. And there's no doubt in my mind it's coming from Andrew's grave.

*Journalist, emerging author, and recipient of the inaugural Andrew McMillan Memorial Writer's Retreat, Kylie Stevenson, just returned from two weeks in the remote township of Larimah.*

This retreat is the result of a bequest to the NT Writers' Centre by the late author Andrew McMillan. Andrew asked that the NTWC use the bequest to establish an annual retreat for an emerging author across genres.

# NT Writers' Festival: Wordstorm 2016

FOUR DAYS CELEBRATING WRITING AND STORYTELLING FROM  
THE NORTHERN TERRITORY AND BEYOND. PHOTOS BY PAZ TASSONE



**Photos this page:** Indonesian writers Eliza Vitri Handayani and Eka Kurniawan with Dr Sandra Thibodeaux; CDU's Dr Adelle Sefton-Rowston, Dr Christian Bok, and Professor Brian Mooney with playwright Mary Anne Butler; Children's author Paul Seden reads to some kids; Memoirists Marie Munkara and Toni Tapp Coutts; and YA author Clare Atkins. Opposite page: Slam poet Zohab Zee Khan; Magda Szubanski talks about her memoir with Rebecca McLaren; Richard Glover meets a fan; Maureen O'Keefe reads from Desert Writings; Kieran Finnane launches her book; and NTWC workers Jen Dowling, Cora Diviny and Fiona Dorrell close the festival.





# Writing in Ngukurr

COURTNEY COLLINS

Sally Bothroyd spoke with Courtney Collins about living and writing in Ngukurr.

When Courtney Collins moved from Victoria to the remote community of Ngukurr, she had the bones of a second novel. But despite being about 300 kilometres away from the nearest town (Katherine), Collins found she still needed to find the time and isolation necessary to write.

"I moved to Ngukurr about 18 months ago," she said (after her partner took a job running the Ngukurr Arts Centre), "and pretty quickly I got enmeshed in the community and community life. Part of that is because we live in the arts centre and it's such a hub of activity. It's not like we go home at the end of the day and have that work-life balance. You do need a place to retreat to and know that you have a stretch of time that won't be interrupted."

But Collins said she'd managed to find a routine that worked in with community life, and her second novel *The Walkman Mix* was now nearing completion.

"We have a rhythm there in that we get up early so we have some time to ourselves. By 8 o'clock people start arriving and I'm at my desk pretty soon after that. I write in the morning, and then I often prepare the lunch for the artists lunch program. After that I retreat into my re-purposed shipping container and write more.

"It works really well. If I need a chat I just go next door. There's always someone happy to have a cup of tea with me. It's quite a secure feeling because my previous experience had been of writing a novel in isolation."

Since moving to Ngukurr, Collins said she'd witnessed and heard "the most amazing stories – beyond imagination", but she was glad she had her own story to tell.

"The odd experience of going to place like Ngukurr and taking with me a half-baked novel set somewhere else has been good, because I've had the authority of a world of my own making."

"In hearing and witnessing other people's stories, I have to set myself the limit. It's not my story to tell. The indigenous approach is culturally different to the Western approach... just because you see or hear a story, doesn't mean it's yours to tell. That's a really interesting place for a writer to be – feeling all of the inspiration, but having to respect the limits."

**"That's a really interesting place for a writer to be – feeling all of the inspiration, but having to respect the limits."**



Collins said she'd had some preparation for this cultural divide, thanks to a long friendship with a woman from the Torres Strait, but she hadn't felt it so acutely until she lived in a remote community.

Collins also said the Western concept of "writing a novel" is not easily translated to the community's residents, but she wasn't complaining too much about that.

"Writing a novel is totally meaningless to them. One of the freedoms of being in Ngukurr is that really at the end of the day I'm judged by how good the lunch was, and whether there was enough meat in it. This project I'm cooking up in the shipping container, no one's concerned about it except me."

*Courtney Collins' first novel The Burial was published by Allen & Unwin in 2012. It's since been published in the UK, the US and France.*

*In March 2017, she'll bring her two-day writing workshop "Beneath The Surface" to Darwin. Bookings can be made via our website [ntwriters.com.au](http://ntwriters.com.au)*

# Illustrating Children's Books

FREYA BLACKWOOD

Freya Blackwood lives in Orange, NSW, and works full-time as a picture book illustrator. Since 2002 she's illustrated numerous books including: *Maudie and Bear*, *The Territory Suitcase*, *The Runaway Hug*, *Hattie Helps Out*, and the Territory Read Award winning book by Irena Kobald *My Two Blankets*. She spoke to Sally Bothroyd about what it takes to make a living in the picture book world.

**How did you get into the illustration business?**

I always enjoyed drawing, but I didn't study it at university.

I took up drawing again at about 25 after working in the film industry, where I met quite a few illustrators in the design department. I was lucky in that we had a family friend who worked as an illustrator, so in my instance I did ask him for some advice, and my first job came through that.

Some of my first jobs were with an educational publisher in New Zealand. They did fantastic journals for school kids, so I did one-off illustrations for plays, and book covers. They were my first jobs, and then that led to a picture book.

My first book was *Two Summers* by John Heffernan. He was well known so he was a good start for me.

**How do publishers pair writers with illustrators?**

It depends, some writers ask to work with certain illustrators, but normally, when the publisher reads the manuscript they get an idea of the kind of pictures that would suit that text, and they go to the illustrators they have on their books.

Publishers often pair unknown illustrators with known writers, as happened with my first book.

**Is it difficult to get noticed by publishers as a new illustrator?**

I think publishers are always looking for new illustrators. A lot of people who've done a lot of work get booked up. I'm booked up for a few years, and I know a lot of other people are as well. So I think there's always room for new illustrators.

**What advice would you give to people wanting to get into illustrating for picture books?**

It's good if people have their own style so they're able to communicate something of themselves - so the drawings have personality and soul.

Figure drawing is very important. You have to be able to draw children well, especially, and keep them consistent.

There's also a lot of networking involved, as well, and really it's just practice. There is so much practice required to get to a point where the work is publishable.

**How does a person practice illustrating picture books?**

I practiced just by choosing stories I liked and analysing the way a picture book worked, knowing the framework that you're working within, and studying what's around at the moment.

There's so much more to it than just being able to do a one-off drawing. You have to be able to get the whole way through a book, and you have to know about colour, composition and materials, and have an idea about telling stories with pictures as well.

**"It's good if people have their own style so they're able to communicate something of themselves - so the drawings have personality and soul."**

**How did you come to illustrate *My Two Blankets*?**

*My Two Blankets* was offered to me by the publisher. So I read it and felt it was really special and that I'd like it to be a book - that it was important it was made into a book. But it was quite a challenge. It had some concepts that weren't visual so I had to create visuals for them.

**What makes a picture book successful?**

A lot of it's luck. You never know whether a book will work or not. It doesn't necessarily do as well as you think while you're doing the drawings.

But I love that you can explore the parenting side of life in picture books. Often I get comments from parents, saying that they can see themselves in the books as well.

**Is picture book illustration a good career choice?**

It's hard to find full-time work. I've working 13 years as a full-time illustrator, and I can survive from it ... but I've had to push myself on it.

But it's lots of fun. I'd recommend it to anyone.

*Freya Blackwood is an Australian illustrator and special effects artist. She illustrated the multi-award winning book, *My Two Blankets* written by NT-based author, Irena Kobald.*



# Tea Anyone?

MAUREEN O'KEEFE

**Mum and dad were great tea drinkers. You could say they were tea-aholics. When I was little mum made tea for dad and later, when mum was getting older, I'd make a pot for her. Many funny stories revolve around mix-ups and mishaps over the famous Bushells tea. Here's a couple to read while sipping a steaming cuppa.**

Mum was always mixing things up, just like a mad scientist. You never knew what she'd put in a cup of tea next. Once mum poured juice into a mug of tea instead of cold water. It had gotten dark real quick and she couldn't see which tin had cold water, juice or tea in it. Fortunately, my cousin quite enjoyed the fruity taste; unlike the time she mistook the salt for sugar.

Whenever we went out bush dad liked to stop for a cup of tea. That was one of his favourite things to do. He would get out his blanket and pillow and lie under a shady tree while mum made him a special brew.

As a kid I couldn't understand why dad always had to have tea.

'Tea is very good for you,' he'd tell me. I just hated it but never said anything.

One time we were driving home to Ali Curung when dad suddenly stopped the car. He had a Landrover back then. Well, that day he was in a bad mood. Maybe it was because we didn't see any turkey along the road. Of course, a cup of tea would make him feel better; calm him down a bit.

'I will have my cup of tea now, Nungarrayi,' he said to mum.

As usual mum and I went to gather wood to make fire to boil water for tea. Mum always kept a billycan of water in the back of the Landrover and five recycled milk tins. One had leaf-tea in it and one had sugar; there was one with powdered milk; another for mum's ashes (to mix with tobacco); and one stored Saxa salt.

'Come on Nungarrayi,' hurry up with that tea,' he said to mum. She was standing by the fire.

'Go get em tins,' she said to me, pointing her chin towards the Landrover.

I went as fast as I could. I didn't want to upset dad. But I could only carry two tins at a time. They were heavy for a kid. There were no labels on the tins either as none of us could read or write, but usually mum knew what was inside by opening the lid.

'Oh, this is tea leaf,' she said, chucking a handful into the water.

Dad had a pannikin – a little, shiny silver one – and once the water boiled she'd pour the brew backwards and forwards from the tin to the pannikin. She'd do this several times to make the tea taste just right.

'Where's my tea, Nungarrayi?' Dad asked. Dad was not the kind of person who could wait around much, especially for tea, and on this day he was particularly cranky.

Feeling a little more flustered than usual, mum pried open what she thought was the sugar tin, poured a teaspoon of granules into his pannikin of tea, and took it to dad.

He got up from his bed, a big smile spreading over his face as he slowly brought that pannikin up to his lips. At last he had his cup of tea.

Well, I only bin little one, about four or five, but I'll never forget the look on his face as he took a sip.

'Are you trying to poison me,' he yelled, spitting the tea out in disgust. Mum was confused. She'd made it exactly as she'd always done – nice and hot, with a teaspoon of sugar.

'What's with the tea Nungarrayi? It's salty.'

'Oh no,' she said to him, 'I thought it was sugar you know.' Poor mum. In the big rush to make dad's tea, she didn't realise I'd brought over the tin with salt in it. She'd not bothered to dip her finger like usual.

Another time mum bin stirring dad's tea with a stick, when she noticed white flecks floating on the top. She wondered to herself why the milk wouldn't dissolve, but she gave that tea to dad anyway because he was in a hurry.

He was about to drink it when he looked at that tea and said: 'What's this Nungarrayi? What is this floating in the tea? What is this white stuff?'

'That's milk,' she replied.

'It doesn't look like milk to me.' Dad bin taste a little bit more.

'Hey Nungarrayi,' dad said after tasting his tea, 'this isn't milk. This is some of your ashes for mixing up with tobacco.'

'I wondered why that milk was floating on the top,' she replied.

I was amazed dad let mum make tea for him ever again after that, even if the two of them laughed about mum mistaking her ashes for the milk. He was really fussy. I once made tea for him. He never asked me again. I think he knew that it wasn't good to hurry mum up. But that didn't stop him. When it came to his tea, especially the famous Bushells tea, dad was the most impatient person alive.

**Maureen Jipyiliya Nampijimpa O'Keefe** is a Warlpiri woman, born and raised in Ali Curung, south-east of Tennant creek. She was the recipient of an Australian Indigenous Creator scholarship with Magabala books and was most recently published in *Desert Writing* (UWA Publishing 2016). This story was presented earlier this year at the Red Dirt Poetry Festival.

## Online Publishing

COLIN WICKING

**As the long-standing cartoonist for the NT News, most people have heard of Colin Wicking.**

**But people may not know that Wicking is also passionate about writing. He's started many novels over the years, completed a few, and earlier this year published his debut work as an ebook.**

"I've written two previous complete novels," said Wicking, "the first one 20 years ago. I shopped it around to publishers with a reasonable response, but there were no takers, and I put it away in the drawer."

"I wrote another one a few years ago, and also shopped it around. But I found the process quite frustrating because it's so glacially slow. I shopped it around for about two years, and then slotted it away as well."

"With this book, I decided to write a genre novel of some sort and publish it myself. It started out as a creative writing exercise more than anything. I hit on the zombie thing one day, inspired by something I saw on the Discovery Channel."

The result is *Cauldron* – a ripping yarn about Nazi zombies in Outback Australia.

"I treated this thing from the outset, not as a novel that would change

the world," said Wicking, "but as a commercial product."

"The book took 18 months to write, and only six weeks to publish as an ebook. I used Vivid, a boutique publisher based in Fremantle."

The immediacy of ebook publishing was the chief attraction for Wicking.

"With ebook publishing, you start getting feedback immediately. I like that. It's quite encouraging. People are enjoying reading it. They're treating it as a work of popular fiction. I've tried to make it as entertaining as possible."

It cost him a little over \$500 to get his ebook up on all platforms, worldwide, along with a web page that enables readers to contact the author directly. But he warns that this direct contact with readers may not suit everyone.

"You have to prepare yourself for the feedback," he said. "It might be worse than getting a rejection letter from a publisher – especially if you've written a personal story. As a cartoonist for 30 years, I've been getting letters telling me I'm rubbish for years. But the online world, it's getting scarier as each day passes. If people are wary of the online world, they might want to think twice about publishing an ebook."

So far he's sold 300 to 350 copies – to readers as far afield as Germany

– and is happy with the way it's going. He receives about 75 per cent of the sale price, but hasn't made his money back yet.

"I set the price at the minimum possible (US\$2.99). I'm viewing it as a long-term investment."

As with all self-publishing, the book's promotion is left up to the author. Wicking's profile as a cartoonist, and inside knowledge of the media world has helped in this area.

"You have to promote yourself rather than the book initially," he said. "You have to engage with people or they're not interested. And you have to jump in with both feet, you can't just dip your toe in the water."

Wicking is planning to publish another ebook next year, and hopefully one a year after that, to build a following of readers.

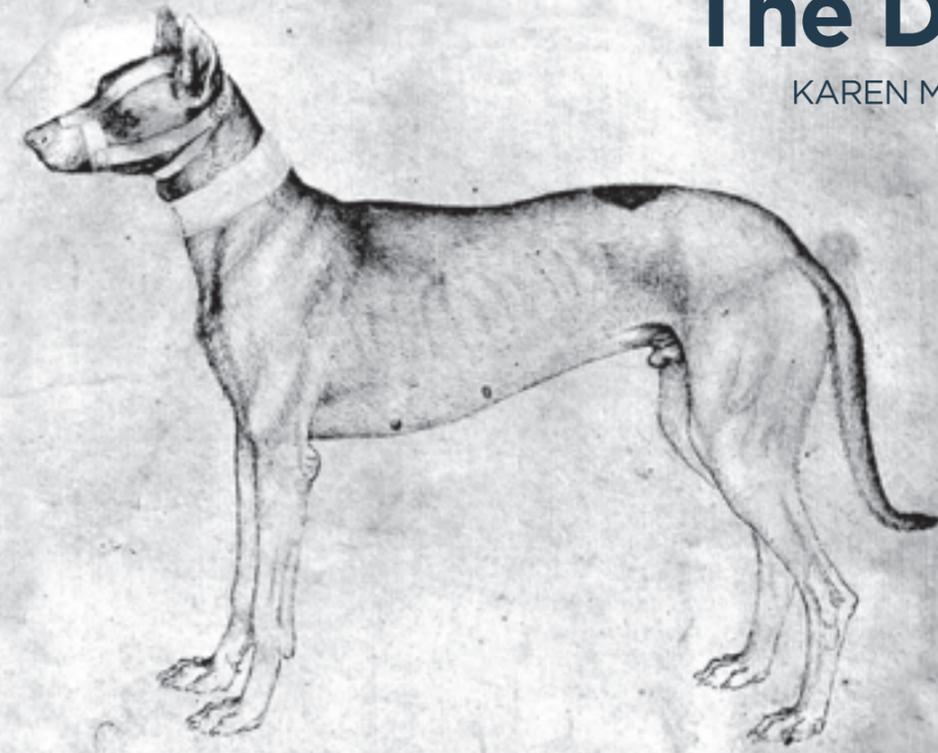
"If you're confident about your product, and think people will buy it, I would recommend trying an ebook," he said. "And there's always the chance that it might catch the eye of a publisher."

**Colin Wicking** is the editorial cartoonist with the Northern Territory News. Based in Darwin, his work also appears in the *Centralian Advocate* and the *Sunday Territorian*.

Image by Ben Speare

# The Dog

KAREN MANTON



## 'Matt! Matt!'

**It was that young girl Janie, calling him, come over for a chat because she'd noticed he was back from weeks out at the mine. Here she was, looming out of the shadows, the thin girl with the scraggly hair and that voice.**

'I heard someone crying,' she said, moving towards him through the dim light, her hands reaching out to brush the verandah poles. 'Over there,' she gestured behind her towards the side fence and the shed with a sunken roof.

There was a silence between them. He was wishing she'd gone to someone else. He was so tired he wasn't sure he could lift himself from the chair. Still, she was waiting, believing he would stand up, and so at last he carefully placed down the beer, and let her take hold of his fingers. There's an oddness to this, he thought, the girl with the dimmed sight leading the man through the night. She could pick vague light, shadows and hazy shapes, people up close in the day, he knew, but in the dark she found her way with her ears and her hands.

They paused by Matt's shed where the foliage was unruly, and old planks lay rotting across the ground. The girl pointed into the neighbour's garden.

'Over there,' she said quietly. 'You can hear it.'

The house was on stilts, the upper level in darkness. Under the house was floodlit with fluorescent lights. Nobody seemed to be there. The sound of weeping came from further out in the garden, where the light did not reach. Matt moved closer to the fence, straining to see, until he found her, the silhouette lying on the grass. Every now and then she sat up, before dropping again into the dark.

Janie shifted closer to the fence, fingers pulling at the wire. Matt stared on into the dark, wishing he'd stayed in the chair. He'd heard something earlier, and now the strange weeping of the woman was unnerving him. He was guessing Janie had heard it too. The dash of a spade against concrete. A dragging chain. High-pitched shrieks, low whimpers, distorted moans like the agony caw of a dying bird. Someone was taking down a wall. Breaking a chain with a spade. Killing a sick dog, perhaps. He'd chased away that last thought, and gone inside for a shower.

Now, in this terrible silence, he felt sick.

'We must go to her,' said the child.

She was looking up at him, waiting again, thin and trusting. Her wispieness was almost ghostly sometimes, as if she'd come to haunt him with wisdom or accusation. Matt sighed. He wasn't keen to go over the fence. He didn't know the neighbour apart from a wave and a hello. She hadn't been there long, seemed self-sufficient, a loner. Bo, she called herself.

'We'll go to her gate,' said Matt.

A crescent moon watched the shadows of the man and the girl shuffle through leaves to the place next door. The latch for the gate was jammed.

'Lift me over,' urged Janie.

Matt hesitated.

'Come on!,' urged the girl.

Defeated, he lifted her up. The bones of her felt so thin he was almost afraid to hold her. She was gone from him quickly, gripping the cyclone wire with knowing toes to shimmy over. From the other side she worked the latch and unraveled the chain that held the gates closed.

Matt winced, reluctant, as the gates squeaked open. The girl gave up on him and ventured in alone, feeling her way under the house. Worried, Matt followed. The woman staggered upright with the

noise of the girl approaching.

'Who's there?' Bo demanded.

A spade supported her crooked stance.

Matt waited like an alarmed rabbit in the glare under the house.

'It's me,' said Janie.

'And Matt from next door,' he added.

'Oh!' said Bo, walking to them, dragging the spade after her so that it rattled across the concrete floor under the house. She brought with her the smell of red wine and wet grass and dirt. She considered him for a moment, and Janie, before letting out a watery sigh.

'Everywhere — everywhere is death.'

Her words spread out slowly into the darkness with the movement of her hand.

'Yes,' said Matt at last.

A familiar coldness was creeping through him, though the skin of his hands felt hot. The woman looked at him, almost surprised, and blurted,

'I tried to kill the dog.'

Her hand lifted the spade a little way and brought it down hard. A sharp clink sounded into the night.

'She's very sick. I tried to do the right thing.'

Bo looked at Matt with something like a smile. He stood near, helplessly.

'I tried to kill her, but she wouldn't die,' Bo continued.

Her hand wavered with her voice, gesturing to the dark garden.

'She's out there, somewhere. Poor Angel.'

Immediately Janie stumbled onto the grass, calling the dog.

'Leave her Janie. She wants to be alone.'

There was an insistent edge to the woman's voice. Her hand caught Matt's wrist so he couldn't follow.

'Come upstairs,' she urged, resting the spade against a table scattered with paint pots and soaking brushes, an overflowing ashtray and empty bottles of wine and spirits.

Matt had the strange sensation of climbing instead of descending to a kind of hell. At the top of the stairs his eyes took in the wide verandah where a couch, and a couple of large old armchairs with sunken and worn cushions were gathered to make a sitting area. A red, shag-pile rug was

sprawled across the floor. In the middle of the rug was the shuddering body of a small, brindle dog.

'Oh! Angel! There you are!' Bo smiled. 'Here she is!'

Matt stared, appalled, at the closed eye of the dog, shut now forever, and the abdomen laboring with breath. A paw trembled out to him like a frightened offering. The one open eye flickered.

Matt shivered. Revulsion, grief, guilt jostled with tumbling questions. He could drive two hours to a vet. Or ask Dougie down the road to shoot it. Or finish off the dog himself, with the spade. Or wait for the dog to die.

'Poor Angel, what have I done to you?' Bo crooned, kneeling beside the shaking animal.

Matt guessed the dog would be dead in ten minutes. In his mind he felt he should stay until then. Janie's fingers brushed his back. He was glad she couldn't see properly. He could say he was guiding her home, and come back about the dog later. But Bo had already taken Janie's hand, and drawn her in, to sit with the dog too.

'—Angel', whispered Janie, taking the dog in her arms.

Matt sat awkwardly beside the girl, unsettled by her poise in this house of shadows. Janie was at ease in many houses not her own. Matt had seen her wandering along the street, passing in and out of other people's places whether anyone was home or not. From one house to the next she made her way along the street, hand bumping across the fence-tops. He wondered how she knew where she was so well, passing through the shadows and light.

He used to see her from behind the safety of dusty, transparent curtains and windows split by louvres, until the day he'd found her in his kitchen.

'What are you doing?' he'd asked.

'Waiting,' she'd replied.

'For what?'

'For you,' she'd said, quivering at his confusion.

He understood, now, that she liked to know where everyone lived, to know how their place smelt and felt — as if she might find someone lost and have to put them back where they belonged. She was often in his house or garden, though not always to visit him. He would round a corner and see her asleep on the verandah day bed, as if she'd lived there for years.

So now, in this house of the dying dog, he knew the girl was unafraid. Her fingers soothed Angel's shivering body, caressed the dry nose, felt the heaving breath. The dog's one open eye turned to look up at her. Janie's eyes stared back. How much of a blur is the dog, for her, wondered Matt. Call her blind, as some people did, she could see some things better than anyone, and the dog knew. Die, die, he thought to the dog. Die in the girl's safe embrace. Angel's eye half closed, as if to grant the wish. But Bo interrupted, dragging the trembling creature from Janie.

Matt wanted to look away but couldn't. The dog's eye was fixed on Bo's contorted face with a kind of love he couldn't fathom. The woman was babbling. Death, loss, death was all he could hear. Janie listened keenly into the darkness, lassoing each word and retrieving it into herself. He would leave but for the girl. And the dog. If only he could get Bo to give it to him. He offered to drive to the vet. But Bo didn't like vets. She'd always lived on farms, where people looked after their own with spades and shotguns.

'It's the kindest thing,' she slurred.

The problem was, she went on to say, that now she'd moved off the land to a town she didn't have a shotgun. Or her son who could kill a dog with one blow.

'I'm not a farm boy,' Matt said, as if by way of explanation for many things — the lateness of his presence in this crisis, unseen cruelties on properties, an inability to understand what she had done this night.

He felt a gathering anger, and took the dog from her clutching, desperate fingers. The animal's shudder reverberated through his sternum bone. Chastising voices swarmed. Hadn't he heard the spade, the woman's grief-struck curlew cries, the screeches and agonised wails of the dog? Was it only the girl Janie who had ears open to the right frequency?

'Die, die, die,' he thought to the dog in his arms.

But Angel kept her eye open, as if by staring into Matt she might live.

'If this was a child I'd take it,' he thought. 'I'd just walk off with her in my arms.'

Then again, maybe not. He wondered if Janie could read his thoughts. He'd heard the thuds in her house across the road, the high-pitched screech that could be a dog but was really a child. Janie took Angel from him and hummed



softly. Bo watched. Angel's eye closed. They were all waiting.

'It's like Jesse,' said Bo, suddenly.

The dog's eye opened. Matt shifted awkwardly, Janie listened.

'My son,' explained Bo, lighting a fresh cigarette while the other smouldered in the ash tray. 'I had to make a choice.'

She splashed the last of a bottle of red wine into her chipped mug.

'It was a motorbike accident, you know. Serious head injury. They said he wasn't coming back.'

Matt watched her throat in all its paroxysms. Until this night he'd never heard of Jesse. Bo grasped the dog from Janie, for comfort.

'I had to decide.'

She was holding the dog at her neck, clutching the sagging body.

'His grandmother says I've sent him to hell!'

Angel struggled against her grip, let out a slow moan.

'Because when he was born I never christened him; and when he was a man I let him go.'

The dog licked her face; her mouth.

'What else could I do? Let him keep on like that?'

She looked at Matt desperately.

'I had to set him free.'

'You did the right thing,' said Matt.

Janie murmured to confirm the truth.

Angel licked Bo's collarbone. The woman curled into the dog, pressing the little brown worry face and bung eye against her cheek.

'That's what I tried to do for you Angel. But you wouldn't die.'

Bo raised her head to look at Matt.

'She was very sick, you know. Fitting. Dying.'

The dog snorted and Bo covered her head with kisses, clutching the trembling body with one hand while the fingers of the other searched for a cigarette in the crumpled box. Matt helped her with the cigarette. Bo stared out beyond the balcony, into the darkness and still shadows of palm fronds, the long rustle of a snake.

'It was the same with Jesse,' she murmured. 'I had to let him go.'

Her hand waved towards the open door of the house.

'I still have all his clothes. Boxes of them. It's like hanging on to someone's skin.'

She was silent then; the woman. Angel started up a new shuddering. The battered eye struggled open, to look up at Bo's face. And the eye was adoring, though bewildered, holding a question without judgment. To trust in spite of everything: a dog will do that best. Seven blows of a spade would be forgiven. Angel's tongue darted out to Bo's chin.

'Do you want to go home?' Matt asked Janie.

'No,' the girl replied, easing herself up onto the old couch, where her body uncurled to rest.

Matt felt a kind of helplessness. Angel kept heaving air.

'You can leave Janie here,' slurred Bo, staggering to her feet.

The dog rolled to the carpet with her cigarette.

Matt smiled weakly. 'It's alright.'

Coils of smoke wisped upwards from glowing threads in the rug. His boot stomped out the danger. Bo was stumbling to the liquor cupboard's open doors.

'Here,' she said, holding out to him a new bottle of whisky and a smudged glass. Her eyes were brown like the dog's and begging for something.

'I don't drink,' he lied.

She sat down and sighed, poured whisky into the chipped mug.

Janie seemed to be asleep already, whistling fragile snores through her nose.

'I didn't mean to insult you,' Matt apologised.

Bo looked at him, not understanding. He put out his hand to touch her shoulder, but she cried out and gave him a fright. The glass tilted, spilling whisky onto the carpet. He watched her swallow back the outburst, steady the glass with her fingers. The distorted mask of her wet face pleaded with shadows.

## “The question held him under water. There was only one answer. He was a coward. He didn't have the guts.”

Angel opened one eye, and tried to edge nearer Bo, claws catching in threads of rug. Janie stirred.

'Sorry,' murmured Bo, smearing away unwanted tears.

She shook her head as if to expel the moment.

'Don't worry,' Matt replied, though there was a rage in him for the dog between them. He stretched to gather Angel to him. The small warmth of her shocked him. A chafed paw shifted against his palm, skin on skin. Her claws were miniature, delicate, limp in his hand. The open eye looked straight into him, as if to ask. 'Why didn't you come?'

The question held him under water. There was only one answer. He was a coward. He didn't have the guts.

The dog's eye widened in horror. Her tiny teeth were weird pins of light in the darkness, jittering faster and faster. With a high-pitched yelp her body jerked from his arms to skid across the floorboards. The other eye snapped open, with a wild look for him. She was shrieking now, her body shaking and twisting, travelling in circles across the floor while claws scratched desperately at the surface. He couldn't believe that something so near death could be so suddenly, violently alive.

And all the while the dog kept that widened eye on him. She knew him for who he was — the man that didn't come to save her. Possessed with shakes and shrieks she spun back to his legs, claws scratching at his skin as if scrabbling to get in.

'See,' said Bo, topping up her drink, and filling Matt's empty glass. 'She is very sick, my Angel.'

Matt struggled to wrap the dog in a sarong discarded under the couch.

'I'll take her to Dougie for you,' he said. 'It's quick: a bullet.'

Bo waved away the thought.

'She'll live, you'll see,' said Bo, and stories of Angel's invincibility whirred out into the warm night — a crocodile; days lost

in the bush; a dingo attack; a near miss with a wheel.

Matt's heart lurched. A near miss with a wheel. The words spun into him. Bo was pulling Angel from his grasp. He let go for fear of injuring the dog more by holding on. Angel's teeth chattered, jaw in a spasm. Bo's fingers squeezed the little body tight.

'Jesse had no hope,' she told the dog's solemn eye. 'But you — Wonder Dog —, and she held the bedraggled, shivering animal out in front of her, to admire, 'You'll outlive us all!'

'I need to go,' said Matt. 'I can take the dog for the night if you like.'

If she would just give it to him, he could make a decision. But Bo shook her head, muttering away the offer. Matt went to Janie instead, and gently lifted her.

'I'm going,' he said, trying not to wake the child in his arms.

Bo watched as if she didn't quite believe they were departing.

'Stay —,' she began, as he carried the girl downstairs.

Stumbling over a fallen branch on the way to Janie's place, Matt remembered he hadn't blown out the candles, or reminded Bo to watch for live ash in the carpet. Too late now. Perhaps it was better if the whole place burnt down. Tomorrow would be easier if all that remained was a charred, skeleton house, scoured of memory. He wished he could do the same to the house of his self — reduce it to cinders and flaky ashes.

The girl was heavy to hold, still asleep. At her fence he paused. Out the back, bottles cracked on concrete. Wails and curling threats belted the dark. Matt turned and carried Janie back to his place. On the verandah day bed he laid her down, cocooning the mozzie net around her. He tried to sleep in a nearby chair. But the eye of the dog stared into his silence, and the light from under Bo's house seemed to shine into him through the fence.

His thoughts had no mercy. The dog was none of his business. But for some reason it brought everything back. A child tangled in the spokes of the front wheel of his pushbike. Bone spiking through skin like the sword of truth. A gathering crowd. The absence of Liam who was far off, fading into white hospital sheets, soon to be swallowed by the earth. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes. Matt had two ghosts now. The

dead stranger child and the dead lover. He'd run 4,000 kilometres to escape both, but here they were, reincarnated in the girl asleep on the couch; the dog shrieking under the spade; the slurring talk of the woman.

At first light the girl woke him with her silent waiting. She was standing close, hair askew, listening. The old little face smiled at his yawn.

Bo's gate was ajar. They climbed the stairs, calling. Silence. Angel was pressed up against the fly-wire door. There all night, trying to get inside, Matt thought. She seemed dead at first, until the one eye opened and the shuddering began. Matt eased the dog into Janie's arms, and called through the fly-wire. No answer.

It was a few minutes before Bo emerged to unlatch the door. Janie was already around the corner of the verandah, whispering to the dog. Bo stared at Matt for a moment, leaned against the verandah railing to light a cigarette and gestured back towards Janie.

'She likes coming here — finds things and goes off with them — odd earrings, coins, a bit of ribbon. I don't mind.'

Matt said nothing. Bo exhaled. Smoke reluctantly curled into the morning air.

'She moves around with her fingertips,' Bo murmured. 'It's as if she has little buds in her skin, and the buds are eyes.'

Matt shivered, afraid.

'What do you want me to do about the dog, Bo?'

She took a drag on the cigarette.

Matt looked at her, waiting. She was staring out across the wavering fingers of palm fronds, as if he wasn't there.

'Take her to Dougie,' she said at last.

It took all Matt's energy to dig the grave with the spade that had not killed the dog. He dug in a kind of frenzy, as if to save his life. Or to get the task over with, in case, as in his nightmares, he exhumed Liam's pale face, or the fingers of the accident child, twisted through the wheel spokes and chain of his bike. He stopped, panting, to look behind him. Janie was there, holding the shivering dog in a torn sarong.

'I'll come with you,' she said.

Matt hardly knew Dougie, though he lived down the street. Janie went in first, calling. Dougie shuffled out to look at the dog and hear the story.

## “The girl was heavy to hold, still asleep. At her fence he paused. Out the back, bottles cracked on concrete. Wails and curling threats belted the dark.”

The shot was quieter than Matt expected.

'Wait for the blood to drain,' was all Dougie said.

They wrapped the dog in the sarong, snout and one paw protruding.

Bo was waiting for them in the shadows under her house.

'Do you want to carry Angel?' Janie asked, offering the bundle.

'No — you hold her. It's better that way.'

Matt led them to the hole he had dug.

'She looks peaceful,' said Bo.

Dirt fell softly from the spade.

'We can plant a tree here,' whispered Janie, her fingers taking hold of Bo's.

Early the next morning Matt heard the gate squeak. It was Janie with a spindly lime tree in a cracked plastic pot. Together they went to the side fence.

'Bo!' called Janie.

No one answered. Matt lifted the girl over the wire. She waded through the grass, knowing her way.

'Bo!'

A cockatoo screeched. Footsteps shuddered the house. The fly-wire door clanged. Bo leaned over the verandah.

'It's for you,' said the girl, holding high the little tree.

*Karen Manton is a writer living in Batchelor, Northern Territory. Her short stories have won NT Literary Awards several times and are published in Bruno's Song, True North, NT Literary Awards, Award Winning Australian Writers, Review Australian Fiction, The Best Australian Stories and Landmarks.*

Image from flickr

# Desert Writing: Stories From Country

KIERAN FINNANE

Edited by Terri-ann White  
UWA Publishing

Remote is a relative term. Remote from where? For many living in so-called remote communities or lands, their place *is* the centre; it's the cities and the coast that are far-flung and on many a day scarcely thought of. That sense of Australia lived 'from the inside out' strongly permeates the anthology, *Desert Writing: Stories from country*, recently released by UWA Publishing.

The collection of stories is the result of a purposeful project creating an opportunity through writing workshops and eventual publication for desert-dwellers to educate the Australian majority, the "coast-huggers". And although it originated in Western Australia, under the leadership of Terri-ann White, director of UWA Publishing, it reached across borders, drawing in story-tellers from Tennant Creek in the NT and from the vast APY lands in South Australia. The Western Australian selection is dominated by contributions from Mulan, a tiny community of mainly Walmajarri people near Paraku (Lake Gregory) in the East Kimberley.

Each of the workshops put its own stamp on the writing. The Tennant Creek stories are as eclectic a mix as you'd find anywhere: there's affectionate, proud memoir from Warumungu woman Rosemary Plummer; heartfelt verse from police officer Matthew McKinlay; sci-fi adventure from Indigenous writer David C Curtis; a suspenseful murder story edged with the paranormal from Ktima Heathcote, whose name I'm used to seeing on media releases from the Barkly Regional Council. Heathcote was also a leader of the workshop together with the Top End writer Marie Munkara, and as "the birth mother" of Barkly Writers' Ink, is committed to nurturing the "great literary potential" of the Barkly.

## MARALINGA'S LONG SHADOW

In the stories from the APY Lands the historic event of the atomic bomb tests at Maralinga leaves a long shadow. The workshops, led by Indigenous writers Ali Cobby Eckermann and Lionel Fogarty, were held in Yalata where many of the people who had been living around Ooldea were forced to relocate after the tests. The image of a family walking out through the smoke of the blasts, to the shock and terror of the soldiers, is memorably evoked in more than one contribution (from Hilary Williams, and Kumunu Queama and Margaret May), as is the suggestion that these people were going to be shot "because of the threat of radiation".

Cobby Eckermann sets up the section with a vivid account of her and Fogarty's journey to Yalata and then eases the reader in at her side with a gentle poem, ready to listen to story in the mulga smoke of a campfire. She also reflects on the nature of the workshop exercise: "It is difficult sometimes to measure all the outcomes in various workshops. Is a happy heart an outcome? Is healing and reverence an outcome? Is three generational mentoring an outcome? I think so. If so, then it is a good life to live."

Later she travelled to Pukatja (Ernabella) and Umuwa and gathered more stories, with a range of subjects: being sent to work down south in mission times (from Mavis Wari), on gathering bush tobacco (Wari and Jennifer Summerfield), cleaning rockholes (Sue Haseldine, writing of rough, dirty work, done for the sake of the animals, to give them "sanctuary"), and a deft little tale from a 10 year old, Kaya Kaya Kelly, about the friendship between a man and a fish.

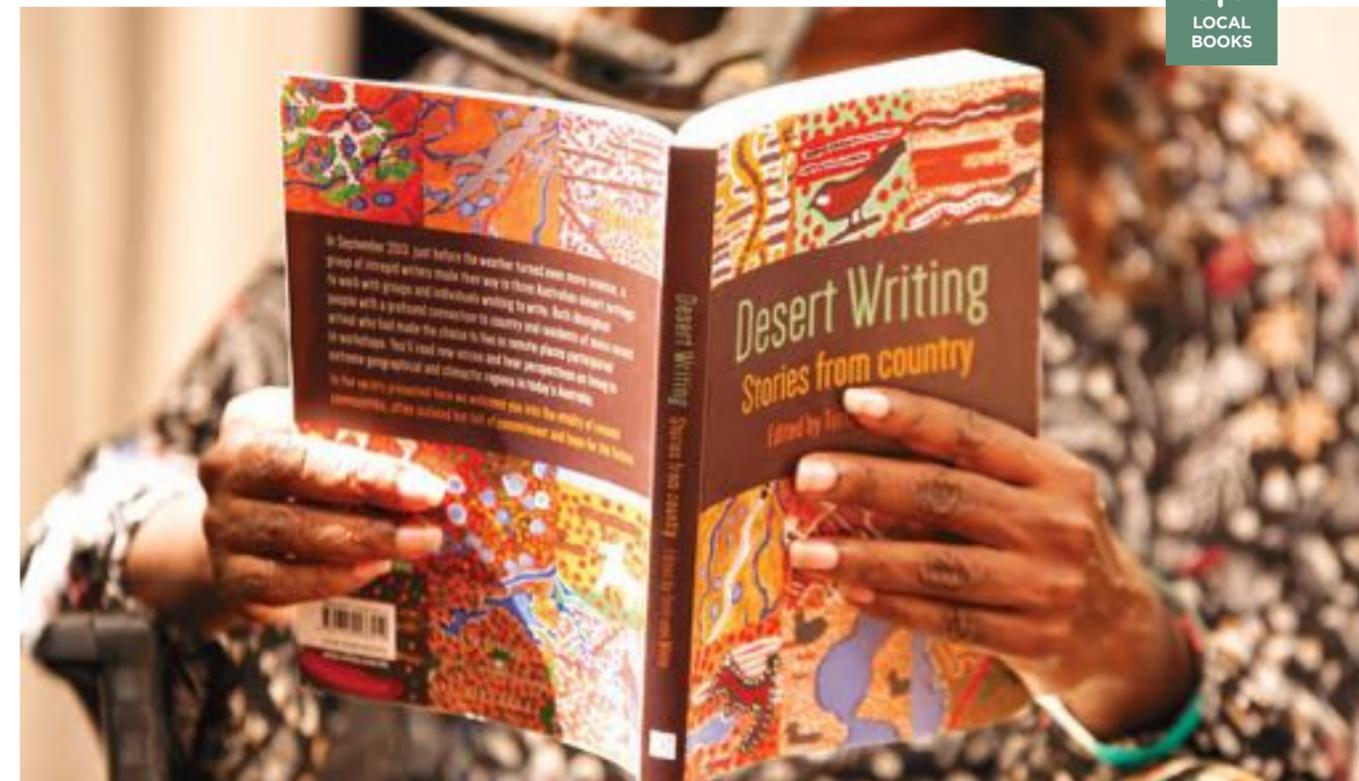
In Mulan, the Aboriginal story-tellers tend towards a bigger sweep of family story rather than focus around a particular theme. Quite a few of

the adults, mostly women, look back, to their parents and grandparents' generations and the country they moved around in, and to their own early years in times of great change.

Not surprisingly the accounts tell of all kinds of outside interferences in their lives, and it's interesting to read their reflections on this. Joan Marie Nagomara, for example, speaks of her father being forcibly taken as a young man to Alice Springs but escaping when they stopped for a break in the Tanami and managing to find his family again. In later life, he told her that he regretted running away. He would have liked to have gone to school and learned to drive a truck, but he was afraid when he and others were rounded up on Gordon Downs. He thought "they were gonna kill me". Karen Lulu also regrets not doing more school. "Too much bullying" and punishment - "workforce" - drove her away: "I'm sorry about that." There's no more adult education in the school, so her hopes are for her grandkids, that they'll learn to read and write, "learn white society. Both ways."

Shirley Yoomarie remembers crying all the way when she was packed off on a truck from Billiluna to go to school at Balgo, at just five years old: "I never used to see my parents", only on holidays. She says she got used to the dormitory life though and when she left school she continued hanging around there. She was only 17 when she had her first child, without a husband on the scene, and the nuns packed her off to Wyndham.

There are some riveting glimpses of events that leave the reader hungry to know more: Evelyn Clancy, for example, in an interview with workshop leader Kim Mahood, tells of her big sister killed because she was "too bright" (light-skinned) and thought to be the child of a kartiya (white person). It's not clear who killed her, but the impression is that it was her own people. Imelda Guyaman



tells of her mother leaving her sick baby brother to die. But her father tells the "babysitter" to go back for him. Later the boy was cared for by nuns. Did he ever rejoin the family? We are not told.

## PRESENCE OF PARUKU

At Mulan, the workshops also involved school children. The presence of Paruku, the lake, looms large in their lives. From the little kids to the seniors, there are lots of stories of swimming, fishing, finding swan eggs, and cooking up the food on campfires. Who they did these things with - other children and family members - is usually a feature. There's interesting evidence of great change in their lives too, compared to the lives of their parents and grandparents: Theo Fernandez wants to be an inventor, of a go-kart fit for a Spiderman movie; Junior Ovi tells of getting lost on a school trip to Melbourne, and with the help of a prayer and his own navigation skills, finding his way back to their accommodation.

The writing in the anthology, then, is as varied as the contexts in which it was produced, so it would always have been challenging to find the opening piece in terms of setting expectations of what would follow. From this point of view, the choice to open with two stories that seem to have been produced outside the workshop context, both of them by non-Aboriginal women, Kate Fielding

and Holly Ringland, professionals with their own websites, who spent time working in the desert, is a bit misleading.

It's not that we don't encounter writing at this level in what follows. We do. But it sets up poles, particularly for the Western Australian selection: at one end, a string of women, coming into communities (Warburton, Mutitjulu, Balgo, Mulan) from elsewhere, reflecting on their experiences with a good deal of flair for written communication (I enjoyed all these pieces, from variously a cultural strategist, a media compliance officer, an art centre director, nurses, a teacher); at the other, the Aboriginal people of Mulan, supported or coaxed through the workshops, to record their stories in English. For the adults, I expect most, if not all of the stories are transcription of spoken word.

Mahood, a writer and artist who spends several months of each year working at Mulan, urges us to approach much of this writing as "a form of poetry, to be heard as much as read", to read it aloud to appreciate its "rhythms and cadences". It's good advice, this makes a difference to the reading experience. But nonetheless I don't think it gets over the problem of juxtaposing worked up texts by native speakers of English with transcribed, first takes of oral stories in English spoken as a second, third or fourth language.

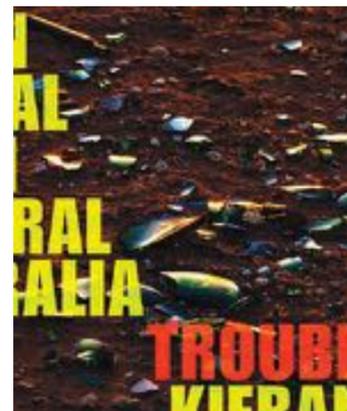
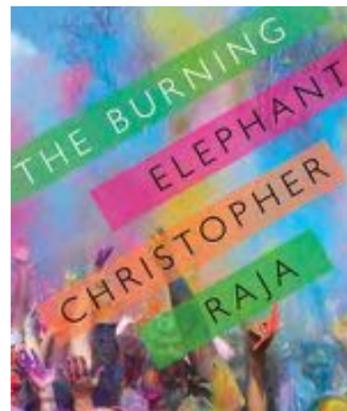
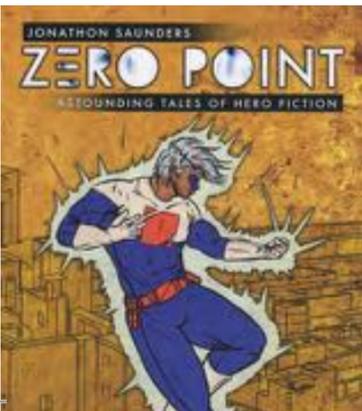
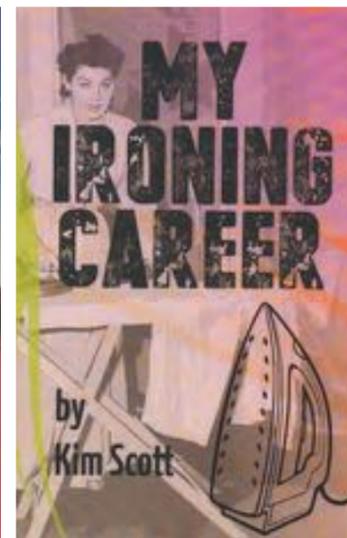
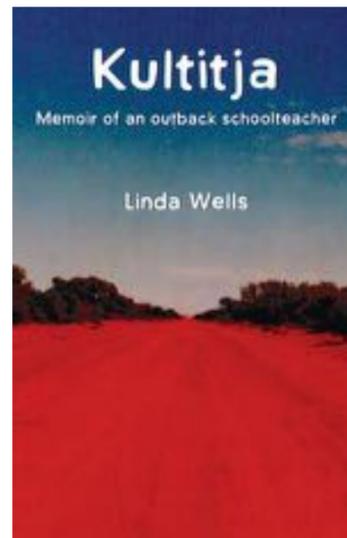
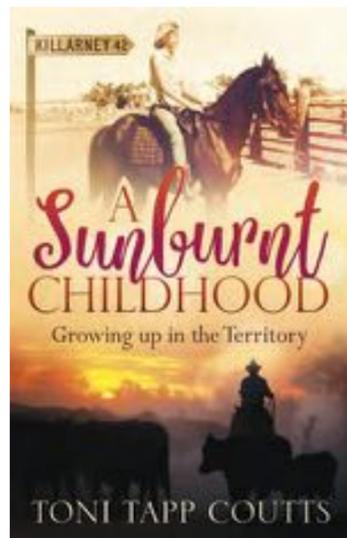
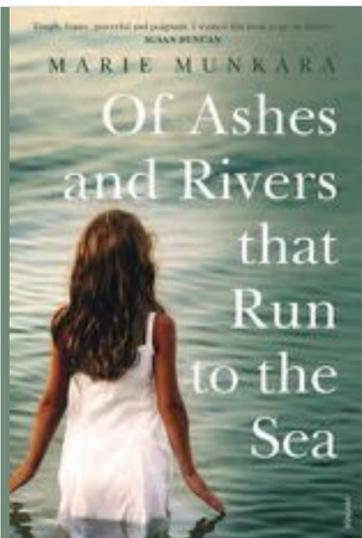
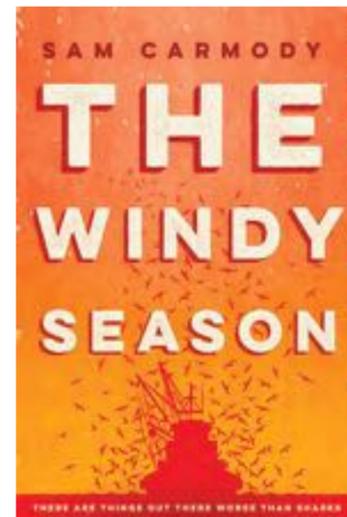
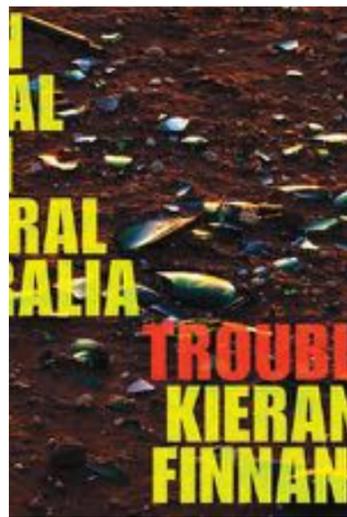
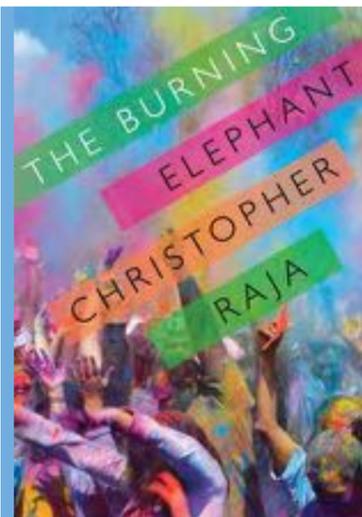
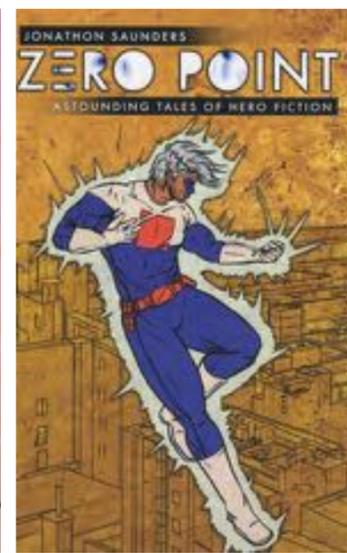
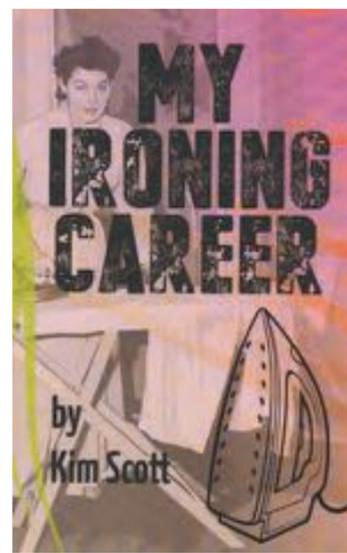
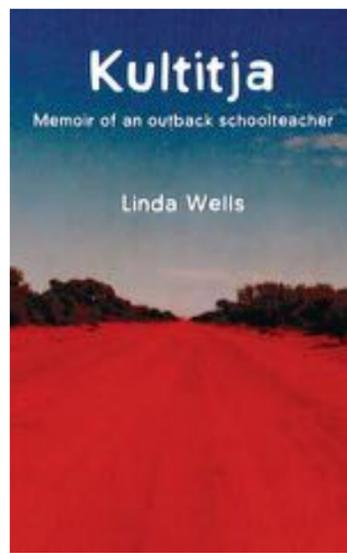
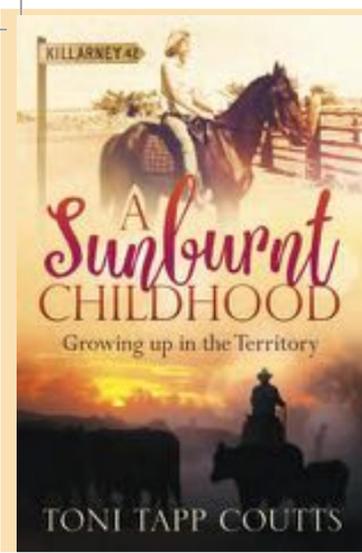
**"It is difficult sometimes to measure all the outcomes in various workshops. Is a happy heart an outcome? Is healing and reverence an outcome? Is three generational mentoring an outcome? I think so. If so, then it is a good life to live."**

It's critical that we hear these Aboriginal voices from Mulan. In situ the experience would be carried richly by all the nuance of people's personalities, gestures, contexts. Stripped of all those things by scrupulous transcription and unadulterated reproduction on the printed page leaves them as husks of what they originally were. How to overcome this problem is a challenge for future projects like this one, of which I hope there will be more.

*Kieran Finnane is an Alice Springs journalist, artist and author. Her book of long-form journalism, Trouble: on trial in Central Australia, was published in June 2016 by UQP. This review first appeared in The Alice Springs News.*

Image: Wordstorm 2016 by Paz Tassone

# Short Reviews



## A SUNBURNT CHILDHOOD: GROWING UP IN THE TERRITORY Toni Tapp Coutts

Hachette Australia 2016

### Review by Kaye Aldenhoven

*'The land where I grew up is vast and flat.'*

Toni Tapp Coutts, the eldest of ten children, grew up on Killarney Station, a cattle property created by her step father Bill Tapp from country 'flat as a breadboard,' using wild feral cattle as stock and an even wilder assortment of stockmen. June Tapp nee Forscutt played a pivotal role in the establishment of the enormous station, while she birthed and raised children and carried her share of station work. Toni slept in a swag from the day the family arrived at Killarney to live in an old water-tank - no electricity, no water.

Fun, and empowering, is how Toni describes her life as she worked alongside stockmen in the cattle yards; drafting and branding cattle; mustering; sleeping in a swag. The community cared about each other and every one worked on Killarney regardless of age. This ethic seems to have produced a remarkable Territory family.

The Aboriginal stockmen and the women who worked with Toni's mother had a strong influence on Toni's understanding of country and her love of it. The descriptions of relationships with Aboriginal people are a highlight.

The oppressive climate of the Territory - either wet or dry - tested everyone. Fish were known to rain from the sky and sometimes good men drank too much and drowned trying to cross swollen rivers. The story of the Cattle King's marriage to Toni's mother; the tragedies and triumphs of life on Killarney; and the alcoholism that consumed and destroyed Bill Tapp are vividly and authentically told in this story.

Flawed and fascinating characters pepper this memoir and beautiful writing is a strong feature. Toni's story is unique, and uniquely Australian. A *Sunburnt Childhood* is easy to read, the words flow and the humour is entertaining.

Read it! Read it!

*Toni Tapp Coutts is a writer from Katherine. Her other books include Bill Tapp - Cattle King. Kaye Aldenhoven is the author of the only poetry book in the Darwin Library that is regularly stolen.*

## THE WINDY SEASON by Sam Carmody

Allen & Unwin 2016

### Review by Sally Bothroyd

"There are things out there worse than sharks", warns the front cover of this novel by Sam Carmody, so readers know from the outset that they're firmly in the crime fiction genre.

Carmody hails from Western Australia where *The Windy Season* is set in the fictional town of Stark - a sleepy settlement reliant on its fishing and tourism industries, and a haven for people running away from their past.

Paul is a young man, with little ambition or direction, until his brother Elliott goes missing - leaving his parents paralysed by grief. Deciding he has to do something, Paul quits his job and hits the road.

His brother was last living in Stark, so Paul follows in his footsteps, taking a job as a deckhand for his troubled cousin who skips a fishing boat in the waters off the windy WA coast.

Naturally it's not all smooth sailing, and there are darker forces at work than just the animalistic men working on the trawlers, or the half-blind shark that is stalking the shallows.

In this gritty crime fiction novel, Sam Carmody conjures the claustrophobic feel of a small town, and the people trapped within its gold-fishbowl-like environs.

The book is a skilled exploration of a family coming to terms with the sudden and unexplained absence of a loved one - even though we learn that Elliott disappeared from his family's lives long before becoming an official "missing person".

*The Windy Season* is an assured and well-written debut novel, and I'm sure crime fiction fans will be keenly watching Sam Carmody's career.

*Sam Carmody now lives in Darwin and is working on his second novel while also teaching creative writing at Batchelor College. Sally Bothroyd is the Executive Director of the NT Writers' Centre.*

## KULTITJA: MEMOIR OF AN OUTBACK SCHOOLTEACHER Linda Wells

Ginninderra Press 2016

### Review by Julia Christensen

After looking at the word Kultitja a few times, I read it aloud and remembered that indigenous language is an evolving oral tradition, not a written one!

As a young schoolteacher, Linda Wells worked in Victoria and Tasmania, but after a chance encounter, she finally fulfils her dream of visiting Central Australia, a trip she'd missed out on at school because of sickness.

She discovers that teachers are a much needed commodity in bush schools and eagerly signs up for a position at the Mount Allen school.

She takes in her stride creeks with no water, red dirt roads that never end, jaded white locals who'd seen it all before; she revels in the new and exotic of her adopted landscape.

As Linda comes to terms with the gulf between her “romantic notions... of peaceful Aboriginal people, living in harmony with nature and each other, against all the odds of invasion” and the realities of sickness, drinking, violence and an all too often dysfunctional family life, she settles into the rhythms of a remote bush community. Her curiosity, good nature and intelligence win through. She finds the sense of community she has been looking for and she finds love.

Linda Wells pulls no punches though when relating the harsh realities of outback life and relationships.

Her writing style is beautifully poetic, concise and engaging...

“I’d never imagined the desert to be so dense and abundant. I’d never imagined living on the back of an old truck. Once there, I could imagine nothing else.”

I am a great believer that life takes us on a journey; doors open and we decide whether or not to walk through them. Linda Wells stepped through the door that took her out bush to teach. She takes us with her on a fascinating journey of cultural, family and self discovery.

**Linda Wells** spent her childhood in Melbourne but has lived for many years now in Alice Springs. She is the author of *Still a Town Like Alice* and a number of short stories and poems. **Julia Christensen** is a former ABC broadcaster with a love of literary festivals.

#### **BROKEN** **Mary Anne Butler**

Currency Press 2016

#### **Review by Adelle Sefton-Rowston**

Mary Anne Butler’s play *Broken* was this year’s winner of the Victorian Premier’s award for Drama and, for the first time ever, it was jointly awarded the Prize for Literature. Similarly, her play breaks a number of literary conventions: it is without stage directions; includes only two props; and depends on three characters to reveal their stories through triangular prose. The set is ‘stripped bare’ with powerful effect,

leaving the audience intimately aware of what’s ‘not there’ in the lives of Ham, Mia and Ash.

Ham is a ‘fly in, fly out’ miner working in the Northern Territory’s Central Desert – except he drives in and out – two weeks on, one week off – so he’s home one week out of three. His wife, Mia does not cope well with him working away and is experiencing painful medical issues. On his way home, Ham discovers a rolled over car in the middle of the bush. It is here he meets Ash, a biologist studying the Mulgara – a small carnivorous marsupial endangered in parts of the Central Desert.

In the beginning, and as we see at the end, all three characters are at turning points in their lives, a little broken yet hanging on to something barely there – luck, memories, hope – all of which are embodied through human emotion and symbolically represented by the recurring ‘barely-there star’ that appears throughout the text.

Over the three and a half years of writing *Broken*, Mary Anne admits that her characters often told her to ‘shut-up and listen’ as she experienced the slow but perpetual revealing of who the characters were and how they wanted her to tell their story. She has done this so markedly well.

Soon to be produced into an Australian film, I cannot wait to see *Broken* transform on the screen, so I can watch it over again – each time taking something new and something wiser from its deeply etched poetic messages.

**Mary Anne Butler** is a successful author, playwright, mentor and educator living in Darwin. **Adelle Sefton-Rowston** has a PhD in literature and lectures at Charles Darwin University.

#### **OF ASHES AND RIVERS THAT RUN TO THE SEA** **Marie Munkara**

Penguin 2016

#### **Review by Dianne Dempsey**

There is an adage that goes along the lines of “I can say anything I like about my family but nobody else had better try it”, an adage that Marie Munkara applies with great glee when she describes in her memoir a much longed-for family reunion.

Munkara was 28 when she discovered her mother and brothers were alive and well and living on the Tiwi islands. She had been given to white foster parents when she was only three years old. “He” was a paedophile and “she” was sour and turned a blind eye to his horrible behaviour.

When the day of the reunion finally arrives Munkara rushes into the fray head on, “Do you speak English?” she asks them, slowly and clearly, and the faux pas accrue from there. She is horrified by the hoards of mangy dogs. She is terrified of the broken, filthy toilet and shower. In a country where kangaroo meat is a staple, Munkara decides she’s a vegetarian. Her aversions are tolerated, but only just, and only because she is part of the kinship group.

Like her first book, *Every Secret Thing*, which won the 2008 David Unaipon Award and the 2010 NT Book of the Year, Munkara’s writing is distinguished by its humour and vivid descriptions of raucous family fun. She laughs at herself as well as the antics of her own mob. But underpinning the laughter are acute political statements about the poverty of her people. She is also unabashedly scathing about the murruntani or whites. Whitefellas take all the good jobs or they might be on some sort of spiritual journey looking for their souls with the blacks.

There is pathos, too. At the heart of the writing is Munkara’s struggle to know her mother; to become connected to her, and to find a place where she no longer feels stiff and self-conscious.

*Of Rembarranga, Tiwi and Chinese descent, Marie Munkara was born on the banks of the Mainoru River in Arnhemland. Her first book Every Secret Thing won 2010 NT Book of the Year. Dianne Dempsey is a scriptwriter, a freelance journalist and book reviewer.*

#### **THE BURNING ELEPHANT** **by Christopher Raja**

Giramondo 2016

#### **Review by Fiona Dorrell**

Set during the lead-up to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, *The Burning Elephant* is coloured by political eruptions. Through the eyes of young Govinda, a story unfolds about discord within a marriage, sectarian violence, and the anticipation of a family preparing to emigrate to Australia.

Religion and mysticism are the book’s primary intoxicants. Characters speak in proverbs and riddles; rivers swell and burst; hijras and politicians alike place curses; Sikhs amass weapons in a temple. From the opening scene, in which a rampaging elephant is shot in a schoolyard, the action is presented in mythic proportions. Like many of Govinda’s formative experiences in India, the image of the elephant’s burning body plagues him.

As the narration is defined by a child’s mind, what is bewildering or overlooked is often most interesting to the reader: the muted eroticism of his mother’s relationship with their Sikh cook; the fantasy of Australia, the ‘best country in the world’; domestic exchanges between two rival wives – one the servant to her husband’s mistress. Love, jealousy, resignation, and grief are tempered or hidden; we watch the politics of a nation play out at an intimate scale.

Though Govinda becomes increasingly aware of his parents’ fallibility, they remain removed and inaccessible to him. He is often left on the perimeters of the adult world. As the political situation in India intensifies, these pretences are tested.

Although Raja’s first novel is presented as Young Adult fiction, it contains layers of meaning that will satisfy readers of all ages. Inevitably, Govinda must contemplate leaving his home country, an experience the book treats with honesty and credibility.

**Christopher Raja** migrated to Melbourne from Kolkata in 1986, and now lives and works in Alice Springs. *The Burning Elephant* was written under a New Work grant awarded by the Literature Board of the Australia Council and is his first novel. **Fiona Dorrell** is the Alice Springs Program Manager for the NT Writers’ Centre. This review was first published in *Australian Book Review*, May 2016.

#### **TROUBLE: ON TRIAL IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA** **By Kieran Finnane**

UQP 2016

#### **Review by Sally Bothroyd**

Alcohol, violence - and the interconnectedness of the two - are at the heart of this unflinching portrait of Alice Springs, told via a number of criminal trials.

As a journalist, Kieran Finnane has no doubt spent hundreds of hours in courtrooms, watching the mundane bureaucracy of the justice system, alongside the stories of utter tragedy.

In *Trouble*, she focuses on half a dozen trials, some of which attracted national attention, giving a detailed rendition of court proceedings.

But hers is not a dry news report. As a long-term resident of Alice Springs – her children born and raised there – Finnane’s depiction of a culture of drinking and violence cut deep, as she tries to describe how the Northern Territory’s justice system deals with the people caught up in the maelstrom of destruction.

In one section she tells of sitting with the weeping family of a deceased man on one side of her, while the parents of the young men accused of causing his death are on the other, also weeping. This trial of five white men accused of killing an Aboriginal man put Alice Springs into the national spotlight, as the judicial system was asked to untangle whether racism was at play.

Finnane doesn’t shrink away from these accusations, but seeks to reveal the complexities of cultural relations in Alice Springs to the degree that she, as a non-Aboriginal woman, understands it.

But time and again, the stories revealed in the courtroom are of such senseless violence that they almost defy comprehension – except to say that alcohol is a major player in every single one.

Finnane’s book is not an easy read at times – focussing on aspects of our society that we’d sooner not see. But that’s also why it’s an important book to read.

**Kieran Finnane** is an Alice Springs journalist, artist and author. Her book of long-form journalism, *Trouble: on trial in Central Australia*, was published in June 2016 by UQP. **Sally Bothroyd** is the executive director of the NT Writers’ Centre.

#### **MY IRONING CAREER** **A 'zine by Kim Scott**

Katherine writer and die-hard zine fan Kim Scott produced this pocket-sized ouvre about her trials and tribulations in the ironing arena.

A kooky tale of ironing in the NT and beyond, with a gorgeous design by Di Bricknell, this zine is sure to bring a smile to the most crumpled among us.

Everything you wanted to know about ironing, but were afraid to ask!

Kim says her zine is on sale at the Emerald Springs Roadhouse, among other retailers.

#### **ZERO POINT: ASTOUNDING TALES OF HERO FICTION**

#### **A comic by Jonathon Saunders**

Darwin artist Jonathan Saunders this year published the first edition of what will hopefully be a long and popular comic series. It features an Indigenous super hero from Darwin who operates in Melbourne and has quantum-based powers.

This beautifully-drawn work is surely a “must read” for comic fans, new and old!

## OPPORTUNITIES

### NOVEMBER 2016

#### The Kat Muscat Fellowship

Opens: 21 November 2016

The annual Kat Muscat Fellowship offers professional development up to the value of \$3,000 for young female-identifying writers and editors working on a literary project that responds to the notion of 'challenge'.

### DECEMBER 2016

#### Nakata Brophy Short Fiction and Poetry Prize

Opens: 1 December 2016

The Nakata Brophy prize recognises the talent of young Indigenous writers across Australia. The prize is \$5000, publication in *Overland's* print magazine, and a three-month writer's residency at the beautiful Trinity College.

#### The Griffin Award

Closing date: 31 December 2016

The prestigious Griffin Award recognises an outstanding play or performance text that displays an authentic, inventive and contemporary Australian voice, with the winner receiving a \$10,000 prize.

#### Ballymaloe International Poetry Prize

Closing Date: 31 December 2016

Launched in 2011, The Ballymaloe International Poetry Prize has quickly established itself as one of the most sought after prizes in the world for a single unpublished poem. An overall winner receives \$10,000. Each of the other shortlisted entrants receive \$1,000.

### JANUARY 2017

#### The Nature Conservancy Australia Nature Writing Prize

Closes: 27 January 2017

The Nature Conservancy has announced the opening of its fourth biennial Australia Nature Writing Prize for essay and non-fiction.

Entry Fee: \$30  
Prize: \$5,000

#### Templar Quarterly Portfolio Pamphlet Awards

Closes: 9 January 2017

The Templar Quarterly Pamphlet Award offers poets the opportunity to submit a portfolio of between ten and twelve pages of poetry to be published as a short Templar Pamphlet.

#### Carnival Hour Playwriting Competition

Closes: 31 January 2017

Aspiring and experienced Australian playwrights are invited to submit unpublished and unperformed one-act play scripts to the annual Carnival of Flowers Toowoomba Repertory Theatre Play Writing Competition. Winning plays will be workshopped, then performed during the 2017 Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers.

### FEBRUARY 2017

#### The Griffith University Josephine Ulrick Literature Prize

Closing date: February 2017

One of the most lucrative prizes for short fiction and poetry. In addition to a share of the \$30,000 total prize money, winners will also be considered for publication in a special e-book edition of *Griffith Review*.

#### The Text Prize for Young Adult and Children's Writing

Closing Date: 3 February 2017

The \$10,000 Text Prize is awarded annually to the best fiction or non-fiction manuscript written for young readers, the prize is open to published and unpublished writers of all ages.

#### Forty South Publishing Tasmanian Writers' Prize

Closing Date: 13 February 2017

Open to residents of Australia and New Zealand, the prize is for short stories up to 3,000 words on an island, or island-resonant theme. The winner receives a cash prize of \$500 and publication in *Tasmania 40°South*.

### MARCH 2017

#### Prairie Schooner Book Prize Contest

Closing date: 15 March 2017

The Prairie Schooner Book Prize Series welcomes manuscripts from all living writers, including non-US citizens, writing in English. Winners will receive \$3000 and publication through the University of Nebraska Press.

#### The Kill Your Darlings (KYD) Unpublished Manuscript Award

Closing date: 31 March 2017

This award will assist an early-career author in the development of their unpublished manuscript. The winner will receive a \$5000 cash prize and a mentorship with KYD's Rebecca Starford (non-fiction) or Hannah Kent (fiction).

### APRIL 2017

#### Hachette Australia Manuscript Development Program

Closing date: April 2017.

Shortlisted writers, and their manuscripts, are invited to participate in a four day retreat program, during which they receive feedback and workshopping opportunities with Hachette Australia publishers, editors and authors.

#### The NSW Premier's History Awards

Closing date: April 2017

Open to Australian citizens and permanent residents. Total prize money in 2016 was \$75,000.

### MAY 2017

#### Prime Minister's Literary Award

Closing date: May 2017

The Prime Minister's Literary Awards are awarded annually to a work published in the categories of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, Australian history, young adult fiction, and children's fiction. The winner of each award category receives a prize of \$80,000.

## OPEN SUBMISSIONS

### The Big Issue

The Big Issue is an independent magazine that publishes informative and entertaining articles on a huge variety of subjects including arts and entertainment, street culture, lifestyle and personal profiles. We are always looking for good-quality writers. The magazine is sold for \$7, with \$3.50 going directly to the vendor.

### Voiceworks

Australia's newest literary talents are filling the pages of *Voiceworks* right now. Submissions open quarterly for young Australian writers. Each piece selected for publication goes through a collaborative editing process with the Editorial Committee, and individualised feedback is provided for all unsuccessful submissions.

### Allen & Unwin

The Friday Pitch  
[Allenandunwin.com](http://Allenandunwin.com)

### Bloomsbury Spark

Bloomsbury YA digital imprint  
General email submissions  
[Bloomsbury.com/au/bloomsbury-spark/submissions](http://Bloomsbury.com/au/bloomsbury-spark/submissions)

### Hachette Australia

General email submissions  
[Hachette.com.au/information](http://Hachette.com.au/information)

### Harlequin Books Australia

General email submissions  
[Harlequinbooks.com.au/submissions](http://Harlequinbooks.com.au/submissions)

### Carina Press

Harlequin digital first imprint  
Submit through online form  
[Carinapress.com/blog/submission-guidelines](http://Carinapress.com/blog/submission-guidelines)

### Escape

Digital imprint of Harlequin Australia  
Online submission form  
[Escapepublishing.com.au](http://Escapepublishing.com.au)

### Mills & Boon

Accept general postal submissions  
[Millsandboon.com.au/submissions](http://Millsandboon.com.au/submissions)

### Harper Collins

Wednesday post  
[Wednesdaypost.com.au](http://Wednesdaypost.com.au)

### Harper Impulse

Digital first imprint of HarperCollins  
general email submissions  
[Harperimpulseromance.com/write-for-us](http://Harperimpulseromance.com/write-for-us)

### Pan Macmillan

Submit manuscripts on Mondays  
[Panmacmillan.com.au/manuscript-Monday](http://Panmacmillan.com.au/manuscript-Monday)

### Penguin

Monthly Catch  
(first week of each month)  
[Penguin.com.au/getting-published](http://Penguin.com.au/getting-published)

### Destiny Romance

A Penguin Australia digital imprint,  
Online submission form  
[Destinyromance.com.au/writers-centre](http://Destinyromance.com.au/writers-centre)

### Random House Australia

Hard Copy general submission only that are separate from Penguin.  
[Randomhouse.com.au/about/manuscripts.aspx](http://Randomhouse.com.au/about/manuscripts.aspx)

### Lacuna Press

Harcy copy submissions only  
[Lacunapublishing.com/index.php/submissions](http://Lacunapublishing.com/index.php/submissions)

### Rhiza Press

Will accept unsolicited YA fiction only, online submission form.  
[Rhizapress.com.au/submissions/all-submissions](http://Rhizapress.com.au/submissions/all-submissions)

### Xoum

Online submission form  
[Xoum.com.au/submissions](http://Xoum.com.au/submissions)

### Wombat books

Unsolicited picture books only through online submission form  
[wombatbooks.com.au/authors/submissions](http://wombatbooks.com.au/authors/submissions)

### Affirm Press

General email submissions  
[Affirmpress.com.au/submissions](http://Affirmpress.com.au/submissions)

### Pantera Press

General email submissions  
[Panterapress.com.au/fiction-and-non-fiction-how-to-submit](http://Panterapress.com.au/fiction-and-non-fiction-how-to-submit)

### Text Publishing

Hard copy submissions only.  
[Textpublishing.com.au/manuscript-submissions](http://Textpublishing.com.au/manuscript-submissions)

### Black Inc

General email submissions, not accepting unsolicited poetry or children's books.  
[Blackincbooks.com/submissions](http://Blackincbooks.com/submissions)

### Ticonderoga Publications

General email submissions  
[Ticonderogapublications.com/web/index.php/about-us/submission/novels](http://Ticonderogapublications.com/web/index.php/about-us/submission/novels)

### Giramondo Publishing

Online submission form  
[Giramondopublishing.com/contribute](http://Giramondopublishing.com/contribute)



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