

# northerly

Byron Writers Festival Member Magazine | Summer 2021

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# FEARLESS

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THE TEAM



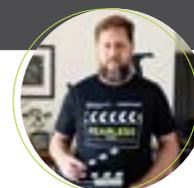
ON TRACK



SAMI AM



GOLDEN SAILS



THE INCIDENTAL  
BLACKSMITH



PLATING BLIND

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## northerly

*northerly* is the quarterly magazine of Byron Writers Festival.

Byron Writers Festival is a non-profit member organisation presenting workshops and events year-round, including the annual Festival.

*Held on the land of the Arakwal Bumberbin People of the Byron Shire. We pay respect to the traditional owners of this land and acknowledge them as the original storytellers of this region.*

### LOCATION/CONTACT

P: 02 6685 5115 F: 02 6685 5166

E: [info@byronwritersfestival.com](mailto:info@byronwritersfestival.com)

W: [byronwritersfestival.com](http://byronwritersfestival.com)

POSTAL ADDRESS: PO Box 1846, Byron Bay NSW 2481

**EDITOR:** Barnaby Smith,  
[northerlyeditor@gmail.com](mailto:northerlyeditor@gmail.com)

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Laurel Cohn, Kathy Gibbings, Blaine Hall, Polly Jude, Hayley Lawrence, Erica Little, Peter Mitchell, Camilla Nelson, Maya Rogers, Dettra Rose, Katinka Smit

**PROOFREADER:** Rebecca Ryall

### BYRON WRITERS FESTIVAL BOARD

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# Director's note

As I sit down to write this, I reflect on my note for *northerly* this time last year, when communities up and down the coast and inland were reeling from the unprecedented destruction of bushfire. Little could we have known how things would progress into early 2020, as that immediate tragedy subsided and we were thrust into a global pandemic that changed pretty much everything about the world as we know it.

After having had to cancel the Festival, we are now forging ahead with many different plans and scenarios for the 2021 Festival. I am pleased to say that Byron Writers Festival has still managed to deliver a fantastic series of digital events through the *Conversations From Byron* podcasts which have been immensely popular, as was the 2020 Thea Astley Address by Professor Marcia Langton which, despite many technical challenges, was a fantastic podcast of great substance and quality. Many thanks to all of our staff at Byron Writers Festival who have worked enormously hard during the pandemic to keep it real and relevant.

It was an absolute delight recently to introduce someone who is fast becoming one of Australia's favourite writers at our first live event back since COVID, Trent Dalton in conversation with Zacharey Jane. It was a sold-out event (with social distancing) and was also available online after the event. Trent was an absolute delight with his trademark enthusiasm, and our Zach was her erudite self with great observations about Trent's new book *All Our Shimmering Skies*. People stopped me in the street for days afterwards to tell me how much they loved the event and indeed how good it was to be back live. From our perspective, it was wonderful to be back doing what we do best, showcasing Australian authors of remarkable talent. We had two more live events in early December: Nardi Simpson was in conversation with Grace Lucas-Pennington, followed by Jenny Hocking in conversation with Kerry O'Brien, both events hosted by Byron Theatre.

Finally, I would like to welcome our new Storyboard Project Manager Sue Andersen, and our newest Board Member, Grace Lucas-Pennington, to the Festival team. They both bring considerable talents and fresh perspectives to their respective roles, and we welcome them both very warmly.

Let's hope that things can continue on the current encouraging path and we will keep you informed and up to date with preparations for the 2021 Byron Writers Festival.

As the year draws to a close, we are thankful to our members for their support in 2020. We missed seeing many of your faces this year but we are hopeful that 2021 will bring more opportunities for in-person connections.

Warm wishes from all of us here at the Festival.

**Adam van Kempen & Edwina Johnson**  
Chair & Director, Byron Writers Festival

# A Spring residency

Because of COVID-19, the Byron Writers Festival Residential Mentorship took place in October this year instead of its usual slot in May. The Spring residency saw four Northern Rivers writers come together for five days of writing and workshopping in a glorious Byron Shire location.



From left: Rachel Faith, Meg Grace, Marele Day (sitting), Kimberley Lipschus and Jacqueline Mohr.

For the first time in twenty years, Byron Writers Festival's flagship program for emerging writers, the Byron Writers Festival Residential Mentorship, was postponed due to COVID-19. Ordinarily held in May each year, the program finally forged ahead in October. The Spring residency saw four Northern Rivers writers come together for five days of intense mentoring and writing, under the guidance of acclaimed author, Marele Day.

The four recipients noted the camaraderie and inspiration that came with sharing quality time with kindred spirits, and the sense of validation that came with garnering a place in the program.

'In a competitive industry like publishing,' said Cabarita-based Meg Grace, author of the comedic novel *Supermums*, 'the opportunities provided by a

mentorship like this cannot be overstated.'

Filmmaker and psychotherapist, Kimberley Lipschus, who used her home in Mullumbimby as the backdrop for her evocative literary novel, *The Lost House*, said, 'The group were so passionate about one another's stories becoming the best they can be.'

Seldom do writers have the chance to devote themselves entirely to their craft, and for this reason the residency is a dream come true for many participants.

Bellingen teacher, Rachel Faith, selected for her visceral memoir, *Lotus from the Brambles*, said of the experience, 'The feedback sessions, led by Marele, were invaluable and insightful.'

Fellow Bellingen resident, Jacqueline Mohr, author of a children's detective novel titled *The Mysterious Affair of the Cocoa Bean*, said 'It was wonderful to spend time focused on writing in Byron's hinterland.'

All four participants also had the opportunity to discuss their projects with publisher Annette Barlow from Allen & Unwin. With accommodation, catered lunches and groceries provided, the annual Byron Writers Festival Residential Mentorship is an outstanding opportunity to participate in a writing experience that has already proven to be a launchpad for many regional writers.

# Margin Notes

News, events and announcements  
from Byron Writers Festival

## Members Mentoring Scholarship recipients announced

Congratulations to our members who have been awarded a mentorship session as part of the Byron Writers Festival Mentoring Scholarships: Youjia Song for *Pursuit of Impossible Dreams*, Catherine Mojsiewicz for *Echoes from an Execution*, Sue Reynolds for *Drive By*, and Steven Kelly for *My Mob, Our Country: It's All or Nothing*. Thank you to all those who applied this year and to Lynda and Christopher Dean for their support of the program.

## Live events return

What a treat it was to welcome audiences back to live events with November's incredible conversation between Trent Dalton and Zachary Jane for Dalton's new book *All Our Shimmering Skies*. It was an electrifying evening filled with warmth, heart and intense connection that left us buzzing for days.

We were equally thrilled to close the year with two more live events in December: Yuwaalaraay writer and musician Nardi Simpson in conversation with Bundjalung writer and Byron Writers Festival Board Member Grace Lucas-Pennington, followed by an evening with celebrated journalist Kerry O'Brien and author and academic Jenny Hocking on her

revealing new book *The Palace Letters: The Queen, The Governor-General, and the Plot to Dismiss Gough Whitlam*.



New faces in the team, Sue Andersen (left) and Grace Lucas-Pennington (right)

## New faces

Byron Writers Festival would like to extend a warm welcome to two new additions to our wonderful team and Board. Sue Andersen joins us as the new StoryBoard Project Manager. As a consultant arts manager working in the cultural industries on large-scale outdoor festivals and other multi-art events for over twenty years, Sue has undertaken a broad range of key roles such as artistic director, programming manager, producer, production manager and stage manager. Community cultural development principles underpin all her work.

We are also thrilled to introduce our new Board Member, Bundjalung writer and editor Grace Lucas-Pennington. Grace is passionate about developing and promoting First Nations storytelling and is currently the Senior Editor at the State Library of Queensland's

black&write! Indigenous Writing and Editing Project.

In other staff news, congratulations to Festival Administrator Emily Brugman, who was recently awarded a residential mentorship from Varuna, The Writers House, based in the Blue Mountains. She will spend two weeks at Varuna working on her manuscript, *The Islands*, in January.

## Callout for StoryBoard presenters and volunteers

Since its inception in 2016, the highly successful StoryBoard Program (a Byron Writers Festival initiative) has gone from strength to strength, providing creative writing workshops to Northern Rivers schools.

2021 is going to be another busy year for StoryBoard. We are keen to bring more Northern Rivers authors and illustrators to our existing professional author team, so if you are a published children's author and interested in being part of the dynamic StoryBoard travelling author team, and have a passion for fostering the next generation of young readers and writers, we'd love to hear from you. Please email: [storyboard@byronwritersfestival.com](mailto:storyboard@byronwritersfestival.com).

Volunteers are invaluable to the StoryBoard program and we are

## Cover story

The cover art for this Summer 2021 issue of *northerly* is *Smoking Ceremony – Lionsville* by Charmaine Davis. Charmaine is a Goori Woman who is descended from the Gumbaynggir and Bundjalung Nations. Charmaine paints landscapes in acrylic and recently has been exploring 3D mediums. Her artistic creations are attributed to her culture, homelands and family. There is a spiritual connection to Country, through ancestral links, family, identity and community. Charmaine creates visual portals that allow the viewer to connect with her art and cultural visions, and she is compelled to tell the history of this Country through an Aboriginal lens. Charmaine's work will be exhibited at Lone Goat Gallery in Byron Bay as soon as COVID-19 restrictions allow. See gallery website for updates.

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*Jake Wallinger Ljungkvist*

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## New Growing Up anthology open to submissions

Black Inc.'s acclaimed *Growing Up* series of anthologies is seeking submissions for its next instalment: *Growing Up in Country Australia*, which will be edited by Rick Morton.

The anthology is inviting non-fiction pieces that deal with any aspect of growing up in rural Australia. Submissions are encouraged from First Nations writers, writers of colour, writers with a disability and writers with a migrant background.

'I think anyone who has spent formative years in the country has a secret,' says Morton. 'It might be a good one, or a dark one, and in most cases it resembles nothing of our national myth. I want to know what your secret is.'

Submissions should be between 1,000 and 4,000 words, with a deadline of 22 January.

Email submissions to [GUICA@blackincbooks.com](mailto:GUICA@blackincbooks.com). For more information visit [blackincbooks.com](http://blackincbooks.com)

## Viva La Novella introduces regional focus

*Seizure* journal, working in partnership with the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies (FALS) has announced that one winner of its annual Viva La Novella competition will be a resident of a regional area.

Winners of the Viva La Novella competition receive \$1,000 and a publishing contract. Submissions to the prize should be 20,000-50,000 words in length and there is no limit on genre. Entries for the 2021 competition close 31 December. For further information go to [seizureonline.com](http://seizureonline.com)

also seeking people to join our volunteer team to accompany authors and illustrators on regional school visits. Your generous support will provide assistance and encouragement to the children and students to share their stories. Please email us at the above address if you are interested.

## Happy festive season to our members

A heartfelt thank you to our members for your support of Byron Writers Festival in 2020.

Due to current restrictions we are reluctantly taking a year off from our end-of-year party. However, to extend the generosity you have shown us, we have instead made a donation to the Indigenous Literacy Foundation to contribute to their goal of getting 99,000 new books to remote communities in 2021. Wishing you all full hearts and bookshelves this festive season.

# Flash fiction: Dettra Rose

## **Falling In. Falling Out.**

If I stay, will it change? That question's doing wheelies in my brain.

Tonight, every night, his snore keeps rhythm with our old dogs.

We don't touch much anymore. Don't reach out to each other in the long liquorice nights.

When we talk about it, words get stuck down my throat. His too, I hear them, then he puts the telly on.

If I leave, I'll miss him. It's not about love.

It's morning. The kettle's on. He pops bread in the toaster. He'll spread one with vegemite and one with jam.

What would it feel like to forget that?

## After the Storm

I'm roadkill on red earth. Car is three metres away, wheels in the air.

Outback stars powder the blackcurrant sky.

My mouth's a ridge of broken teeth and my leg dead as butcher's meat.

Feral pigs and dingoes howl in the heartbeat of the night. I'm dinner on a dirt road plate. My wife's asleep at home, but I see her here in the emptiness. Hear her.

'Don't drive all that way. Fly.'

Didn't listen. Never do, she'd say.

Minutes pass. Hours. Weeks. I don't know, time is lost and broken.

I holler at a passing truck, but wheels spit grit and the driver's blind to me. It shrinks to a dot. I whimper.

Hazy apricot sunrise, sweat beading down my back. One dim headlight pulls up. Pile of blokes dark as charcoal stand over me.

'What happened, brother?'

I point to my leg. To my tumbled 4x4.

'You had a wobble-up. You'll be right.'

'Am-bu-lance,' I croak.

'Out of range, bro.'

They raise me clumsily, slide my flesh into their tray-top ute. I'm next to a mottled cattle dog.

'He's friendly, don't worry.'

Dog slobbers me, tongue warm and meaty.

Engine starts, sounds like a screeching bat. Sheets of pain hammer my leg and privates. Guy hops in the back with me and the hound.

'Hospital's not too far, bro. We'll speed all the way.'

He rests his hand on my shoulder.

I half lift my index finger and point to the dawn. Sun ball to the left. Moon ball to the right. The sky is stoking an amber fire. Not many people die watching something as pretty.

'Our mob's name for sun is Walu. She's decorating herself with red ochre right now. After Walu lights a stringybark tree, carries it west across the sky so bright it lights up country. When she stumps it out, daytime's finished.'

'The sun is a woman?'

'Old lady.'

I imagine her. Old sun lady, soaring torch of flames. Sparks crackling. Embers in her skin. Hair blazing. Eyes seven shades of fire. One is the startling red at emergency.

Dettra Rose writes flash fiction, non-fiction articles and tiny poems. Her flash pieces have won and been shortlisted or longlisted in a number of esteemed competitions, including the Bath Flash Fiction Award, Reflex Fiction, and competitions run by Retreat West, the Australian Writers' Centre and TSS Publishing. Dettra is also working on her novel and trying not to get too distracted by her addiction to telling big stories in small wordcounts. She's planning to teach workshops on short form next year. Find her at [dettrarose.com](http://dettrarose.com) or on Twitter: [@dettrarose](https://twitter.com/dettrarose)

# Susie Warrick Young Writers Award 2020

Susie Warrick was a much-loved staff member at Northern Rivers Writers' Centre (now Byron Writers Festival). The Susie Warrick Young Writers Award was established to honour her memory, celebrate the art of the short story, and support emerging young writers in furthering their career.

This year we introduced a new Primary category open to Stage 3 primary school students in memory of Jesse Blackadder, founder of Byron Writers Festival's StoryBoard Program.

We received a record number of entries (220) this year, which is exciting as it signifies the enthusiasm and prevalence of young writers throughout northern New South Wales. We look forward to watching their journey as writers unfold.

## ***Bird Whisperer***

by Erica Little

### **Winner of Category 1 School years 5-6**

Rose set flight at twilight, her wings beating the air rhythmically. They shined in the shimmering sunset, as sprinkling rain descended across the horizon.

As she flew, she followed a wistful call. The call of friendship, the call of hope. She could see her destiny, the future so beautiful and pure, throw a coruscating kaleidoscope of colourful excitement in her mind.

It was whispering to her.

The cool early-night breeze brushed against her scarlet wings as she flew. Flecks of deep ocean blue shimmered on her feathers. Dark like night, soft as snow.

Below her, she could see the many birds responding to the call. A sea of colour and noise stretches across the sky. Birds ranging in size from large, looming eagles, to small, measly pigeons.

Peacocks, emus and other land-dwelling birds alike were also running with glee toward the bird-call, trampling everything in their path.

Rose flew faster than she ever had before, and was starting to lose momentum. Though sky's beautiful luminescence of fading colours willed her on. She *must not* give up.

Colder and colder. The icy wind caused a deathly chill to creep up their spines. The sky turned darker and darker as they flew on. Soon, the sky was as black as obsidian. Dark. Cold.

The sky was crystal clear, not a cloud in sight, and a pathway to the galaxies above.

The feathered flock moved across the night sky. They *must not* give up.

The wistful echo sounds again, the sound bouncing around the sky. Excitement flurried around the globe, calling yet more birds to the feathered flock.

Birds of all colours drift across the sky, following the same call of destiny. All different, yet completely the same. All of them belonged to the same diverse flock.

Across the globe, they flew, their wings beating

against the cold wind current. Their determination and perseverance, such an honourable trait shared throughout the group.

The pitch-black sky was an endless abyss of mystery, holding the key to all the world's secrets. Up in the sky, the birds could hear the bird-call with more depth, more emotion to the voice.

The black abyss gravitated them towards it, luring them in with the peaceful call as if to swallow them up. The colossal mass of birds flew higher and higher.

They travelled through the sunrise. The sun glittering through the misty sky. They flew on, not knowing what lies beneath them. Could it be a green, lush forest? Could it be the ocean?

Above the clouds, they soared. Getting closer, yet still so far away.

The call itself was a beautiful sound. Nostalgic, bring back their most treasured memories from somewhere unknown. The feeling lifts the birds' hearts up into the heavens, causing them to glow with pleasure.

Rose gasped as the bird-call caused her life to flash before her eyes. A bittersweet feeling rushed through her mind.

A woman. Whom she had met before. Her kind, dimpled smile warmed her heart.

She also remembered the bitterly cold snow that drifted across the sky that night. Her mother snuggled up to her in their small nest. Rose wished her father was there as well.

Then she shivered as the wind beneath her wings reminded her of the falling sensation. All was lost that day. Hope. Family.

The snow was deathly cold. She sank into it, longing she could fly.

Then she recalled some warm hands lifting her up to be inspected by an enormous face. Rose was so weak, she closed her eyes.

Waking up in layers of soft cotton, her heart was filled with happiness again. Staring at the dimpled smile in her mind. That woman had saved her.

The wistful call, once again, echoed through the bright sky, waking Rose up from her 'trip down memory lane'. The lane was rocky, but it reminded her of home.

'Squark!!' one of her fellow birds guided the flock round the bend. She knew they were getting close.

Each bird felt the feeling of anticipation shiver down their spines. They start to fly downwards, heading below the clouds. The mist clears over the horizon, letting them see the beautiful terrain in front of them.

And then they saw it.

A small white cottage was placed in the clearing. An assortment of coloured flowers was placed around the neatly hedged bushes.

And a woman with a kind smile was standing in the doorway.

She was the one calling to them.

She had saved each one of these birds all that time ago, with her caring heart, and warm smile. She had taken them in, out of the cold.

This was home.

# Susie Warrick Young Writers Award 2020

## *The Jump*

by Maya Rogers

### Winner of Category 2

#### School years 7-9

Jeremy glanced back over his already sunburnt shoulder, his cold gaze chilling me despite the warm temperature.

‘You did this,’ he spat.

I pushed myself forwards on my bike, tiptoeing quickly across the baking concrete to reach his side. Greeting him with a glare of my own, I said, ‘No, you did this to yourself. I’m merely ensuring you get through it in one piece.’

Jeremy stuck his tongue out at me, launching himself forwards on flip-flop-covered feet, pedalling at an increasing rate.

Jeremy Red was the most horrible person I had ever encountered. An awful, skinny, pale red-head with a crude smile and a dark soul. He was the boy with the sharp tongue; the boy who made you cry or made your nose bleed.

‘Are you coming or not?’ He called out, a bitter edge to his voice. I raised my eyebrows in barely-contained surprise, wondering for the fifteenth time that hot Sunday afternoon why he hadn’t just left me behind.

If he weren’t such a terrible character, I would’ve almost felt sorry for him, what with the rumours going about – all of his infamous deeds spreading like poison in our school.

No one knew why he was such an evil boy. He took pleasure in making people squirm, enjoyed the goriest horror movies and greeted anyone with his usual scowl.

He’d always been like that for as long as I could remember. Then Fletcher arrived. Fletcher Red,

Jeremy’s older brother. The crazy thing was, *he* was actually *nice*. Real nice, with a heart of gold and a wicked grin. He was freckled, had fly-away blonde locks and tanned skin, strong bones and a winning personality. Half the girls had fallen in love with him the moment he’d stepped through the school gates, glowing like the sun itself.

It made me wonder why his younger sibling had ended up being so sour. But what was even more interesting was how Jeremy reacted upon Fletcher’s arrival.

It was an ever so slight change in his normally agitated demeanour.

For once in his life, Jeremy was quiet. He suddenly became a lot less vocal about his opinions and observations of others. Instead, he watched Fletcher.

I didn’t know they were brothers up until a week ago; that’s how distant Jeremy had been towards one of his last stable family members. But I’d been watching that red-head all week; noting his stooped posture around Fletch, his flushed cheeks, the constant twitching of his fingers as he ran his hand through his messy hair. He was hesitant, vigilant, uncertain.

I never thought I’d live to see the day where Jeremy Red was unsure of himself.

‘Do you mind slowing down a bit?’ I asked, my bare toes curling into the moss-sewn cracks, teeth gritted as I concentrated on pulling through the last of the slope.

My left foot slipped off the pedal and I skidded to a stop, cursing as my bruised flesh caught on the ragged edges of the path. From somewhere ahead, I heard Jeremy cackle.

'The winds are changing,' he said, coughing into the elbow of his sunscreen stained shirt to cover up another bout of laughter. I flashed him a warning glare but he dismissed it with a raised hand, flicking back one of his own. 'We need to get there before the tide goes or it'll be too shallow to jump.'

Ah, yes. The jump. Damn Fletcher and his stupid grin.

Fletcher had his own intentions the moment he saw me. He knew that I'd been keeping an eye on Jeremy longer than anyone else, (purely out of spite, just in case he tripped or broke his leg) and he wanted to thank me for accompanying Jeremy as a 'friend'. I wasn't sure what to say. But I didn't get to tell him otherwise.

*'Can you take him somewhere for me?'*

*'No. Why?'*

*A warm chuckle. 'It's some place Jeremy's been meaning to visit for a while, and I thought it would be a good thing if you went with him.'*

*'Absolutely not. Your brother-'*

*'-hates you, I know. It'll be the exact motivation he needs to jump.'*

We reached the top of the hill – me, slick with sweat, panting and hobbling like an old lady; Jeremy, breathing deeply as if steeling himself. Whatever for, I wasn't sure, until I looked up. *Up, up.*

Now Fletcher's words made sense. We were jumping, alright. Straight off a bridge.

When I caught sight of Jeremy's paling face, something stirred inside of me.

Damn Fletcher, his stupid grin, his stupid words and his stupid dare. There was no way I was going to force Jeremy to jump off of the tallest bridge in town into oyster-infested waters, whether we hated each other or not.

I grabbed his arm, something I had never done before, and gave it a gentle tug.

*'I think we should go back now. It's getting hot.'*

Jeremy shook his head, but didn't brush my hand away. *'No. I'm doing this.'*

His voice trembled slightly as he shrugged his shoulders back, trying to relax. *'Like you said; it's getting hot. Let's get this over with.'*

He ditched his bike and started climbing. Ignoring my tingling palm where it had made contact with his skin, I reached for the nearest hand-hold. We climbed in companionable silence for a while. I saw him looking down several times, then quickly pulling himself upwards.

Halfway up, he swayed precariously to the side, and I latched onto him, guiding his shaking hands to a ledge. Jeremy nodded his thanks, white as a sheet.

We got to the top. He threaded his fingers with mine, tightening his grip as we stared off into the blue, swirling abyss.

*'I'll be fine,'* he assured me, a slight roughness to his voice.

I never thought I'd live to see the day where Jeremy Red was scared.

*"We don't have to do this."*

*'No. I want to.'*

Metal beneath feet. And we jump.

# Susie Warrick Young Writers Award 2020

## *Tea, Shivering, and Domes of Glass*

by Blaine Hall

Winner of Category 3

School years 10-12

He opens his eyes at the crack of dawn, woken up by a sliver of light through his curtains and the shriek of his alarm clock. It's five in the morning on a Friday, mid-November, and he's forgotten to turn off the alarm. The air shimmers so very coldly, and after a while of working through his reservations against doing so, he peels the sheets from his body and emerges into the dark. Stumbling to the door, he fumbles with the knob awkwardly, almost as if he cannot get his hands working quick enough to grip onto it. He swears under his breath, batting awkwardly at the handle that awaits him, and eventually, both he and the doorknob decide to comply with each other's demands.

He does his morning errands, and he has a wonderful day at work. He sits at his office desk, and types numbers and letters into a never-ending spreadsheet. Sometimes, he is forced to move from his desk into a slightly larger desk, where other people are sitting while his boss flashes up presentations filled with meaningless buzzwords. He talks with his fellow employees about life's little delights, like today's weather, or the wonderful thing their kid did last week.

It truly was the dream, and when he got home his wife was always waiting for him, and it was all she did. It was always comfortable and always the same – and when he gets home from his job, he is met with the dining room, and his wife sits at the very end of the table, and she looks at him, and he looks at her. It was always this way.

All she did was wait. He brushes the creases out of the clothes that lie across his form, smiling. It had been a long, hard day, and he was worried that it would show – but he was sure that she would understand. My god, she is so beautiful, he thinks, and sits at the other side

of the table. His wife smiles back at him. She picks up the finely detailed jug on the table and pours him a cup of tea, the special kind that he isn't allowed to have too frequently, because it is quite expensive – being the tea made from boiling down the leaves of butterfly parsley and milky possumhaw, and carefully filtering them through layers of cheesecloth until all you have left is whatever liquid substance that remains and not whatever other toxic parts of the plant that would hurt if you left them behind.

He takes a sip and it smells like the dark that he came from and leaves a downy coating on the inside of his mouth. She smiles at him and he drinks it down. He smiles back too, though he thought he was already smiling. He leans in to kiss her between the corridor of her upper lip and the turned down edge of her nose. The butterfly possumhaw tea spills all over the tablecloth.

I'm so sorry, he says, as the hot tea coats his hands, arms, and everything else attached. She turns her head down in apology, scraping the tea from the table and back into the cup from which it came. Tea runs up his sleeves, and he turns around to visit his bedroom, but only finds that the door in which he came ends up leading to the kitchen. He decides that the kitchen will suffice and runs the water in the sink. He washes his sleeves. It's all dry now. Thank god, he thinks, and returns to the dining room, where his wife was – or so he thought, because his wife is in the kitchen now. He turns around, and she's washing the dishes. He cradles his head in his hands, and walks back into his bedroom, and goes back to sleep.

He wakes up covered in sweat. His wife is covered in sweat too. They wake up at the same time and look at

each other. All of her eyes are beautiful. He slithers out from the bed. He wakes up covered in sweat, but he was already awake, and he is in the dining room now. His wife pours him a cup of possumhaw. He drinks it down and his wife pours him another. She doesn't bother with the cheesecloth. His lungs sit heavily in their cage, and my god, it's all so beautiful. He stares at her and she stares back unblinking. She isn't talking anymore. Is there any reason? He grips at the tablecloth. He bites at his own teeth. They turn to chalk in his mouth, and so does she. When did she get there?

She pours him a cup and disappears into the door on the left. Pen in one hand, and cup in the other, he sits at the table and works there all day filling out papers. His job pays better than he thought it would. He thought he finished work for the day already. His wife pours him another cup, but he isn't thirsty. He sees the look on her face and drinks it anyway. She's happy for a little while longer, but then a half hour passes, and here comes another cup of tea. He takes a sip and the bile fills the back of his throat. She smiles and leaves to the left. He stares through the documents on the table. He picks up the piece of paper. He puts down the pen and the cup. He hasn't written anything down and isn't sure what he's been doing all day. Another cup appears on the table. Why is she doing this?

There are leaves left in the bottom of the cup.

She talks to him, but he never hears what she says. He looks at the cup and the top rim looks as if it expands infinitely into the room. His hand shivers as he brings it to his mouth. She smiles. He feels so small. He feels so big. He looks up from the cup and the table fills the whole perspective of his vision. His eyes shut forever and infinitely. He clutches onto his wife, but she isn't there.

He wakes up at the crack of dawn, woken up by a sliver of light through his curtains. He sits up in his bed, and his wife is there next to him. His stomach churns, and it's all so grotesque. He looks at her two eyes and he doesn't know what happened to the rest of them. He endures the abomination of it and looks further down and finds that there's three holes in her face that go nowhere. He breathes, and his lungs expand and retract in his form like a twitching, festering wound. His tongue cannot find a place in his mouth, if he had a tongue at all. He can't bear the feeling of her skin on his – but he doesn't have any.

'What's wrong, honey?'

He chirps out a cry in response. Disgust scrapes along the edges of his wife's voice and bounces through his

body, only contributing to the guilt already piling up within his chitinous form. She's repugnant to him, but at last he remembers she was beautiful, and he isn't sure what changed. Maybe she felt the same, because even he can't bear to see the veins under his skin, or the way the teeth now lay in his mouth. He can't bring himself to kiss her, because he doesn't know where he even could. It's all so close together, and yet it's never been further apart.

He doesn't answer her, because he doesn't know what to say, and when he tries to grunt out any words, the anatomy is all unfamiliar. He shakes like a leaf as he crawls out of bed. His legs feel too long for his brutalised, mangled form. She grips at his back, fingers pressing against his wings, lifting him into something cramped and small. He is monstrous, yet shivering, terrified. He knows she's looking at him, but he can't bear to look up at her, because she is too tall now, and he is too horribly small.

She leaves to do her morning errands, and only now was it always comfortable, and always the same – and when she gets home from her job, she is met with the dining room, and a little thing sits trapped in a glass at the end of the table.

# From the Reading Chair: Feedback for writers, part two

In the Spring issue of *northerly*, developmental editor Laurel Cohn examined how writers should go about seeking feedback, a crucial part of the process of developing your work to a publishable standard. Here, she follows up by looking at what a writer should do with all that feedback.

## Part 2: Managing Feedback

You've laboured long and hard over your manuscript. You realise you need fresh eyes to give you some constructive feedback and so you've handed your precious baby over to someone else, someone you have carefully chosen. Well done. But be prepared that that 'someone' may not see your 'baby' – who may be a young adult by now – as cute, adorable and can do no wrong. Feedback such as an assessment report from a professional reader gives an outside view of who your 'baby' is, and offers guidance on how your 'baby' needs to grow in order to succeed in the big wide world.

Sometimes writers I work with are like proud parents wanting to show off their beautiful, highly intelligent offspring. They have polished and honed and redrafted and revised and are confident about the finished manuscript. That's great. But it doesn't mean that they *are* finished with the manuscript. Close scrutiny by a professional will almost certainly result in recommendations on how to further develop the work to give it the best possible chance with an agent or publisher. In all my years of reading manuscripts, I have not read one that didn't require more work – even those that have gone on to be bestsellers and award-winners.

### Separation

The key to dealing with feedback is to separate your sense of self from the actual work, from all those words. Only with this separation will you be able to embrace the potential that feedback and revision can offer. Yes, you pour yourself into your manuscript – you live it, breathe it, are immersed in the process – but

remember that the writing produced is a collection of words, a representation of your thoughts, ideas, research, imagination. Yes, you are likely to be emotionally attached to your work, and indeed you need some sort of attachment to find the commitment to have come this far with your writing project – but the words can be cut, rearranged, changed or omitted, without drawing blood. The manuscript is not *you*. Any suggestion that something may not be working in the manuscript is feedback about *the story on the page*, not about who *you* are.

It can be difficult to receive feedback suggesting changes if you thought your work was done – let's face it, it can be positively excruciating! But every writer I know who has faced the unwelcome news that the manuscript is not quite ready, has, in the end (and perhaps after a glass or two of red wine, or a week or month of putting the manuscript out of sight) been thankful for the opportunity to make their work richer, deeper, stronger. It's about trusting the person to whom you have handed your work. If they are any good at their job, they will treat it with respect, care and consideration.

### Too many cooks

Constructive feedback can be an eye-opening experience, allowing you to see the potential of your work and your ideas in a new way; it can unleash a new wave of creativity. But feedback from too many different readers can be confusing. Particularly if the feedback is conflicting. Reading is a subjective experience; there is no getting around that. If you get conflicting feedback – probe further. Why didn't that reader like the use of all those action words – Wham!



Bang! etc.? *Why did that reader want to know more about the characters up front?* Some of your readers won't be able to answer, but some will. And if you get the same response from a number of different readers, then perhaps they're on to something.

If you get feedback you don't understand, ask the reader to clarify their response. If you feel that the feedback is unhelpful, ask someone else, or ask for feedback a different way.

### Responding to feedback

The most common issue I see writers wrestle with – whether they are just starting out, or have a couple of bestsellers behind them – is self-confidence. Your particular personality, your life journey, your circumstances, your day – these will all affect your confidence levels and how you handle criticism of any kind. Keep in mind that while you don't have control over the feedback you receive, you do have control over how you respond to it. Certainly, dealing with challenging criticism can bring you down, but what do you do next? Do you feel defeated? Angry? Do you give up? Become determined to 'show 'em'? Most likely there will be a range of responses over time. It may take a while before you can rekindle your enthusiasm to revisit your draft. Think back to the kernel of the idea that inspired you in the first place, touch base with your love of writing. Recharge your batteries, take a deep breath and push forward.

A few years back I got a call from a writer who said, 'You probably won't remember me – you assessed my manuscript five years ago.' I did remember her, and her story; the manuscript needed a lot of work. She told

me that when she had received the assessment report she was so embarrassed about what she had sent me that she stuck the manuscript in a drawer. It took over twelve months before she could look at it again. Then she re-read the report, and started rewriting. After several more drafts she found a publisher who loved it. She was calling to invite me to her book launch.

The road to reaching your writing goal may feel never ending. Ultimately it is a voyage of discovery. It's up to you to embrace the challenge.

Laurel Cohn is a developmental book editor passionate about communication and the power of stories in our lives. She has been helping writers prepare their work for publication since the 1980s, and is a popular workshop presenter. She has a PhD in literary and cultural studies. [laurelcohn.com.au](http://laurelcohn.com.au)

# Young talent time: Poets Out Loud's Youth Poetry Slam

Northern Rivers poetry collective Poets Out Loud recently held its first ever Youth Poetry Slam, an event held online due to COVID-19. Here, writer and Poets Out Loud mentor Katinka Smit reports on a successful first outing and some special achievements by the region's young writers.

On November 1, Poets Out Loud launched its inaugural Youth Poetry Slam via livestream. The slam featured local up-and-coming performance poets, a culmination of the Poets Out Loud Youth Program's workshops and mentoring, while the organisation's website will provide a permanent digital platform for their efforts.

Poets Out Loud founder and poet, Sarah Temporal, began the mostly schools-based program to provide a creative outlet for local youth.

'A poetry slam gives them the opportunity to speak up about what matters to them, and more importantly, to be heard,' Sarah said.

Third place winner, Jasmine Logan, appreciated the opportunity.

'It's nice when an adult wants to listen to me and see who I am as myself,' said Jasmine. 'Because I can do this, my culture can come out and be with all the other poets. Bundjalung people have a voice if I am speaking.'

'These are insightful, articulate voices,' adds Sarah. 'It's hard to believe that for most it was their first encounter with slam poetry.'

Georgia Smith, second place winner and first-time poet, now sees herself as poet and performer in the making.

'This whole experience allowed me to look into the world of poetry, and I don't want to go back,' says Georgia. 'Recording the poem, I felt the energy of my piece. I've never seen that passionate side of me before.'

Over 120 workshop participants were introduced to slam poetry and offered one-on-one mentoring leading up to the slam. Anna Avocado, 2019 Qld Poetry Slam Champion, youth counsellor and fellow Poets Out Loud mentor, credits the guided experience as wonderful for self-development, having witnessed participants' courage and growing self-confidence in stand-up delivery.

Mentor and performance poet Jedda Winkworth describes the dynamic, interactive workshop format as supportive of creative and critical thinking. The collaboratively designed workshops were inspired by Melbourne performance poet Emily Zoe Baker's youth slam model. The added mentoring experience provided poets the opportunity to refine their writing and performance, taking it to the next level.

The diverse experience of the mentors (including mine) exposed young poets to the possibilities of slam poetry. The winning poems, judged by local author Samantha Turnbull and Griffith University's

Dr Sally Breen, were chosen on the merit of their writing, delivery and impact.

'The truth is there's no genre or style that constitutes a slam poem, as I think the originality of our winning piece this year demonstrates,' says Sarah.

The winning poet, Pancho Symes, felt liberated by that knowledge.

'I thought it unlikely I'd win the comp with my poem, being a story with a lot of imagery and abstract meaning,' he says. 'But there's a lot of leeway in this genre.' Pancho's gift for words is a combination of nature and nurture.

'My mother's a jazz horn player, my grandma's a writer, my grandpa's a painter and my dad's a chippie with a lyrical tongue. A lot of my literary inspiration has come from being exposed to fascinating and quality music, poetry and novels that lay around my house.'

For future aspiring young poets, the Poets Out Loud Youth Program has great scope to continue.

'We have a talented and dedicated team, and although we don't yet have funding confirmed, we would like to build on the enthusiastic response to this year's event and connect with more schools in 2021,' says Sarah.



## The Confederacy of Ants (abridged version)

By Pancho Symes

Winner, Poets Out Loud Youth  
Poetry Slam 2020

A confederacy of ants hitched up  
their pants

and toiled up hill, a Turkish delight  
on their backs. This excess in  
gelatine

authorized by the Queen, was  
justified as a vaccine for her  
inelastic knees.

But as the queen had never cared  
for the faculties of locomotion, they  
knew

they were merely the devoted  
casualties in the name of Cathleen:

their broad-in-the-beam Queen,  
and her intemperate affiliation with  
sweet cuisines.

6563 awfully keen ant marines  
skimmed fat from the black sea,

their antennae tilted  
sanctimoniously;

More distinguished than fleas, a bit  
less so than bees.

The squashed nominees were off to

fill the queen's tureen,

and to serve the Romanian flag  
painted on their lateen.

The Confederacy for the United  
Effort to Elasticise the Queen's  
knees

crawled deep into the Turkish night,  
and finally found a Turkish delight.

In an Ankaran Tea House a few were  
nibbled by an Ankaran mouse.

At the Rize River many numbers  
were lost: drowned in a clay cup  
royally embossed.

Those remaining obtained the treat  
from a charcoal moustache who'd  
fallen asleep.

But right at their triumphant retreat,  
the moustache drew breath; a  
martyr named Pete sacrificed, his  
life for his death.

Down and out. Clambering to evade  
the Tea Master's clout.

Still they knew their theft was  
blessed and heaved their delight  
without a doubt.

But their legs came loose and ran  
away, once they'd shouldered the  
sugar from night to day. Rosewater

leaked into their eyes, they slithered  
on thoraxes, the only holy way.

They would apologise profusely for  
any delay.

Atop a big blue hill, they saw their  
Romanee across the sea,

and dreamed to be licked clean  
by their magniloquently-tongued  
Queen.

But the confederacy never smelt  
seclusion in their dewy anthill halls.

They suffered the protestant  
delusion: life was a confectionary  
haul.

With an irreverent, lukewarm sun in  
their eyes, and Queen Cathleen in  
their cries,

they were all squashed and  
smattered. You could hardly see any  
of them die

or head to heaven for that matter  
at all.

Because the Turkish Delight was  
awfully big. And they were rather  
small.

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Watch the full 2020 Youth Slam  
Competition at [poetsoutloud.org/  
youth/](https://poetsoutloud.org/youth/)

# Annus mirabilis? 2020 in YA fiction

While we were all busy hand sanitising and social distancing during 2020, some pretty great Australian young adult fiction slipped off the printing presses and into our bookshops. These titles might have missed out on the usual glossy book launches and publicity stunts, but here local writer and YA lover, Polly Jude, highlights some of her favourites from a year like no other.

## ***Ruby Tuesday***

**By Hayley Lawrence**

Named after a rock 'n' roll classic, Ruby aspires to write and perform her own music but feels trapped in the shadow of her musical genius mum.

Growing up in a small country town, Ruby longs to find her own voice and be heard. When her nan dies, Ruby feels even more alone and finds herself at a party with Joey Milano. By the end of the night, Ruby's not sure she can trust anyone anymore.

A mysterious arrival in town and an old friend help Ruby find joy in her music again. They help her discover the confidence she needs to take control of her life, stand tall and sing her story.

*Ruby Tuesday* is a tender love story about enduring friendships and overcoming adversities. It will appeal to readers who enjoyed Lawrence's first novel, *Inside the Tiger*.

Penguin / 336pp / RRP \$19.99

## ***The Erasure Initiative***

**by Lili Wilkinson**

When Cecily wakes up on a mysterious bus, she can't remember who she is, where she's going or even what her name is. She soon discovers that she's not the only one. The six other, seemingly unconnected, passengers on the bus soon begin a series of tests. The tests get more and more complex and have deadly consequences. But who is controlling the game and why?

This clever psychological thriller will have YA audiences gripped from the opening page. As the tests progress and Cecily begins to make sense of her strange surroundings, readers will be holding on as the bus ride from hell takes them to some pretty dark and confronting places.

*The Erasure Initiative* is fast-paced and forces the audience to reflect on their own moral compass and the decisions we'd make in the same situation. Cecily finds hope, love and herself along the way. *The Erasure Initiative* will appeal to readers who like a hint of sci-fi or dystopia, where things are turned on their heads.

Allen & Unwin / 336pp / RRP \$19.99

## ***Future Girl*** **by Asphyxia**

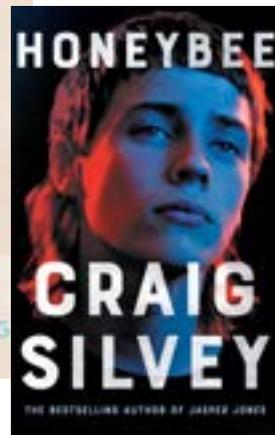
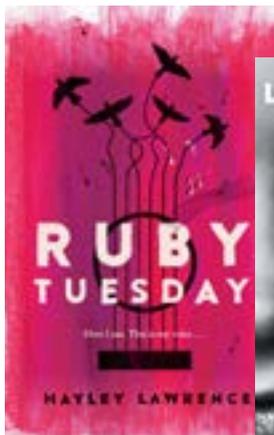
*Future Girl* is set in a futuristic, worst-case scenario version of Melbourne, in which oil prices have pushed society to the brink of catastrophe. Piper and her mum are fighting for survival in a city where corporations have convinced the masses that wild food is poisonous, but rising petrol prices have pushed up the cost of biofood.

In a desperate world, sixteen-year-old Piper just wants to survive. But her mum is busy worrying about her getting an education, a decent job and passing as hearing.

When she meets Marley, a whole new world, where deafness is celebrated, is revealed to Piper and she finds new meaning and purpose in growing her own food in a beautiful community garden. But there are laws against that, and corporate heavies soon threaten to undo all Piper has worked for.

*Future Girl* is created by deaf writer, artist and activist, Asphyxia. The colourful art on every page makes this a unique and delightful reading experience. Piper's original voice is refreshing and enlightening.

Allen & Unwin / 384 pp / RRP \$24.99



## Loner

by Georgina Young

Lona isn't really sure why she's dropped out of art school. She's lost, and her lack of ambition and vision is as frustrating to her as it is to her parents.

She ends up working as a trolley girl at Coles even though she hates it. She usually does the Friday night session as DJ and games host at the local roller rink where she no longer works. Lona falls into a relationship with George but still has feelings for her uni pal, Sampson... what could possibly go wrong?

Lona is a lovable chick who makes bad choices in a series of funny, life-affirming scenarios that help her work out what the hell life is all about.

*Loner* is the winner of the 2019 Text Prize and offers a refreshingly confident take on being yourself, no matter what it costs. *Loner* will appeal to older YAs and women who will relate to the feelings of discontentment in a busy world, where everyone else seems to know what they are doing.

Text / 256pp / RRP \$24.99

## Honeybee

by Craig Silvey

Craig Silvey fans have waited eleven years since his last offering, *Jasper Jones*, which was hugely successful and adapted to stage and screen.

Silvey has not disappointed with his third novel, *Honeybee*. *Honeybee* is a heartbreaking story of love, exploration and growing up. Fourteen-year-old Sam, a delightfully charming, confused and resilient kid, tries to find his way in a confronting and often violent world. He navigates issues with his troubled mother, controlling stepfather and an uncertain future where he explores gender and belonging. He makes unlikely friendships along the way that help him work out what's really important.

*Honeybee* is a beautifully written coming of age story for the young and old. It will appeal to adults as much as the YAs and will be sure to hit your book club reading lists soon.

Allen & Unwin / 432pp / RRP \$32.99

# The Female Eunuch at 50: Germaine Greer's fearless, feminist masterpiece

In an article that was first published by *The Conversation*, Camilla Nelson of the University of Notre Dame celebrates and contextualises Germaine Greer's seminal book, *The Female Eunuch*, discussing among other things its intellectual roots in the Sydney Push, its critical responses and its ongoing relevance.

Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* changed lives. Published fifty years ago in October 1970, it exists in the popular imagination as a kind of shorthand for that world-historic moment when women said they'd had enough.

The book inspired women to challenge the ties binding them to gender inequality and domestic servitude. It broke marriages, or else caused some to be renegotiated on more equal terms.

*The Female Eunuch* told women the project of emancipation had stalled. Freedom would not be wrested from a process of reform, by 'genteel, middle-class women' sitting on committees or signing petitions. To grasp their freedom, 'ungenteel' women would need to 'call for revolution', 'disrupt society' and 'unseat God'.

Indeed, 'marriage, the family, private property, and the state' were in the firing line.

Greer urged women to think beyond the stereotype patriarchal society had created for them, which limited their capacity to act. She likened the situation of the 1970s woman to that of a bird 'made for captivity'.

'The cage door had been opened but the canary had refused to fly out,' Greer wrote. 'The conclusion was that the cage door ought never to have been opened because canaries are made for captivity; the suggestion of an alternative had only confused and saddened them.'

Women, she wrote, needed to 'discover that they have a will'.

Through the book's five chapters – 'Body', 'Soul', 'Love', 'Hate' and 'Revolution' – Greer gradually built her famous motif of women as 'eunuchs' or castrates, robbed of their natural energy. She wrote that in accepting this castrated or false identity, women had allowed the destruction of their instinct, inclination, will and capacity.

Greer's book told women – in a hopeful way – that things could be otherwise. It told them to demand a better education, to pool their childcare arrangements, to share a better washing machine or other labour-saving appliance with women in the street. It told women to challenge men's ownership of the means of production and consumer capitalism's ownership of the soul.

## Smashing sexual shibboleths

Greer famously drew attention to deeply entrenched cultural constructs that linked sex to shame and disgust, calling out the hypocrisy of a society that blamed women for men's misogyny. 'Women have very little idea of how much men hate them,' she wrote. 'The man regards her as a receptacle into which he has emptied his sperm, a kind of human spittoon.'

These sexual shibboleths, she wrote, must be smashed. This was the point behind Greer's widely discussed calls to go around braless and wear no underpants. Own your body, she urged women.

Greer said women must question everything they had been taught about sex, love, romance, their bodies and their rights. Freedom was theirs, but they had to take it. Action was not just collective but individual too. Agency was everything. Grab any missile, break any rule. Do it now.

In this way, *The Female Eunuch* spoke to, and challenged, women

directly. It asked, in its famous end line, ‘What will you do?’

## Intellectual origins

Too few discussions of Greer’s work fully appreciate its intellectual origins in the libertarian ideas of the Sydney Push. Greer was born in Melbourne, educated by Irish nuns in a convent school, and yearned for a world beyond her own home, which was, she says, singularly bereft of books.

She moved to Sydney to study and fell in with a tearaway group of left libertarians known as the Push, a Bohemian movement with its origins in philosopher John Anderson’s Freethought Society.

In Greer’s time, the Push included soon to be luminaries such as Clive James, Richard Neville – editor of *Oz* magazine and a doyen of the underground culture that gathered around it in London – and Lillian Roxon, ‘the abundant, the golden, the eloquent, the well and badly loved’, who became the New York-based correspondent for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, author of the *Rock Encyclopedia*, and is one of five women to whom *The Female Eunuch* is dedicated.

The ‘Sydney line’ espoused by the Push featured a heady mix of libertarianism and rule-smashing, anarcho-socialism. It preached ‘free love’ and ‘opposition to authority’, encouraging members to live ‘freely’ in an attitude of ‘permanent protest’.

Members of the Push pondered the ‘futility of revolutions’ but nonetheless turned out for protests. The movement gave rise to seminal works of Australian feminism from Greer’s to Eva Cox’s and Wendy Bacon’s.

The formative influence of the Push led Greer to mount her social



Germaine Greer in 1972. Credit: Hans Peters / Anefo (Wikimedia Commons)

critique from the standpoint of ‘liberation feminism’, which she differentiated from so-called ‘equality feminism’. Equality was dismissed as a conservative aim, because it confers an illusion of power that merely re-entrenches the status quo.

Meaningful change – true ‘liberation’ – required something more radical. Liberty could be terrifying. It was something not even men possessed. ‘The first significant discovery we shall make as we rocket along our female road to freedom is that men are not free,’ wrote Greer, ‘and they will seek to make this an argument why nobody should be free’.

## Media event

Intellectual discussions of *The Female Eunuch* often focus on the book’s appearance as a media event, and on Greer as a celebrity. It is a rich line of cultural inquiry, but occasionally leads critics to sell her work short, as flippant and ephemeral.

The book was commissioned by Sonny Mehta, who met Greer at a cafe in Soho on March 17 1969,

when he was editor at MacGibbon and Kee. Mehta had an unerring eye for words, and an astonishing capacity to connect authors to an audience. He went on to become one of the most influential publishers of the late 20th century.

*The Female Eunuch* launched in London, but it was the extensive publicity campaign preceding the book’s entry into the American market that shaped its Anglophone reception. Its US publisher, McGraw Hill, outlayed a then extraordinary US\$25,000 on promotion, including full-page advertisements in national newspapers.

During her 1971 book tour of the US, Greer appeared on television and radio. *The New York Times* called *The Female Eunuch* ‘the best feminist book so far’.

Always the controversialist, Greer gave interviews to magazines such as *Esquire* and *Playboy*. She trounced Norman Mailer in a New York debate, and often spoke back to journalists. ‘What kind of a question is that?’ she would ask them.

(con’d pge 22)

In *The Female Eunuch*, Greer first signalled her often misinterpreted theories around rape and sexual consent. Greer has argued the idea of consent as it is written into law automatically positions women as subordinate and inferior. This sets up a situation that makes it almost impossible for a rape victim to get justice, as a perpetrator will only ever need to establish an element of doubt that consent was absent, by arguing that the victim had ‘given up’ or ‘given in’ or ‘hadn’t fought hard enough’.

The law, she argues, is a reflection of the wider misogyny diffuse in our culture, and is written in men’s interest. In more recent times, Greer has been accused of underplaying the seriousness of sexual assault and its impact on women.

In the 1970s, Greer openly discussed sexual violence and reproductive politics on prime-time TV, on talk shows like Dick Cavett’s, which Greer guest hosted for two nights. The results were explosive.

The Greer archives, housed at the University of Melbourne, contains thousands of letters that demonstrate the impact of Greer’s work and *The Female Eunuch* in particular. One female television viewer wrote about Greer’s talkshow appearance, ‘You could see minds and attitudes changing right on stage’.

She added, ‘*Life* magazine claims your appeal is that you ‘like men’. I claim that your appeal is that your intellect is welded to a very handsome ability to communicate’.

Of course, not everybody agreed. A reader of *McCall’s* magazine called

a book extract from *The Female Eunuch* published in its pages ‘the most revolting ideas I’ve read in a woman’s magazine’.

## Making the personal political

Greer became known – and still is – equally for her personality as for her ideas. This was perhaps inevitable because Greer had – and still has – a mesmerising capacity to make the personal political, and to play with the cultural gap between news and social norms.

Her work communicated her ideas on a mass scale and translated what were then the utterly unfamiliar ideals of feminism into everyday aspirations.

In the 1970s, *The Female Eunuch* was dismissed with faint praise and even subject to panicked attacks from some feminists who saw the book as taking up too much space. In ‘The Selling of Germaine Greer’, published in *The Nation*, Claudia Dreifus argued that Greer was ‘shallow, anti-woman, regressive, three steps backwards’ and ‘not the feminist leader she is advertised to be’.

In Australia, Beatrice Faust called Greer a ‘political bonehead’. Others appeared disconcerted by her dazzling polemics or dismayed – or simply uncomprehending – of the book’s left libertarian intellectual origins and its blunt insistence that before liberation can be achieved, women need to free themselves from the stereotypes that shackle them personally and sexually, as well as politically.

Today Greer’s work – and her legacy – remains divisive. Writers Mary Beard and Rachel Cusk have stood by the book, while others, including Naomi Wolf and Mary Spongberg, have been vocally critical of the author and her subsequent works. In 2010, Greer was vigorously attacked by playwright Louis Nowra in an infamous essay published in the *The Monthly*.

I first read *The Female Eunuch* at the age of twelve, taking the age-spotted copy from my mother’s bookshelf. I read it again – this time from cover to cover – at twenty-three. *The Female Eunuch* has never been out of print since it was published.

What still jumps out of the book’s pages is the strength and power of an author’s voice that speaks to its reader so directly.

The voice – like the author – is dazzling, erudite, anti-authoritarian, reliably contrarian, recklessly courageous, full of wit and great encouragement for unconventional ideas, tactics and behaviours, and utterly fearless in her search for social justice.

All this is why the marvellous ‘Germaine’ exists for her reader on first name terms.

# From dream to page

In the wake of the publication of her second novel for young adults, *Ruby Tuesday*, author and former recipient of a Byron Writers Festival Residential Mentorship, Hayley Lawrence, reflects on motivation, confidence, rejection and vulnerability.



'I want to write a novel.' The secret thoughts of my short-story writing self at the age of eighteen. At that age, you believe you have an ocean of life stretching ahead of you, and mostly, you do. But it's amazing how secret ambitions are thwarted by the idea of having forever. So that novel I secretly wanted to write pattered along very slowly and quietly in the background of my life, known only by my closest family and friends.

By the age of twenty-four, I was getting serious about writing. I attended a writers' camp in Victoria over three days, staying at John Marsden's Tye Estate, meeting other writers and editors. But I was also caught in the bog of my dystopian novel. That part about two thirds of the way through which seems to be my sticking point every time I write. It's the point at which I want to give the novel away. I didn't give it away though. I pitched it to an editor from Text Publishing at the writers' camp and she asked to see more. Five months later, I was predictably rejected and decided that my novel, trapped in the mud, was in fact no good. I'd never cut it as a writer.

It took six years for me to shake myself and realise that I needed to try again. A little bit older, a little bit more knocked around by life, I was going to write a

contemporary novel. I would drag myself through the bog and finish it. I pasted inspirational quotes from writers all around my house that must have made friends think I was mad. But they were not coming down until I'd finished my first draft. I finished it. I polished it, started pitching it. Rejection followed rejection, until in the space of a couple of weeks ... two bites. An editor from Walker Books said, 'You write beautifully. But getting published in this climate? Another matter. You need all the stars to align.' Then a random email when I was lying in bed one day from an editor at Penguin Random House. 'I think your writing has promise,' she said. I leapt out of bed, instantly awake and trembling with excitement.

Promise or not, that novel went on to be rejected by both publishers. But I'd had my taste of blood, and they wanted to see my next manuscript. So, pregnant with my fifth child (no deadline like a newborn coming!), I wrote furiously. The result of that feverish race against the baby clock was my debut novel, *Inside the Tiger*, which was shortlisted for The Australian / Vogel's Literary Award before being published by Penguin Random House in 2018.

I am now double the age I was when I made that secret eighteen-year-old wish, and have just published my second novel, *Ruby Tuesday*, with Penguin Random House. The success of *Inside the Tiger* gave me the courage to dig even deeper into my personal reservoir of life experience and write the most honest novel I've written to date. *Ruby Tuesday* is the story of a young woman finding her voice in a world not always kind to young women. It's a story of disillusionment and courage, as Ruby comes of age against a backdrop of social media. But it's also an ode to the power of music and the joy of creativity as Ruby finds healing in the wildest of places.

I'd like to think I've found the courage to write openly now, but the truth is, writing is always a vulnerable process. Writers write in quiet, solitary rooms from the depths of their hearts, then hand their work over to be critiqued by strangers. It can be daunting. But guess what? I still want to write a novel. I want to write many more.

# The mayo conundrum

## *The Adversary*

by Ronnie Scott

Review by Peter Mitchell

*The Adversary* is the debut novel from essayist, academic and critic, Ronnie Scott. An elegantly-produced product, it reads in curious ways. As I turned each page and ventured further and further into the narrative, the writing generated varying resonances. The residual feelings were degrees of uncertainty, a wavering critical eye unable to pin this contemporary story down.

Set in Melbourne after the postal vote for same-sex marriage in late 2017, the unnamed narrator shares an apartment with Dan in Brunswick. Despite the narrator's youthful vigour and lack of daily commitments, he rarely ventures beyond the boundaries of his geographical locale: 'What I mostly wanted was to hang around by myself, and I wondered what Dan would say if I told him so'. He prefers to 'read books, take a break from study, and stare all day at Grindr'.

In an interview with Dion Kagan published in *The Saturday Paper*, Ronnie Scott contends that 'when you write a first-person story, the action is always about perception'. And that is the problematic nub with *The Adversary*. With a weariness from the lack of plot and action, the book still feels dense due to the narrator's sometimes irksome, but always compulsive 'perception'.

The narrator possesses minimal distinguishing character traits. His older flatmate, Dan, has some influence over him; it's like an older-brother-younger-brother set of interactions.

Mobile apps like Grindr are a significant presence in

these pages. At one point an exchange occurs between the narrator and a second man. The stranger consents to give him a lift from Brunswick to Fitzroy. Picking him up, their conversation covers inconsequential matters, concluding with:

'You tried to make me tell you about so many boring things,' he said. 'I almost told you about my gym routine.'

'That's okay,' I said again. I was counting the cross streets.

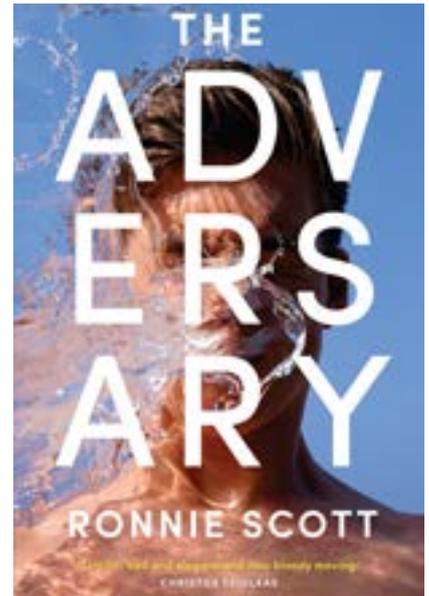
He looked over at me meaningfully.

'I can tell you have a generous heart,' he said.

'Just anywhere here,' I said.

And the narrator walks off into the night. This is a stilted exchange, replete with weirdness. Why don't these two men talk about the 'gym routine'? How can the narrator get a lift with a complete stranger and not introduce himself?

A need to negotiate hidden intentions is another trait of this narrator. He always over-analyses the alphabets of body language. At another point in the summer of 'public appearances and self-discoveries', the young man is at a local pool with Dan and others. One of the group, a man in 'smooth white trunks', passes a burger to a second young man over the narrator's body. 'A drop of mayo' drips beside his naked chest. He considers the significance of this. Is it a failing? Or a hidden success?



Through a further app exchange, the narrator visits the stranger's (now 'The Richmond man') home: 'a silvery apartment block that was chunked with rainbow boxes, modern, cheap and fun'. There is a brief conversation and the two men 'lay down with clothes on'. The narrator writes, 'he tried to kiss me and I moved my lips dryly over his, on again and off again, on again and off again'. The two men still haven't introduced themselves to each other; they are still anonymous strangers, the potential intimacy becoming 'more depressing the longer we continued' and, eventually, the narrator leaves.

The young man is involved in other social occasions, often under the purview of Dan. In one, a moment of self-awareness occurs. He shows a casual decisiveness about some men he dislikes: 'But I hated guys who were masc and cool, chill and casual'. Later in the novel, Dan tells his flatmate he's moving in with Lachlan, the man Dan is seeing:

'I'm moving in with Lachlan,' he said. 'Isn't that exciting?'

I dropped the phone.

'Very cool,' I said.

And strangely, I was dead.

This is a rare moment where he feels fear and vulnerability, his hero-of-sorts leaving his life.

Scott states that 'I had to rewrite it [the novel] heaps

of times and always used the drafts to figure out what it was really about'. The author was finding out about the mechanics of novel writing. Even so, the quality of the prose varies in places and it's hard to discern the spectrum of emotions in the at-times-flat storytelling. There are also examples of clunky writing, too many 'I said' and 'he said' and telling, not showing.

There is also beautiful writing in these pages – 'The sun dropped like a bath bomb, colours blew through the sky' – and pithy observations – 'Many housemates, many friends, blocked each other on Grindr, a gentlemen's agreement that allowed both parties to be comfortably gross and constantly online'.

As I turned the last page of the novel, I felt and still feel uncertain about this reading experience. It's as if my critical eye sits on a mezzanine: many considerations abounding above and below, all of them relevant. That said, I do value this initial re-introduction to Australian LGBTIQ writing and look forward to reading more of Scott's work.

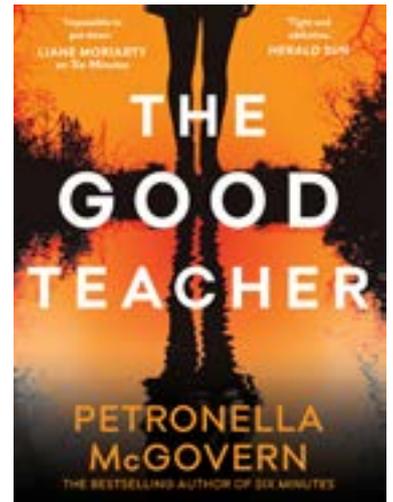
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*Hamish Hamilton Penguin / 243pp / RRP \$29.99*

# Back to school

## *The Good Teacher* by Petronella McGovern

Review by Kathy Gibbings



Allison's husband has left her, her son is living between their houses, and Allison finds herself spying on her husband's new abode. She fronts up to her teaching job at the local primary school and meets the new girl, Grace (unwell, motherless), and her handsome father, Luke. Allison is at first resentful at the tax on her already stretched emotions, but then Grace and Luke become a project into which she can pour her energy. She clings to the distraction of their story, as if to a life buoy. But the question is, who is saving whom?

*The Good Teacher* is a page-turner with clever hooks (Dan Brown comes to mind). There is action and intrigue. The characters and their pitfalls, conflicts and collusions, are all so familiar. You could see yourself in this milieu, and under the same circumstances, making some of the same mistakes.

In an article about Petronella McGovern in *The Canberra Times*, Karen Hardy writes 'One of the best aspects about what I'm going to call 'suburban noir' is that the books are filled with people who could well be living next door.' Hardy also quotes McGovern, who says, 'In real life, we're more likely to have conflict with family and friends than with one of the villains from a James Bond story.'

McGovern describes herself as being fascinated by people: 'what makes us tick, how we view the world and the lies we tell ourselves'. She concerns herself with time-honoured questions: what causes a good person to behave badly? And what justifies that behaviour? What is goodness? What if good actions cause bad results? The novel also explores modern concerns, such as the power of the Facebook campaign and who gets championed online.

McGovern contrasts the openness of the Northern Beaches of Sydney, where this novel is set, with the duplicity of human nature. The setting is reminiscent

of Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*, with the same concentration of suburban mothers, fathers and children clustered around the local school. Moriarty endorses *The Good Teacher* on the front cover, and as it turns out, McGovern and Moriarty are old friends, having worked together in marketing, at a business publishing company in Sydney.

The book is told from three points of view: Allison, Luke, and Maz (a young woman with an agenda, selling health supplements). Point of view is tricky in mystery writing, because characters know things that will reveal plot points, so the author has to be careful with how they share information and keep the reader guessing. McGovern does well to not unravel the story too soon. Allison has the lion's share of the storytelling. Perhaps Luke's voice could have been introduced earlier, to reveal small events and character along the way.

This is McGovern's second novel. She has also published two non-fiction works. The language of this novel is quite dry and direct, perhaps arising from a grounding in non-fiction writing. For my liking, there could have been more poetry: literariness, rather than literalness, some more complexity of language to match the complexity of plot.

*The Good Teacher* is an absorbing read, and also touches on contemporary Australian issues. In her acknowledgements, McGovern comments on the disastrous year that has been 2020.

We've certainly seen the worst – and the very best – of human nature. These terrible times reinforce what a few characters say in *The Good Teacher*: we need kindness and a strong sense of community to take us into the future.

Allen & Unwin / 416pp / \$29.99



## THE TRUTH ABOUT TELLING YOUR STORY WITH THE QUEEN MODE COLLECTIVE

THURSDAY 28 JAN & 4, 11 FEB

🕒 1.00PM - 2.30PM

📍 Online via Zoom

💰 \$80\* / \$100

In this three-part online workshop presented by Queen Mode Collective, you will learn how and why our indigenous ancestors from all over the world told their stories. In each session you will gain an intimate understanding of the importance of keeping wisdom, tradition and culture alive through storytelling.

Anthea Balfour is a proud Khoisan woman, indigenous to South Africa, and has called Australia home for the past nine years. As a somatic psychotherapist, trained in psycholinguistics and compassionate inquiry, Anthea teaches transformative storytelling through self-awareness.



## FINDING YOUR STORY WITH DAVID ROLAND

SATURDAY 20 FEBRUARY

🕒 10.00AM - 4.00PM

📍 Byron Writers Festival office

💰 \$100\* / \$120

When life is turned upside down by loss, illness, disaster or anything else, we have the opportunity to create a new life story, a growth story that takes us beyond our suffering and into new territory. How do we find this story? In this workshop David will introduce the concept of posttraumatic growth to provide participants with a framework to examine what happens after trauma or upheaval and how this can lead to new beginnings.

Dr David Roland worked as a clinical and forensic psychologist in the treatment and assessment of clients ranging from children to adults. David's latest book is *The Power of Suffering: Growing Through Life Crises*.



## SONGWRITING WITH BOBBY ALU

SATURDAY 13 MARCH

🕒 10.00AM - 1.00PM

📍 Byron Writers Festival office

💰 \$50\* / \$60

Join singer and multi-instrumentalist Bobby Alu to explore some of the methods he uses to write music. In this song writing workshop, Bobby will guide you through tried and tested methods he relies on to engage creativity and get that pen dancing on the paper. Creativity is for everyone; any level is welcome.

Bobby Alu is a singer-songwriter based in Byron Bay. Amidst smooth harmonies, rhythms inspired by a strong family lineage of Polynesian performance, and unassuming grooves that work a gradual, smile-inducing high through even a casual listener, Bobby Alu tunes have a way of sneaking into the subconscious and taking up residence.



## OPINION WRITING WITH VIVIENNE PEARSON

SATURDAY 20 MARCH

🕒 10.00AM - 1.00PM

📍 Byron Writers Festival office

💰 \$50\* / \$60

Are you a writer, keen to see your byline in a newspaper's comment section? If you're an academic, are you under pressure to communicate your expertise in the public arena? Or an individual with an idea that you know will resonate far and wide? This workshop will delve into opinion writing: what it is, what it isn't and how to do it in a way that's right for your intended audience. This is an opportunity to learn tips for structure, style and substance in order to maximise the impact of your opinion writing.

Vivienne Pearson is a freelance feature and content writer based in the Byron Shire. She has had opinion pieces published by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Guardian*, ABC, SBS, *Daily Life* and *Whimn*.



## 2021: THE YEAR OF THE NOVEL WITH SARAH ARMSTRONG

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🕒 5.30PM - 8.30PM

📍 Online & in-person

💰 \$950\* / \$1050

Join author Sarah Armstrong for three terms of writing classes spread over the year. The small group will meet once a week for four-week blocks, and a total of thirty-six face-to-face hours, during which Sarah will give you practical guidance, tools and tips on all aspect of novel writing.

Sarah Armstrong has written three adult novels, including *Salt Rain* which was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. She's just completed her first novel for kids and is working on a fourth adult novel. Sarah is an experienced writing teacher, mentor and manuscript assessor.

## Competitions & Writers Groups

For a list of current writing competitions and opportunities please see:

[byronwritersfestival/members/comps-and-ops/](https://byronwritersfestival.com/members/comps-and-ops/)

For a list of local writers' groups please see:

[byronwritersfestival/members/writers-groups](https://byronwritersfestival.com/members/writers-groups/)

To register visit [byronwritersfestival.com/whats-on](https://byronwritersfestival.com/whats-on) \*Member/Student price

# Storyboard seeks published authors and illustrators

Byron Writers Festival's free creative writing program for school children StoryBoard is broadening their team of workshop facilitators.

If you are a published children's author or illustrator and local to Northern NSW, have some experience creating and delivering workshops either at festivals or in schools, have an interest in being part of the dynamic StoryBoard program and have a passion for fostering the next generation of young readers and writers, we would love to hear from you.

Get in touch via  
[storyboard@byronwritersfestival.com](mailto:storyboard@byronwritersfestival.com)



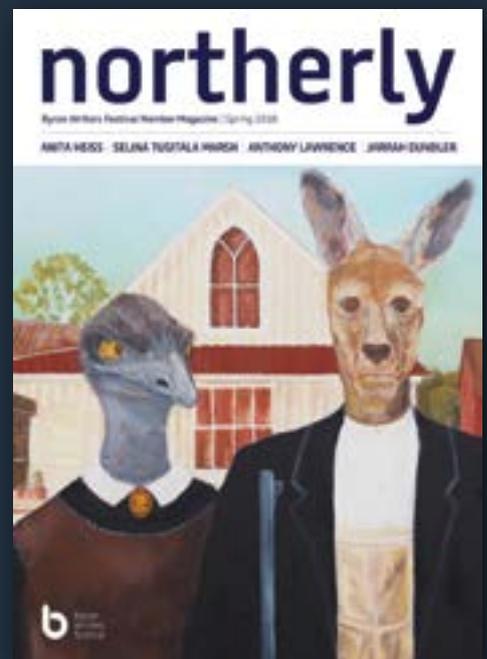
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