

northerly

Byron Writers Festival Member Magazine Festival Edition 2023

SALLY COLIN-JAMES

TRACEY SPICER

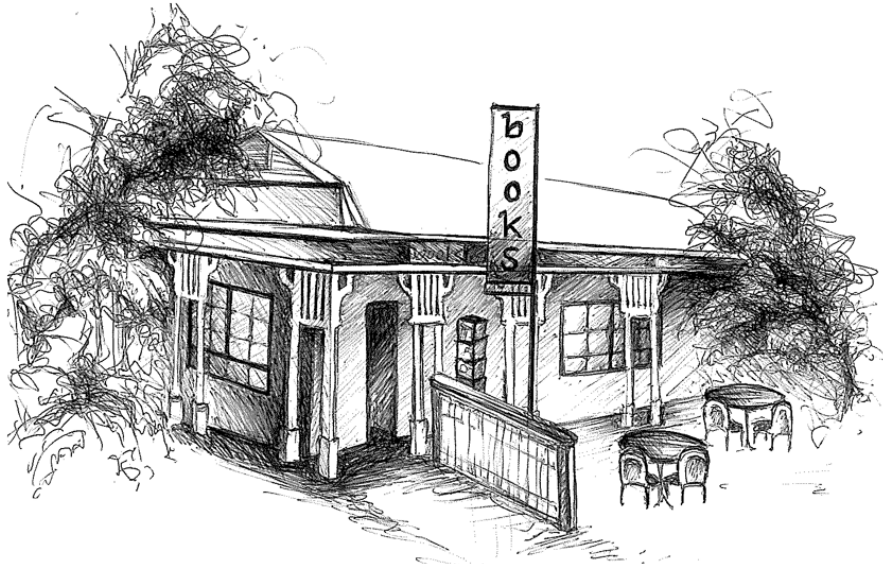
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northerly

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 lands of the Arakwal Bumberbin peoples of the Bundjalung Nation, we pay respect to the traditional owners of these lands and acknowledge them as the original storytellers of this region.

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Artistic Director's note

I hope you can feel a little buzz in the air. It is positively humming in our office as we put the final touches on our preparations for the twenty-seventh Byron Writers Festival. By now you should have a copy of your program and I hope you've found something between its pages that tickles your fancy. We can't wait to welcome our star-studded line-up to Byron Bay in just a few weeks' time.

This year's event is a bold and colourful celebration of creativity, and in particular how that plays out on the page. There has been an explosion of high-quality fiction in the past year, with many beloved Australian novelists releasing new works, including Pip Williams (*The Bookbinder of Jericho*), Kate Morton (*Homecoming*), Peggy Frew (*Wildflowers*), Gail Jones (*Salonika Burning*), Holly Ringland (*The Seven Skins of Esther Wilding*) and Robbie Arnott (*Limberlost*).

Wild Imagination, this year's festival theme, is not the exclusive domain of novelists. Our creative writing masterminds will be joined by a formidable line-up of writers exploring their own stories including Grace Tame (*Ninth Life of a Diamond Miner*), Myf Warhurst (*Time of My Life*), Briohny Doyle (*Why We Are Here*), Debra Dank (*We Come With This Place*), Heather Rose (*Nothing Bad Ever Happens Here*) and our very own Marele Day (*Reckless*). Let's also not forget an excellent cast of non-fiction writers who are daring to imagine a wildly different future for us all, including Ellen van Neervan, Jess Scully, Osman Faruqi and many many more.

The cover of this issue is a riot of colour created by the delightful artist Liz Payne. We've collaborated with Liz this year to create a beautiful original work of art inspired by the 2023 festival theme. Liz was the perfect artist to approach as her work is wildly creative and inspired by plants and nature. We felt it reflected so perfectly the pure creativity we want to celebrate, coupled with a deep connection to the natural world. You can read more about our collaboration on the facing page.

This issue of *northerly* will give you a taste of what's in store at this year's festival, with pieces from local author Sally Colin-James, a Q&A with the indomitable Tracey Spicer, extracts from Bertie Blackman and André Dao, and poetry from Bebe Backhouse.

I can't wait to see you all on the festival grounds in August. Until then, happy reading!

Zoë Pollock
CEO & Artistic Director

Microscopic and macrocosmic: A chat with Liz Payne

The work of Sydney-based artist Liz Payne explores colour, shape, form and abstraction through a variety of mediums including painting, embroidery and beading. Earlier this year, Payne was commissioned by Byron Writers Festival to produce a piece for this year's event, featured on the 2023 festival program cover. We sat down with her to discuss her creative process and more.



You are a trained graphic designer. How did you discover textiles and mixed media, and what do you love about working with this medium?

I was always interested in textiles from a young age and after completing my Bachelor of Visual Arts degree I went on to study graphic design. This led me to working as a graphic designer here and then in London, designing in the publishing industry across multiple magazine titles. When I returned to Sydney though, I was missing the physicality of creating with my hands and so began to produce artworks that incorporated my passion for textiles, background in visual arts and years of experience as a designer.

Your aesthetic is quite distinct, with an emphasis on colour, shape and symbolism. How did you arrive at this style?

I am immensely inspired by botanical, astrological and topographical elements that encompass the world around us – where shapes, colours and patterns repeatedly occur, from the microscopic to the macrocosmic. Recently I have been exploring various different geometric shapes that I see recurring in nature. These elements comprise all matter that surrounds us – that transcends time and geography, unifies cultures and forms part of a universal language beyond the spoken word.

What makes you feel creative? How do you seek inspiration in your day-to-day life?

I've always been very creative and find inspiration everywhere and in everything – no matter how small or seemingly mundane it could be at first glance. I am inspired by art, music, nature, textiles, books and fashion. I am fuelled by a curiosity to know how things work and how they are made, so am involved in a lot of the process from the design to the framing of an artwork. Subsequently my work involves a lot of processes, so I could be painting one day, collaging the next, working on furniture, working with textiles, sewing wearable art outfits. And I

find inspiration can cross from one medium to the next.

Tell us about the creative process behind your commissioned piece for the festival. What inspired you?

I was inspired by the scope and possibilities that the theme 'Wild Imagination' evokes. It has a universal magnitude. I wanted to portray different shapes inspired by natural elements, that are open to interpretation, referencing the natural world and the land we are on, and our place in the universe. The green beads that swirl across part of the artwork, for example, are representative of water and its fluidity, and the yellow motif is symbolic of the sun. My work always begins by drawing out the concept either by sketches or in Photoshop, playing around with shape, pattern and composition, before a final design. Next step is creating the artwork, which can be a lengthy process as my work is completely hand-stitched and beaded. Little sequins were added right at the end to the background to evoke the feeling of a starry sky, further reiterating the theme and the possibilities of the universe.

Liz Payne's work on the cover of this issue of *northerly* is titled *Piece by Piece*.
www.lizlpayne.com

Margin Notes

News, events and announcements from Byron Writers Festival

Writers on the Road August tour

Byron Writers Festival is taking its regional touring program Writers on the Road south this winter, to Maclean, Grafton and Evans Head. Gather around the literary fire with acclaimed authors Peggy Frew (pictured below), Peter Polites and 2022 Australian Poetry Slam champion Jo Yang, with host Zacharey Jane. They hit the road in the week leading up to the annual Byron Writers Festival.

Writers on the Road events are free and open to the public, thanks to Byron Writers Festival and Create NSW.

For the full schedule and to register visit byronwritersfestival.com/wotr



Festival workshops

Once again, Byron Writers Festival is offering an incredible array of workshops as part of the 2023 festival program. Featuring facilitators from the festival line-

up and spanning a range of topics and skills, these popular workshops fill up fast, so be sure to book your place soon. For more details, head to page 26.

Festival benefactors & The Next Chapter

Byron Writers Festival would like to acknowledge and thank our valued benefactors for their incredible generosity and support: Vasudhara Fund, Scott Malcolm and Jane Taylor, and Courtney Miller and Damian Kassabgi.

Our mission to connect, inspire and celebrate the power of story is more important than ever, so we would like to introduce our new annual giving circle, The Next Chapter. Annual gifts are one of the most significant ways to support Byron Writers Festival, unlocking new potential for our regional arts organisation, supporting the growth of the festival and the literary arts in our region. Let's make stories matter, together. If you would like to join us as an inaugural supporter of The Next Chapter annual giving circle, or hear more about being part of this community of change-makers, please contact our Development Manager, Aarna Hudson.

Thank you to our 2023 partners

We would like to extend a big thank you to all our funders, partners and donors who are supporting Byron Writers Festival 2023. This includes

our principal partner Vasudhara Fund; funding partners NSW Government (through Create NSW) and the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund; and major partners Southern Cross University, The Book Room at Byron and Greenstone Partners. We also thank First National Byron for supporting our Sunday Locals' Passes. To all other partners, patrons and supporters, you know who you are – we couldn't do it without you! For a full list of 2023 partners and supporters go to: byronwritersfestival.com/festival/partners.



Student writing prizes

Are you a young writer with a story to tell? Do you know a young writer who dreams of getting their work out into the world? This year we have three student writing competitions, celebrating

young creative voices of the Northern Rivers with cash prizes, festival tickets and publishing opportunities up for grabs.

Greener Futures Writing Prize, open to year 10 and 11 students, aims to stimulate and showcase youth thinking around climate change and sustainability, imagining a greener future.

Welcome to new festival team members

Byron Writers Festival would like to extend a warm welcome to new members of the 2023 festival team.

Becky Buckwell (administration coordinator), Emily Read (events coordinator), Samantha Smith (marketing coordinator) and Simone Evans (book-keeper) have

or follow Byron Writers Festival on your podcasts app or Spotify.

Writers call-out

The magazine you currently hold in your hands, *northerly* (the official publication of Byron Writers Festival), is seeking anyone in the local community keen to contribute book reviews, literary essays, opinion pieces or author interviews. Experience not necessary, just a strong interest in books and literary culture and an ability to string a nice sentence together. The festival is now able to offer a number of perks and advantages as a 'thank you' for contributing in this way.

Additionally, the magazine would like to start showcasing the creative works of Byron Writers Festival Members, with a Members Showcase section. Submissions for this should be stories of anything between 700 and 1800 words, or poetry of maximum 25 lines.

And if you are a member of Byron Writers Festival and have some exciting news, be it success in a competition, acceptance to a prestigious journal, a book deal or similar, we're keen to hear about it to sing your praises in these pages.

Whether you are interested in writing for *northerly* or just want to share some news, email northerlyeditor@gmail.com

Speaking of contributors, regular *northerly* writer Peter Mitchell recently won first prize in the Kyogle Writers Festival Poetry Competition for 2023, with his work 'Sacred Country'. Congratulations to him.

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Susie Warrick Young Writer Award, open to years 7-9 and 11-12, celebrates the art of the short story and supports emerging young writers in furthering their career. Lastly, **The Jesse Blackadder Prize**, open to years 5 and 6, encourages creativity and imagination in young writers.

Prizes are proudly supported by Southern Cross University, the Warrick family, Hilarie Dunn and the Byron Writers Festival Jesse Blackadder Memorial Fund.

slid with ease into the slipstream as we prepare to present another wonderful festival in August.

Power & Truth podcast series

Series three of our festival podcasts explores the complex dynamic between power and truth in a world still under the stranglehold of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. Featuring Byron Writers Festival 2022 guests Jess Hill, Yves Rees, Marcia Langton, Van Badham, Ed Coper and more. Tune in via byronwritersfestival.com/digital

Feature Poet: Bebe Backhouse

wonder/lost

we'll always be free
to move

and we'll always be safe
to dream

in a sky full of stars
we're two silver comets

we can wander anywhere
through bustling cities
or dead grass country

wherever we might go
the world
will always be on our side

a sincere apology

in the silence
we sit completely motionless
my head – heavy on my shoulders
the clock – ticking relentlessly in the kitchen
a reminder that time won't wait for us

we've been fighting and arguing
and we're exhausted
like every time before
my throat is sore
and you're shaking
enough for me to feel the tremor across the room

i can hear you breathe
 deep and fast
 and in the dull glow of the living room lamp
 i see two tears gently roll their way
 down both sides of your face

you're still there
 in that hazel body
 the gentle man i fell fast in love with
 the one i could talk to for hours
 without direction
 i know it's still you who sits in front of me

you still smile the same wide smile
 you still laugh the same contagious laugh
 you still kiss the same forgiving kiss
 your heart just doesn't beat for me anymore

we've reduced each other from boulders to sand
 we were solid and honest
 but now we sit
 absolutely conquered in this certain silence
 unable to even look each other in the eye

you know i love you
 and i know you love me
 and as hard as it is
 to not reach out and take your hand
 it's too late for either one of us
 to even try
 and make the smallest of gardens in this mud

i'm so sorry

Bebe Backhouse is a Naarm-based creative producer, writer, musician and poet. A descendent of the Bardi Jawi people, he has worked across theatre, festivals and public art all over the world, and fostered many artistic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives to showcase their work in mainstream platforms, allowing traditional culture to thrive in the public realm. These poems are taken from *more than these bones*, his first solo collection, published by Magabala Books. Backhouse will appear at Byron Writers Festival 2023.

Language, power and privilege: The challenge for monolingual literacy to engage with multilingual truths.

Ahead of a key panel at Byron Writers Festival 2023 with Anna Funder and Pip Williams, Northern Rivers author Sally Colin-James examines how a conscious awareness of linguistic diversity can open hearts, cultivate meaningful human connection and help expose power structures inherent in monolingual culture.

When I was living in London in my early twenties, my Burmese-English friend, Cherry, voiced a private realisation. ‘I’ve started thinking in English, not Burmese,’ she said.

As a young Australian with minimal multilingual exposure, the notion was explosive. I tried to read her face and eyes, searching for signs of how she felt, of how I should therefore respond. But nothing in my own monolingual thinking could accommodate any appropriate insight. It was a moment of patent inadequacy that triggered a turning point in my thinking about literacy. An equal sense of shame and fascination at the privileges and shortcomings of my English language. In retrospect, it formed the bedrock of my writing life by rousing two burning questions: in what ways does speaking and thinking in the dominant language of English thwart a literacy that

desires multilingual connection? And how can I, as a monolingual speaker and writer, address, honour and participate in multilingual truths? I began to see my literacy as carrying this responsibility.

It is this ‘responsibility’ – or lack thereof – that Anna Funder and Pip Williams examine in *Wifedom* and *The Bookbinder of Jericho* respectively. Both authors are grappling with what it means to ‘give voice’ in the dominant language of English. A language that has often striven for – and achieved – the opposite. Subjugation. Silence. I can see that, like me, they wrangle with privileges wrought – both intrinsically and extrinsically – by our shared language. Funder with her determination to ameliorate patriarchal biographers’ erasure of Eileen Blair (nee O’Shaughnessy, George Orwell’s first wife); and Williams through her early 1900s

bookbinder, Peggy Jones, who dreams of an Oxford Education but is told her ‘job is to bind the books, not read them’.

In their contemporary Edwardian-Windsor worlds, Eileen Blair and Peggy Jones share the same language as their male peers, but not the same privileges. Through them we see not only the force of ‘English’ upon what is considered ‘other’, but one that acts within the very layers of the language use itself. As both authors argue and demonstrate, it’s not only whole words but whole people who can blur and even vanish under the duress of a dominant language and the culture – or gender – that wields it.

My novel *One Illumined Thread* traverses three eras of distinct language and literacy. A modern Australian textile conservator oppressed by domestic abuse,

Anna Funder



Pip Williams. Photo: Andre Goosen



the Italian wife of a famous 1500s Renaissance artist struggling with debts incurred by her husband, and a mother in 40 BCE Judea striving for agency under Herod's brutal rule. It is the story of three women separated by centuries but united by a singular creative spirit. But it is also a personal quest to give voice to women obscured, minimised, oppressed or forgotten by history.

One of many research challenges was to ensure that in ancient Judea, Elisheva of Aharon, spoke the Aramaic contemporaneous with her world. The first Aramaic specialist I engaged fell ill, and only pure instinct caused me to doubt the second translator's work. When Aramaic, Hebrew and non-Semitic language specialist Nahum Ben Yehuda took over, his anguish at reading the misguided translations led him to exclaim: 'You've been duped!'

His verdict is convincing. Because while language itself arguably consists of inert, impartial characters in time and space, the manipulation of these characters is what creates meaning... and bias. Herein lies the power of 'the literate'. And where power and privilege can cast the longest shadows.

As Funder draws Eileen Blair from her husband Orwell's shadow, she reveals that, despite his clever literacy, Orwell himself and his biographers specialise in 'theft-and-erasure'. A mechanism where Eileen, as his wife, is acknowledged for small contributions to his life, in effect, erasing the significant ones. Not least her imaginative ideas and editing that enriched Orwell's work. Likewise the work of Peggy Jones's bookbinding – the folding, the stitching – is rendered invisible when the books are, literally, 'covered'. In both cases the women are subject to a production of language that disguises and hides

and casts aside. It is brutal exclusion exercised by literacy.

Peggy knows she's been duped. But does Eileen?

Elisheva of Aharon speaks a specific Aramaic. When I imagine her calling for her mother, what I hear is: *EE-mah*. However, in English text the word is spelled 'Emma'. A ubiquitous girl's name. In the production of a novel, I'd worried that the printed word in its correct translation would distract a reader from the sense of Elisheva's language-world. That if I used the same-sounding Hebrew 'Imma', it would avoid the confusion of 'Emma' as an English-looking word. I was distraught and torn. How could the wrong word be the right answer? It was one of many times I would confront the research conflict I've termed: accuracy versus sensitivity.

The Emma-Imma question raised others: what would I call my 'mum' if the word no longer existed? If familiar nouns disappeared, how would I describe and remember the sound of my mum's voice? Her green eyes? Her touch? How would I describe my love for my family? Or the light and colour of a sunset? What would happen to my story? My-story? Mystory. A single vowel between all I know and what might become: mystery.

The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation says 'First Languages are disappearing at a faster rate [in Australia] than anywhere in the world despite a universal acknowledgment that language plays a vital role in the health, wellbeing, education and future of Indigenous peoples'.

The Foundation's work is critical and clear: 'making connections between Indigenous Australian First Language and English is vital.' Across ninety countries, 350 million Indigenous people share a unique language and literacy.

A Northern Territory Warumungu Elder's words on a First Languages focus speaks loudest:

'I am alive again. Listen! Language is life. You have given me language. You have given me life. I am alive again.'

Listen!

How can I help build connections between Indigenous Australian First Language and English?

Listen!

To heed the Elder's words is to also reckon with the shame of what is already lost.

Language is life.

I yearn to hear the words spoken by the Warumungu Elder in her First Language. To hear her tones and inflections. The emphases of her voice. To watch the shape of her mouth, the shifting expressions in her face. The flex and release of her jaw, of her throat. The inhale, the exhale, of her breath.

The losses caused by a dominant language far exceed words.

Funder says, 'Finding [Eileen] held the possibility of revealing how [power] works on women: how a woman can be buried first by domesticity and then by history.'

In Williams's bookbinding world, both Peggy's work and dreams of education are buried. Then – at last! – Peggy finds herself inside the school library she has long-yearned to enter. But it is not under the circumstances she imagined. And I felt broken-hearted fury as Peggy walks past shelf after shelf of books she's been told not to read, wondering 'how long it would take me to find a book with pages I had folded, gathered, sewn.'

Peggy is bound to but deemed separate from the literate world she helps create.

The perforations in history echo with the creativity of women.

The women in *One Illumined Thread* are embroiderers, paint-makers, glass artists. Women whose diligent, delicate, furious industry deliver an imprint of selfhood carried within their creations. The articulation of their finger joints, their wrists; the arc in their spines as they bend over their work; the whispered breath of shared secrets, of lullabies, as weaving reeds are passed from hand to hand, as needles are threaded. In every expression, breath. A breath smothered, choked and extinguished by a language that privileged the actions of men.

This breath, to me, is the precious subtext of all language. I see and hear Eileen, Peggy and Elisheva and their worlds, but I also feel them breathing. The rise and fall of their chests with mine.

I am alive again.

In her article 'What is Language Extinction and Why Should We Care?', Lauren Johnson draws on findings from endangered language specialists, UNESCO and global indigenous studies to reveal the life and death effect on individuals, communities and the earth with the loss of diverse languages. With this loss, she reports, comes a direct loss of knowledge specific to unique environments.

'A world that discourages diversity, whether biological, cultural or linguistic, is probably not a very resilient one. Just as no one person has all the answers, no one culture has all the answers.'

Listen!

With literacy comes responsibility. Not simply to be heard but to *hear*. It's likewise a responsibility to question the very language in which we are speaking and listening. And not only the literal ABC of what is overt, but what is hidden behind the letters, the words, the sentences.

To search for what moves and shifts and breathes between the spaces.

To find Eileen in the texts she has been erased from, Funder read Orwell's *Homage* 'backwards and forwards, knowing ... who was there but isn't in the text.' She began to 'read' differently. Keeping an eye on 'the way the text buckles and strains to avoid her is the way I can see the shape [Eileen] left.'

After five years away, I visited Cherry's family on a return trip to London. I remember her father, Gordon, his checked purple sarong wrapped around his waist, waving enthusiastically from the front doorstep.

The Burmese greeting is 'Mingala'.

I knew the word. Its rich sentiments: 'Hello and happiness to you'.

Why didn't I use it?

When we said our goodbyes, Gordon smiled the infectious smile inherited by his daughter.

'You look ten years younger!' he announced. 'Because you found your true love.'

He was right. The man I'd travelled with is now my husband.

I'd laughed, waved farewell and said, 'Thank you, Gordon!'

'Gordon' was his name, but how I wish I'd called him 'Ulay'. The Burmese term of respect and endearment for 'uncle' or 'elder'. Others in our circle of friends used both 'Ulay' and 'Adaw' when addressing Cherry's father and mother.

Why didn't I speak it?

When he died from COVID, the gap left by my unspoken word widened.

As a monolingual human, the simple exchange of one word for another held the power to address, honour and participate in a multilingual truth. It would have held a meaning more vast, more complex, than the literal because

it would have identified 'Gordon' as more than Gordon. Speaking 'Ulay' is to speak of him as the cherished father of my precious friend, as a respected elder in my life. As the man who knew I'd found my true love. 'Ulay' bestows acknowledgment and status. It is the bridge between his humanity and my own.

Does this choice to not speak a simple, single word, expose a fundamental example of how a dominant language can thwart a literacy that cultivates connection? That facilitates meaning and human connection? My answer is: yes. And I also see that it is a dangerous example because, on the surface, it seems benign.

'Ulay' is a doorway to a rich, complex story. Gordon's story, his daughter's story and my story and the point at which they intersect. Without it, rich arteries of connection are cut.

This is the privilege and power of language.

As Funder asks: Now what?

Unlike Cherry, my thoughts have always been in English.

Can I buckle and strain this text in my head, on this page, to build connections between my monolingual thinking and engage with life-affirming – life-giving – multilingual truths?

For Ulay, for the Warumungu elder, for 350 million humans with a unique language and literacy, I must try.

Sally Colin-James will appear with Anna Funder and Pip Williams on the panel Language, Privilege and Power at Byron Writers Festival 2023.

ⁱ ALNF <https://alnf.org/program/firstlanguages/>

ⁱⁱ *ibid* ALNF. Please note: the name of the Warumungu Elder has been omitted for reasons of cultural respect.

Defeating the algorithm: An interview with Tracey Spicer

Where is AI taking the world, and how is it embedded with long-held, damaging bias and prejudice? These questions are among those posed by Tracey Spicer in her new book, *Man-Made*. She talked with *northerly* ahead of Byron Writers Festival 2023.

Tracey Spicer is one of Australia's best-known journalists, having made her name as a newsreader on commercial TV in the 1990s. Alongside an illustrious broadcasting career, she has made significant contributions as a writer, with her debut book, the memoir *The Good Girl Stripped Bare* quickly becoming a best-seller upon publication in 2017. Spicer has received a plethora of prestigious awards over the course of her career, including the NSW Premier's Woman of the Year, the Sydney Peace Prize and multiple Walkley awards. She also delivered the immensely popular Ted Talk, *The Lady Stripped Bare*.

For her second book, Spicer has turned to the thorny and extremely topical issue of artificial intelligence (AI). *Man-Made: How the Bias of the Past is Being Built Into the Future* looks at this technology, with its potential to transform humankind on an existential level, through a feminist lens – asking crucial questions of what the future may bring us as AI evolves. As she outlines here, the book was inspired by the inquisitiveness of a child, and considers questions of

accountability, regulation and how AI may be harnessed for good.

Ahead of her appearance at Byron Writers Festival 2023, Spicer chatted with *northerly* about *Man-Made*.

How and when did the idea for this book first emerge in your mind? What were the key questions you wanted to answer at the outset?

This book was inspired by a conversation with my then eleven-year-old son, Taj. 'Mum, I want a robot slave,' he said one morning. Taj had been watching an episode of *South Park*, in which Cartman was ordering around his Amazon Alexa using extremely offensive language. Suddenly, I realised that the 1950s ideal of women and girls being servile was being embedded into the technologies of the future. I wanted to discover why chatbots for the home sounded female, while those in the banking and finance sector had male voices. Ultimately, my aim was to discover who were the villains, and what we could do to reduce the bias being built into artificial intelligence.

The book's subtitle is 'How the bias of the past is being built into

the future'. Can you give us a brief summary of how this is taking place?

It starts with the datasets, which are used to train the algorithms. All of these datasets are from the past. So, most doctors are 'he' and nurses are 'she'. There is also a tendency to default to descriptions of people who are white, heteronormative and able-bodied. The bias born in the algorithm becomes a troublesome teenager through machine learning. In the book, I compare machine learning with a white supremacist going down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theory websites. The bots become more bigoted over time.

Did any other books provide particular inspiration or a model for the book's tone, structure or style?

I decided a long time ago to write essays, columns and books on serious topics in a humorous tone. Initially I was inspired by Caitlin Moran, who pens pacy, engaging and thought-provoking books about class and gender. I also loved *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo. However, reading *Invisible*



Women by Caroline Criado Perez was the real lightbulb moment. Perez combines deep research with storytelling, anger, and clear calls to action in a seamless narrative.

In your introduction you write the book took six years to research. What have been the biggest challenges in writing, researching or preparing the book?

The interviewing process was quite easy because most of it happened during lockdowns. Stuck at home, there was plenty of time to chat to experts, academics and technologists via Zoom. However, towards the end of the writing process, I was stricken with long COVID. The cognitive damage was utterly debilitating. I'd re-read a chapter only to find I'd used the same word dozens of times. I seemed unable to think of synonyms. Long COVID is an energy

production disorder, so I was only able to write for about half an hour each day. Fortunately, I discovered a few decent doctors who put me on medication to dampen the brain inflammation. Rest assured, I wrote those last chapters again during the editing process!

And what issues, facts, trends or revelations surprised you the most during your research?

I was horrified by the story of the 'racist soap dispensers'. Several years ago, a Nigerian tech worker tried to use an AI-powered soap dispenser in a Marriot hotel, but it wouldn't work for his hand. However, it *did* work for his white colleague. You see, we picture Big Tech as a handful of large corporations. But most inventions are tested by tiny teams, comprising four to five people. Usually, these are young white men based in

Silicon Valley. This technology did not recognise people of colour. The same tech is being used in self-driving cars. What happens when the cars can't detect a person at a pedestrian crossing? This is a matter of life and death.

Given your status as a writer and the topic of the book, what has been your reaction to the growing prevalence of ChatGPT? How might your book's premise relate to that platform in particular?

ChatGPT is beset with bias. If you ask it to tell a story about an engineer and a childcare worker, it will almost always make the engineer male, and the childcare worker female. This simply creates more content reinforcing the gender-segregated workforces of the past. Then, material will be 'scraped' from the internet to create new AIs, repeating and amplifying the bias.



However, I urge everyone to use ChatGPT to train it do be better! If women and people in marginalised communities refuse to use this technology, we risk our voices being silenced.

The book's publication comes as we move further away from the peak of COVID – a time when we relied on technology more than ever for society to maintain itself. Did the unprecedented nature of this period provide you with any special insight about technology, its capacities, legislation, and so on?

There are two issues here. The development of artificial intelligence increased exponentially during the pandemic. Consequently, governments which were (rightly) focused on COVID-19 were unable to keep up with regulation and legislation to tame this beast. Now, they're playing catch-up. But they're reticent to rein in these technologies because of the enormous benefits to businesses, which are struggling to improve productivity during the current economic slowdown. I expect the European Union will be the first to release sensible

guidelines, as the United States is far too beholden to free market economics.

From the perspective of language and writing style, which authors have meant the most to you, or been the most influential, over the years?

I adore the writing of John Steinbeck, particularly in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He managed to write compelling social commentary with true heart. Steinbeck was the master of metaphors and similes. I love the simple, direct and insightful writing of Roxanne Gay. And Lindy West is hilarious, sharp and incredibly clever.

What hopes do you have for the book in terms of how it might fit into the wider national conversation of this topic?

I am of the firm belief that we're having the wrong conversation about artificial intelligence. The tech billionaires are calling for a moratorium on further development of this constellation of technologies, to divert attention from the real-world damage they're causing *now*. The current conversation is framed around a near-to-distant future.

But the bias and discrimination happening under our noses is fraying our social fabric, widening the gap between rich and poor, and deepening stereotypes and inequity.

Tracey Spicer will be appearing at 2023 Byron Writers Festival in the sessions Ethics of AI with Grace Chan and Suneel Jethani; The Feminist Trajectory with Madison Godfrey and Kristine Ziwick; and Living Disgracefully with Susan Johnson and Jacinta Parsons. Her book *Man Made: How the Bias of the Past is Being Built Into the Future* is out now through Simon and Schuster.

Extract: Anam by André Dao

Melbourne-based writer André Dao's first novel, *Anam*, won the 2021 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an Unpublished Manuscript. Two years later, the book was published to widespread acclaim. Dao will appear at Byron Writers Festival 2023.

I. MICHAELMAS

C

(If I think of my grandparents now, after all this writing and reading and imagining and remembering, two couples are thrown into relief, their outlines like clay figures in the mud where so many others are failing to resist the ebb and flow of forgetting. Both couples are elderly and Vietnamese and live in an apartment outside Paris with their eldest daughter. Both couples have been together sixty years, through two wars, and many separations. Both speak to me in a mix of Vietnamese, French, and a smattering of English. But one couple speak to me of suffering, loss, exile, forgiveness and redemption, and the other couple do not. Instead they are always laughing, with each other and at me, pinching, touching, feeding me, looking at me, shaking their heads and chastising me, praising my plumpness and my height and my grades. This second couple is harder to write but easier to remember. I think of them as saying to me over and over again, We want you to be. And also, Why don't you marry that poor girl? And, When are you taking the bar exam? And always, Eat up, Why aren't you eating, Finished already? I've been trying for a long time to bring the two couples together in my mind, or at least to avoid having to choose between them. And just now, thinking

of them, I remember the visit that my grandmother and I paid to my grandfather one late afternoon when he was on his deathbed. He was in a clean, beige room in a public hospital a train and a bus away from their daughter's apartment. He patted the side of the bed for my grandmother to come sit by him, and I asked them once again about the story, expecting them to tell me the usual things. Instead they chose to sing, something they had never done before, and would never do again, an old jazz standard: *I remember you* . . . But even as I was fumbling to record them on my phone, they were already finishing, lapsing into wrinkled smiles, so that the recording I have is nothing but silence.)

D

This will be the last time that I will have begun again – the last, because I will have learnt to see what I failed to see at the beginning. I will have learnt to see that a muddy swamp can be called a fen, that not knowing where you're going can be a virtue, and that walking is a kind of perfection. I will have learnt to see that the dilapidated rental we left behind in Footscray will always be the house where we first bathed our daughter, washing off the blood and muck with which she arrived, and I will have learnt that after Cambridge we will return to that house in Footscray after all, and that, in time, it will also be where we first bathe our son,

washing off the blood and muck with which he arrives. I will have learnt that the robes we matriculated in at Cambridge, hired from the college's graduate student association, were actually cheap polyester, that most of the books in the many libraries in which I will have sat have never and will never be read, and that the past is no more a home than any of the string of place names with which my family is entangled could be a home: Hung-Xa, Hanoi, Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City, Laon, Paris, Boissy, Cambridge, Footscray. I will have learnt that we walk, as Paul said, by faith and not by sight. I will have learnt to stop stopping – that is, to stop waiting while stopped. I will have learnt, instead, to wait while walking, to walk without expectation of arriving and yet still be ready to arrive at any moment. In the end I will have learnt – or remembered, if there's any difference – how to live. Or, at least, I will have learnt what we receive from our ancestors and what we pass on to our children – what we give them, even as we wash away the blood and muck with which they arrived.

1

We are walking in the meadows halfway between Cambridge and Grantchester. To our left, the river Cam, narrow and deep, winds its way towards town. It's a fine autumn day, six months after I'd nearly lost them both, and the scene is dreamily bucolic: a canoe or two travelling upriver, a birdwatcher with binoculars trained on some bird of prey – a windhover, probably – beating at the gentle currents with its great wings, a silver-haired walker in Hunters and country coat, all bathed in weak English sunshine. Edith is asleep in the carrier on my back, which is so well designed that I can forget for lengthy stretches that she is even there, as if it is just the two of us again – Lauren and me.

As we walk through the meadows in silence, I remember the crowd of doctors in scrubs that suddenly appeared in the delivery room, the way they stood around Edith's body – though she wasn't Edith yet – on the table in the corner as I dumbly held Lauren's hand; I remember the machine they wheeled in, a big plastic tube on wheels, the way the doctors spoke with quiet authority as they put not-yet-Edith inside and began to wheel her away; I remember the way the last doctor stopped at the door and looked back at me as if to say, Aren't you coming? I let go of Lauren's hand and followed, still mute.

I don't know how much of this she remembers. But maybe it's not so important to remember everything. Maybe there are reasons to forget.

As we enter the village of Grantchester, past a herd of grazing cows who pay us no mind, Lauren asks me if I've settled on a topic for my thesis.

At the beginning of term, Simons, my international law professor, told the class that in lieu of sitting the exam we could choose to submit a thesis. He meant a dissertation, an essay. A medium-length piece of writing duly researched and footnoted. He meant a very minor contribution to scholarship – a reappraisal of the doctrine of state responsibility for internationally wrongful acts as it appeared in the American–Mexican Claims Commission, or tracing the evolution of free-flow-of-data clauses in bilateral trade agreements. These are the kind of topics, I say to Lauren, that might tip the balance in my favour for a pupillage at one of the London chambers, or a traineeship at one of the international arbitration firms.



And that's what you want, says Lauren, somewhere between a statement and a question. It's what everyone here wants, I say. The other students, they're all Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Canadians, Indians. The best the Commonwealth has to offer.

Back to the imperial bosom for validation, says Lauren.

And a golden ticket to stay on in the City, I say. Or clerk for a judge in the Hague.

Just so long as you don't return to whatever backwater you came from, right?

At a pub in Grantchester, as I eat my first ever Yorkshire pudding, Lauren asks again about the thesis. I don't respond right away, lost in a trailing thought about Wittgenstein – he'd completed this same walk many times to take tea with Bertrand Russell at the Orchard, a nearby tearoom. Beside us Edith sits in her high chair, squeezing a slice of avocado into a pulp in her fist.

A thesis, I say, is also a theory, an idea. And I have one of those, even if it isn't something that will get me a job:

Forgetting is complicity. Remembering is complicity. Making art is complicity. Living in the world, pursuing material gain, buying a house you can't afford: complicity. Starting a family, putting down roots is complicity; migration, travel, too. Hope is complicity, but so is despair. Asking, What is to be done? is complicity. Not asking is complicity. Being a human rights lawyer is complicity. Loving my daughter.

I imagine I am already hearing Lauren's response: Complicity in what? Complicit how? Why don't you just say what you mean? And why can't you say it without referencing someone else? But instead she says, Then what are we doing here?

André Dao will appear at Byron Writers Festival 2023 on Friday 11 August in the sessions Blood Ties: The Family Saga with Peggy Frew and Holly Ringland, and All Work & No Play with Suneel Jethani. *Anam* is published by Hamish Hamilton/Penguin.

The weight of suffering:

An interview with Ben Hobson

Ben Hobson's latest novel, *The Death of John Lacey*, is a tale of greed, power and colonisation from the Brisbane-based author. Ahead of his appearance at Byron Writers Festival, Hobson discusses his work.

***The Death of John Lacey* is described as an Australian western. Can you describe what gives it that label, and perhaps some of the key characteristics of this generally?**

Sure! Westerns are a little difficult to describe, but they tend to mostly be morality tales of people living desperately, on a type of frontier – think *Lonesome Dove*, or even Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*. They are often placed in the nineteenth century, but not always. In the 1950s and 60s, westerns really were simple heroic tales of good guy beating bad guy, whereas now, with modern television shows like *Deadwood*, or the works of Taylor Sheridan, they tend to focus on the weight of suffering, and true sacrifice.

An Australian western I think borrows heavily from the American western – deep ideas of justice, of barbarity, of survival and frontier – and simply brings these to Australia. Sadly, there are a lot of similarities in our histories, so it's actually not too difficult a job! I think perhaps where there are differences are in our particular brand of humour, and much less certainty surrounding our national identity. Americans were forged in rebellion, and took a lot of pride in that. I think Australian colonists seemed to be far more disparate and separate to that,

leading to a lack of cohesion among many.

How did the idea for the book, and its setting and story, first germinate in your mind?

This novel really started for me with the character of John Lacey – I wanted to write a three-dimensional, truly evil man, a person without any type of care for anybody else. Most of the time in my novels, my characters care deeply about doing the 'right thing' but for Lacey, that question never even enters his mind. And then it was all about placing him in an interesting setting, and of course, for a person who is power-hungry like Lacey, the goldfields of Ballarat were extremely potent.

***The Death of John Lacey* is your third novel. Over the course of these books, what major things have changed in terms of your writing habits, stylistic approach, research or any other parts of the process?**

I would say I'm becoming more and more myself, with every book I write. Some authors tend to come out of the gate fully formed, with their magnum opus being the very first thing they write. I think I'm getting closer to something truly honest with every book I write. It's always an effort to write something purely

you – not held sway by what people might think. I think I'm getting more and more confident – and happy – with simply writing things that are interesting to me. I'm a people-pleaser, so I can find that quite difficult when I'm interested in difficult subjects!

What specific books do you recognise as influences on *The Death of John Lacey*, and indeed what fiction was very important to you earlier in your career?

Hemingway has been a massive influence on me, early on in my writing life, and now as well – especially in how spare his writing is. I love his pursuit of writing honestly, too, without reservation. Bleeding onto the page, I think he would say. I would also add that *Moby Dick* is a massive influence on *Lacey* – the world-building, the specificity of it. Also, *There Will Be Blood*, the Paul Thomas Anderson film, was very influential on the character of John Lacey.

You work as a teacher alongside your writing career and a family. Any advice on how to maintain a fruitful writing life amid such demanding commitments?

It really is all about balance, a balance I'm still working on achieving! I think placing my writing in a family context helps me feel better about pursuing it, as it can



often feel like I'm stealing time from my family to do this – but I think it's really valuable for my kids to see their dad pursuing something important to him, so I try to include them in book launches, when I do interviews, and so on. I want my kids to see that they too can pursue their dreams and ambitions. I also have taught myself to write quickly, and intuitively, and to think about things in the in-betweens. I'll often spend no more than thirty minutes a day writing. I also have an extremely supportive and wonderful wife, so choose somebody awesome to be married to!

Also – make use of your time when you have it! I'm answering these questions during lunch break at work for instance!

You clearly participate in wider writing communities through a podcast and book club. What is

the philosophy or mission behind those projects?

There are a number of things! On a very practical level, it really helps me stay current within my field – writing is very isolating, so being a part of building communities can help me feel more 'relevant'. In addition though, it's such an awesome world to be a part of, and I love giving back to authors by interviewing them, and featuring their work in a really positive way. It's fun, too. Getting people reading – it's such an important mission!

The Byron Writers Festival theme is 'wild imagination' – in what ways do you think your work might fit into that theme?

I think any artist really does need to be a little wild! Restraints are wonderful, and often necessary in being specific, or narrowing scope,

but man, letting the shackles off and creating without restriction is what we truly need. Be wild with your ideas! Be rough and awkward! It's the best way to be honest.

What ideas might you have regarding a possible next book?

Too many to list here! I'm working on another historical fiction thriller, set in an inn. I'm excited to keep writing in this time period.

Ben Hobson will appear at Byron Writers Festival 2023 on Saturday 12 August for the panels Inner Wilds: Acknowledging the Animal Within, with Robbie Arnott and Kayte Nunn, and Worldbuilding – an Act of Wild Imagining with Grace Chan and Amie Kaufman.

Extract: Bohemian Negligence by Bertie Blackman

Bertie Blackman's memoir *Bohemian Negligence* is an account of a vulnerable but loving childhood, with the acclaimed musician reflecting on her relationship with her father, the late artist Charles Blackman, and her artistic awakening. Here we present an extract from the book ahead of Blackman's appearance at Byron Writers Festival 2023.

This is love

The room feels alive in the light and dark. There is a big four-poster bed in the middle of the wide and long studio and that's where I sleep sometimes. That's where I'm sleeping tonight.

The lines of the timber slats join the shadows in their geometric roads and find their way to the masking tape peeling off canvases stacked alongside each other, shoulder to shoulder, corner to corner. Reflecting and projecting, the moonlight screens films across the walls just for me. The leaves rustle and move and whisper secrets to each other. They talk in bright scratchy voices. Quietly hysterical. Headlights from passing cars stretch and drive towards this inner landscape – blinding the room for a second – and then receding with the sound of the labouring engine, trying to make it up the steep hill of Attunga Street. In the dark, the unfinished paintings start to paint themselves as the world outside creeps in and becomes part of what's here. Inside, outside... who can tell?

I watch the lines move across my skin and I lift up my hand to catch them. I want to be part of that. I want to be part of those night-time lines... but the lines on my hands are too soft and human to fit into this world of shadow and edge. I'm too small for something so large.

Dad is lying next to me and I can tell he too is not quite asleep. His breathing is not steady. He holds me with his hands and says he loves me. He talks of the stars and the universe outside. He pats my hip in a constant beat as I lie on my side. 'Off to sleep, my little dove.'

I can smell wine. I can smell dust. I can smell turpentine. I can smell distant sweat. I can smell the old sunshine from the day sleeping on the furniture... raising its head

in curiosity. I can smell his breath, I can smell his skin... I can't smell mine.

There are so many cracks to hide in here. I find one and pretend it is a hammock and I sway in it and look beyond the moon, pretending we are back in Fiji, where we went a few years ago before Mum and Dad broke up. They fought a lot but I didn't care because we were all together. The water was warm and we ate bananas and the air was so salty.

He pats my hip harder and I just stay still. I don't tell him it's too hard. I don't know what to say.

This is love.

The room starts to blur and my eyes want to pour with rain.

This is love.

My tears are hot and fizzy like a spa. Like the spas in Fiji. I'm frozen in those tropical memories and I'm frozen here. I hope if I just lie still, the hitting will stop but it doesn't.

This is love.

It gets harder. And harder. And harder. My tears hitting the pillow drown out the sound of everything else and the ringing in my ears turns to the song of birds. Pitter-patter... trill trill.

Everything goes black.

I'm swept up by the sweet skin of someone else's arms and through my watery eyes I can see the room getting smaller and smaller. Like looking back from the end of a tunnel, like looking through a periscope – swaying in between the moon stripes – I can hear Dad weeping softly.

Maybe this is where I get my sense of rhythm from. Maybe I'm writing my first song here. Maybe this is where my actual life begins. Maybe this is what I deserve. Maybe I am worthy only of this. If he is sad, I should be sad too.

Is this what love is?

Paddington Street

The colour red.

Red in love. Red in paint. Red in heart. Red in blood. Red in words. Red out loud.

I have my own romantic vision of how the moments played out.

Mum and Dad lay on the couch in his house on Paddington Street. Their bodies entwined... gazing... eyes reaching. Hands still. Their legs wrapped around.

The currawongs sing their morning song in the afternoon – a musical introduction. The notes coo across the creases of the lived-in furniture, and offer a word or two to the people in the paintings, paused there, looking into a suspended time, waiting to resume a lost conversation. The afternoon sun streams in through the windows, and the blinds cut the light into sharp contrast. They become stripy in the shadows like ferns in a forest, like the keys of a piano. Stardust is in the air, twirling in its own golden threads, giving the passing moments a density that is fragile and new and raw and exciting. Dad recites a favourite poem, his voice causing the dancing universe to bow towards them, holding its breath in time...

When bees are hot with honey-thirst
and hastening with the Spring,
When kisses are as strawberries
and Love is more than king—

When quiet birds have merriment
by waters brown and blue,
And little maids wool gathering
will murmur, 'I love you'—

When blossoms dance in carnival
to hearten maids and men
And kisses are as strawberries
who would be sober then?

Now the moon is rising early in the blue daylight, but the sun doesn't mind. And life begins here

Memory colour

If you could touch your memories, how would they feel?

My first memory of life is blurry. A blurry red dot. A strawberry in a thicket of dark green vines and tall grass.

A chalky red pastel. A cadmium paint splash. A cardinal's



feather. A lipstick smear... a strawberry kiss. All things red in one. I reach out to pluck the fruit but it's made of smoke and it vanishes as I touch it. It felt cool. Dewy. Tingly on the skin as if it were pressed there briefly and then it disappeared.

In the distance I can see our house sitting high on stilts. The long adolescent limbs are pale and glossy, with the rainforest's vines curled tight around them like long socks.

I can see the bottom of my mother's long white dress lapping gently in the breeze, but she is turned away from me.

I can hear cicadas chirping and birds swallowing their words and scratching for their breakfast. It's the first time I feel alone.

This is an edited extract from *Bohemian Negligence* by Bertie Blackman, RRP \$29.99, published by Allen & Unwin, out now.

Bertie Blackman will be in conversation with Sarah Kanowski about her book on Sunday 13 August in the Deep Dives marquee. She will also appear in the Sunday session Wild Notes, alongside fellow songwriter Eliza Hull.

From the Reading Chair: The messy first draft

Writers should not lose heart when a first draft feels like a mushy mess of flimsy plotlines and one-dimensional characters – it's an essential part of the process, writes Laurel Cohn.

A writer I'm working with reached out to me recently, despairing at the prospect of reviewing her first draft. She was a participant in The Next Draft course I run on structural editing for writers and we had, up to this point, explored some of the big-picture issues such as story structure, theme and the relationship between character and plot. Now we were up to undertaking a detailed read through of the current draft.

I feel defeated at the outset. It's as though I have wandered into the wrong room – rather than being in home economics, I have ended up in an engineering class and it is overwhelming. I began to write my manuscript with no knowledge of how to write a book – it simply poured out in its way – and fear that now it may be all wrong. It seems like a train wreck. This is about acknowledging to myself, and you, that I am overwhelmed. Perhaps this is normal.

This writer, we'll call her Lola, is not alone in reaching a point where she doubts herself and fears that she's bitten off more than she can chew. Yes, it can be overwhelming to realise what lies ahead in the development process. Let's face it, it's an enormously challenging thing to write a book. These feelings are common, and show that Lola is digesting the reality of the road ahead – a huge plus in the long term.

First drafts are messy. Yours, like Lola's, may seem like a train wreck. It may be shambolic, confused, all over the place. It may be overly long, or under the word count you're aiming for. All of that is fine. It's just the first draft. And getting to the end of the first draft is an achievement in itself. In the first draft you are discovering the story, the world in which the story is set, and the characters who will populate that world. You are experimenting, you are finding your voice, you are playing with ideas. Hopefully, you are having fun! In later drafts you will deepen your understanding of what you want to say and how to say it. It takes multiple drafts. But you can't get there without that first draft, whatever state it's in.

For example, if the inciting incident happens in the middle of the story in the first draft, that's okay – you can move it and rearrange things. If there is way too much backstory up front, that's okay – you can work out what you need to keep and where it should go. If the dialogue feels stilted and the characters all sounds the same, that's okay – you can dig deeper into who your characters are to discover their individual ways of expressing themselves. That's the work of redrafting.

Loads of successful writers wail over and bemoan their messy, hopeless first drafts. They come to understand that it's part of the creative process, even if they



temporarily forget just how bad the first draft can be. Michele de Kretser talked about this at the 2022 Sydney Writers Festival. An article in the *Guardian* noted:

de Kretser said she wanted to test herself while writing her latest novel, *Scary Monsters*, trying out the first-person perspective for the first time. But “it was just shockingly bad. I panicked!” So she rewrote what she had, in the third person this time. Except, it happened again. “It was just SO bad. And then I remembered the thing that I manage to forget between each book, which is that the first draft is ALWAYS mortifyingly bad.”

It doesn't matter how mortifyingly bad that first draft is. It doesn't matter if you feel it is like a rank compost heap. It's a first draft. And it serves a crucial purpose. It's in the development phase over multiple drafts that you grow the idea that has been planted in that first draft. You need the compost to fertilise that seedling. It's in the redrafting process that magic happens.

I shared some of these thoughts with Lola and was pleased to receive a reply:

You have helped me turn my attitude around and instil hope that my work can be stronger, fresher, wiser, draft by draft. I will pick myself up

and keep plodding forward, with the occasional huge sigh. There's a light in sight.

Great advice for other writers who are feeling overwhelmed by their messy first drafts. Thank you, Lola.

Bookings are open for Laurel's course *The Next Draft*, to be held in Byron Bay over four sessions: 13 October, 27 October, 10 November, 1 December. For details see: byronwritersfestival.com/the-next-draft-with-laurel-cohn/

Laurel Cohn is a developmental book editor who has been helping writers prepare their work for publication since the mid 1980s, and is a popular workshop presenter. She has a PhD in literary and cultural studies.

What YA Reading: Young adult voices for 2023

Amid the diverse line-up for Byron Writers Festival this year are several YA and children's authors, participating in events and panels that are always hugely popular. Here, Polly Jude introduces us to four of them, from sci-fi to slam poetry and beyond.

Amie Kaufman

Amie Kaufman's 2013 debut novel, *These Broken Stars*, written in collaboration with Meagan Spooner, became a *New York Times* bestseller and won an Aurealis Award for Best Young Adult Novel. And the Australian has never looked back.

Young adults will be familiar with her other hit series, *Illuminae*, which was co-authored with Jay Kristoff. The three-book Ibsidio series has received immense acclaim internationally.

Kaufman writes science fiction and fantasy. Her work is engaging and intelligent. With her bursting back catalogue, film and television rights acquired by the likes of Brad Pitt, and fresh from recent publicity tour of the United Kingdom and Ireland, Kaufman will be an engaging presenter on the Byron Writers Festival line-up.

Mark Smith

Mark Smith is the author of four young adult novels, including the critically acclaimed Winter trilogy. The Winter series incorporates Smith's love of surfing, beautiful detail and descriptions of landscapes and the unique people who occupy the land. The reader gets a sense of his deep connection to water and Country through reading this fast-paced and thrilling read.

The Road To Winter, the first book in the series, is an engaging, end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it novel. With its pacing, haunting geography and loveable characters, *The Road To Winter* has that amazing ability to engage otherwise disinterested readers, particularly teenage boys who have lost their love of books. An engaging and popular speaker, audiences can expect a fun session with Smith.

Karen Foxlee

Karen Foxlee will be familiar to slightly younger readers than the normal young adult demographic, though teen readers might be familiar with her young adult novels *The Anatomy of Wings* and *The Midnight Dress*. These novels explore the disappearances of young women who vanish in the mysterious Queensland outback.

Her books for younger readers include *Ophelia and the Marvelous Boy*, *A Most Magical Girl*, *Lenny's Book of Everything*, *Dragon Skin* and her most recent junior fiction series, *Miss Mary-Kate Martin's Guide to Monster*.

Foxlee grew up and lives in Mount Isa. Her stories often explore the sense of space and openness that comes from living under the big, blue skies of Queensland. Foxlee brings her love of colour, magic and dragons to her fantasy novels and stories for young adults and junior readers. Her sessions will be a crowd-pleaser for the younger kids.

Solli Raphael

At just twelve years of age, home-schooled Solli Raphael won the 2017 National Australian Poetry Slam Championships. Competing against an all-adult line-up in an event at Sydney Opera House, Raphael became the youngest winner ever.

His winning piece, 'Australian Air', is an outstanding example of his ability to explore our ways, our pace, our consumerist culture. He implores his audience to re-examine, reconnect and re-embrace what is uniquely Australian. Deeply political and clever beyond his years, Raphael's powerful words might help inspire your young adult to pick up the almighty pen.

His slam poetry readings have flooded YouTube since his historic slam win, and the recording of that performance went viral, with over 3.5 million views in just the first twenty-four hours. His poetry has become a staple for English teachers and is taught widely across Australia.

And in the years since, he has continued to grow as a poet and a performer. His fusion of rap, poetry and a passion for equality, environmental issues and social justice make him the voice of a generation.

His novels for young readers, *Limelight* and *Spotlight*, have seen him emerge into the world as a powerful advocate for environmental change and empowering a whole new conversation.

Now aged seventeen, his most recent book, *29 Things You Didn't Know About Me*, explores multiculturalism and acceptance. This funny and relatable story explores writers and illustrators with diverse cultural backgrounds. *29 Things You Didn't Know About Me* will suit younger readers as they reach out for early chapter books.



Raphael is an engaging speaker and performer. He is the youth ambassador for various charities, and has appeared as a keynote speaker at festivals and events around the world. Solli Raphael will ignite a passion in his audience and inspire change.

Clockwise from top left: Amie Kaufman, Mark Smith, Solli Raphael and Karen Foxlee.

Books from all these fantastic authors will be available in the bookshop on-site – or kids can bring a much-loved copy for signing. Check out the Sunday program for child-friendly events featuring authors of young adult, junior and children's fiction.

2023 Festival Workshops



Present and Represent with Nell Schofield

MON 7 AUG

10AM — 1PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

Craft a radio script that sounds like your authentic voice. Compose a 'piece to camera' and deliver it with confidence. Plot questions for an interview that keep you anchored in the narrative and leave space for spontaneity. Learn how to present and represent your subjects with respect.



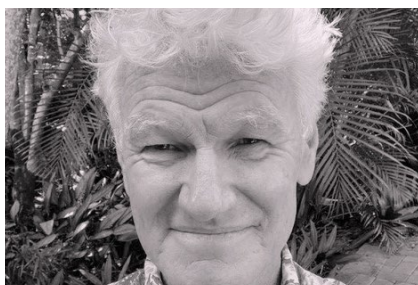
Writing Change with Sonya Voumard

MON 7 AUG

2PM — 5PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

From homelessness to vast wealth; from floods to fires and drought: the Byron Shire and surrounds are places where residents live visibly at both extremes of the socioeconomic spectrum; as well as with the impacts of weather and climate extremes. This workshop will focus on the amount of change the Northern Rivers has seen, is seeing and will see in the coming years. Participants will be encouraged to delve into stories of what that means for the character of a community/communities where competing interests and needs, as well as extreme weather events, bring out the best and worst of humanity.



Memoir: Finding Your Story and Making it Come Alive with Alan Close

TUES 8 AUG

10AM — 4PM

\$180 / \$140 Members & Students

Everybody has a story. You might have a deep need to heal and 'set the story straight' or simply want to make a record of your life for family and friends. But finding the best way to tell your story can be the hardest part of writing it, and 'the truth' of your life challenging and elusive. Many questions present themselves. Is the story you want to tell really the story you need to tell? What is the difference between the 'truth' and the 'facts'? Is memory reliable? How can you reconstruct events and conversations that often took place many years ago? And how do you write honestly about your life without hurting those closest to you?



Write to Speak with Miles Merrill

TUES 8 AUG

9.30AM — 12.30PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

Award-winning writer, performer and TED speaker, Miles Merrill, teaches you how to tell a great story. Learn to grab your live audience by crafting a tight text. Turn your raw writing into live performance. Use one of the key tenets of poetry – less is more. Transform your ideas into narratives with popping imagery, clenching action and a snarling satchel of metaphors.

2023 Festival Workshops



Laugh Lines with Mandy Nolan

TUES 8 AUG

1PM — 4PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

Want to be able to write the kind of content that has people laughing out loud? Comedian and author Mandy Nolan shares comedy writing techniques, idea ignition points and secret satirical strategies that will transform modest titters into raucous belly laughs.



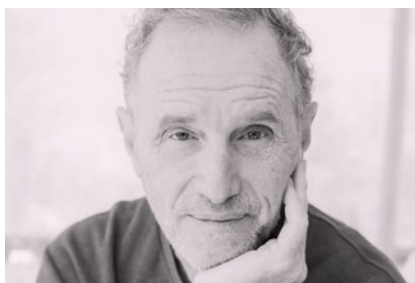
Writing YA with Mark Smith

WED 9 AUG

2PM — 5PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

The YA market is flourishing in Australia, but many emerging writers are unsure of how to attract the eyes of publishers. Whether you have a developed manuscript or just a story idea, this hands-on workshop will help you navigate the road to publication. Mark will cover topics such as how YA writing is different from other genres, what themes are relevant or acceptable, who is publishing YA in Australia, who are the gatekeepers and how much influence they exert in getting your book in front of young readers.



Nature Connection for Creativity with David Roland

THUR 10 AUG

8.30AM — 12.30PM

Bangalow Parklands

(meeting point advised upon booking)

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

How can we optimise creativity and our capacity to write beautifully? Attention fatigue is an inevitable outcome of life's day-to-day demands, with the digital world particularly draining on our mental fuel tank. Writers need to refill their attention tank and rest in the creative mind state to write well. Nature connection offers us access to this.



Marketing for Authors with Anna Featherstone

THUR 10 AUG

1PM — 3PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

In a world awash with content, creatives and AI, what can you do to stand out, grow your readership and gain more visibility for your works? Join Anna Featherstone for an inspiring and informative mix of real-world author and book marketing examples. Discover in the brainstorm how marketing your books (and yourself!) can be more manageable, effective, and fun.

2023 Festival Workshops



The Art of the Interview with Ashley Hay

THUR 10 AUG

9.30AM — 12.30PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

Join Ashley Hay for a conversation about how to make the most of different public conversations – on stage, or as research for fiction or non-fiction work. From how to prepare to how to present, when to script and when to seize spontaneity, and the importance of ingredients like love and listening, this workshop is designed to encompass topics from quick tips to the means of going deeper, and taking both subject and audience with you.



From Idea to Finished Novel with Ben Hobson

THUR 10 AUG

2PM — 5PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

Novelist Ben Hobson will walk you through the journey from ideas to writing drafts and execution, all the way to submitting a finished manuscript.



Personal Essay with Briohny Doyle

THUR 10 AUG

9AM — 11AM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

Finding the balance between vulnerability and broader resonance is a key task for the personal essay writer. Explore the connections between the personal and public through writing exercises and mini-workshops with Briohny Doyle, author of *Adult Fantasy*.



Exploring Imagination with Heather Rose

FRI 11 AUG

2PM — 5PM

\$100 / \$80 Members & Students

What holds you back from complete ease in your writing? Do you wish to be more adventurous? More disciplined? Do you wish you could finish that book? Join award-winning author Heather Rose in an afternoon exploring your extraordinary imagination. This workshop is for writers of all abilities.

All festival workshops are face to face and take place at Byron Bay Community Centre.
For details and to book go to byronwritersfestival.com/festival-workshops

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