Celebrating the union of two passionate pursuits, the craft of winemaking and creative writing.

Eden Road Wines, proud sponsors of the ACT Writers Centre

3182 Barton Highway Murrumbateman NSW 2582
+61 2 6226 8800 | www.edenroadwines.com.au
We sure do.
Printed or digital, large or small, we love wielding letters to make beautiful designs.

Check out our work NEWBESTFRIEND.COM.AU
Say hello FRIENDS@NEWBESTFRIEND.COM.AU
According to local photographer, Zhenshi van der Klooster, making great images combines a bit of art and a bit of science. “Once the technical side is sorted, it’s all about creating and capturing those magic moments, the smile, the look—it’s hard to describe—but you absolutely know it when you see it.”

P: 0409 25 13 19
E: zhenshi@mac.com

BITE is a biannual publication created for members of the ACT Writers Centre community.
IN EVERY ISSUE

4 Director’s Note
5 Words from the Chair
6 What We’re Reading
29 Writing Prompts
56 Upcoming Opportunities and Competitions

FEATURES

8 Q&A with Kathryn Hind
10 Cover Story: Kindling
14 Round Off Your Writing Year: 2019 Second-Half Program Highlights
16 Bittersweet Endings
19 War of the Worlds Reimagined
22 Tragedy, Rejection and Triple-Chocolate Biscuits
24 Worth the Wait: Peter Papathanasiou on writing the long road
27 NEW TERRITORY Showcase
30 PhD-meets-poetry: Penelope Layland on academia, elegy and inspiration
32 Communicating Carbon: Multi Arts Messaging in a Digital World
34 Member Creation: Aunty Dolores
36 Lit Scene Spotlight—Farewell to BAD!SLAM!NO!BISCUIT!
38 Lit Scene Spotlight—Find the Poetry
53 Harry Hartog lands at ANU

CREATIVE WORKS

40 Poetry Extracts: This is Home, with an introduction from Tania McCartney
44 Extract: Penelope Hanley’s After She Left
47 Extract: Songspirals, Gay’wu Group of Women
50 Extract: Kate Cramond’s Beating My Breast—a diary of life and connection
DIRECTOR’S NOTE
On this issue’s theme: HOPE

Most stories are, in one way or another, about hope. The protagonist hopes for something and, sometimes, the hope is realised, sometimes not. Perhaps what they hoped for wasn’t what they really needed, and they learn that along the way.

All these stories, whether about war, hazardous voyages or unrequited love, have a common element. For the protagonist to realise their hopes, they must act. Hope without action gets people nowhere, and leaves them wanting and, eventually, entirely without hope.

Hope plays a big part in our lives as writers. I hope my book gets published. I hope my writing has an impact. I hope my book gets turned into a movie, I can quit my job and write full time. But hope on its own is really just a dream—something that lives entirely in the mind. Only tenacity and action will see hope take the crucial leap from one’s mind and given the chance to breathe. Much like writers take an idea and craft it into a story, we can use our hope as a stimulus to drive our personal stories as creatives.

Writing the words, making the connections, dialling the numbers, spruiking, pitching—these are the things that make writers’ hopes come true.

This is where writers centres and other organisations based around writing can be so beneficial. They connect writers to one another, and when we talk to fellow writers, we share stories, ideas and experiences; we learn. Our networks grow, our friendships grow, and we don’t just become better writers, we actually start to achieve those things we hope for.

As you turn the pages of this issue, you’ll find yourself immersed in some remarkable stories. Some are about hope, and some may just provide the hope you’re looking for.

I want to thank each of the featured writers for sharing their wonderful words with us. I also want to personally thank the generous members who help us help Canberra’s hardworking writing community through their generous support, donations and contributions.

Paul Bissett
Director, ACT Writers Centre
was listening to a program the other day where a caller rang in and asked the presenter about how one can find hope in a world beset with problems—irrational and unfathomable presidents, climate change deniers, income inequality, homelessness, environmental degradation, pandemics, wars... The litany of the world's ills seem to be ever expanding. Within this global context there are also personal struggles.

Under such weight, it is remarkable that we get out of bed every day—but most of us do. It seems to be programmed into the human psyche that in the darkest moments we can find some hope that things will get better. I'm quite taken by a quote by fantasy author, Marion Zimmer Bradley, who wrote in her book, The Fall of Atlantis (1983), that “The road that is built in hope is more pleasant to the traveller than the road built in despair, even though they both lead to the same destination.”

I think it is the role of the author to provide some hope to the reader, whether the book written is fiction or nonfiction. Even the grimmest book about climate change should provide hope—for there is hope—otherwise, there is the risk that we do pack it in and stay in bed. Then we are no good to anyone or anything. We have only one life on this planet (as far as we know). It seems an immeasurable waste to stay in bed. We understand from significant bodies of research that positive thinking about one's current condition or the future provides benefits not only to the one doing the positive thinking but also to those around them. Such positivity does need to be grounded in reality, however, otherwise one's grasp of reality becomes distorted or delusional. Nelson Mandela, who was imprisoned for 27 years in several appalling prisons, could have given up hope, but as he says in his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom (1994), “There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.” Mandela was a realist. He knew that the regime that imprisoned him could not last forever. His hope was not delusional. It may have been only a glimmer, but even a glimmer provides some light.

TS Elliot, poet, playwright, social and literary critic purportedly said, “The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man.” Our role as writers is to fill those libraries and provide that hope to our fellow humans.

I leave you with this last quote from the writer’s companion, Stephen King: “Remember, Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” (from Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption, 1982)

David Vernan
Chair, ACT Writers Centre
**WHAT WE’RE READING**

**ACTWC Staff**

**MEG WILSON**
Programs and Strategic Manager

**NIGEL FEATHERSTONE**
Project Officer

**JERZY BEAUMONT**
Administrative Officer

---

**The Skulduggery**
**Pleasant series**
*By Derek Landy*

This series will always hold a special place in my heart. Landy is one of the few authors who can make me gasp and laugh and squeal in delight on my 5th or 6th read of a book. The discovery that *Bedlam* was a May release rather than September was a moment of pure joy. In *Bedlam*, Landy made me fall in love with the lead characters all over again, left me on the edge of my seat and spilling more than one cup of tea due to an overexcited leap. The writing is pithy and quick and clever and everything you could ever want from an adventure novel. Whenever I reach the end of Landy’s writing, whether it’s a chapter or the end of the book itself, I am always left wistfully hoping that magic was real.

---

**Little One**
*By Peter Papathanasiou*

*Little One* by Peter Papathanasiou is a memoir about parenthood and crossing borders—in many different ways—to achieve what’s necessary. Told in accessible prose, Papathanasiou, a son of migrants and grandson of refugees, reveals the extraordinary way he came into being: he was the gift of an aunt and uncle in Greece. Papathanasiou does a terrific job in bringing his family members to life; there is warmth in the prose, and empathy, but never does it fall into sentimentality. He also delicately contrasts the life of his parents with the life he has been able to lead because of the sacrifices made on his behalf. In a political context that demonises those who take risks to get ahead and/or escape precarious circumstances, *Little One* is a timely read.

---

**A Common Garment**
*By Anita Patel*

*A Common Garment* is Canberra poet Anita Patel’s first published book of poetry. This must be stated outright, for you could hardly believe it to read this polished collection.

Fair warning: this is no sampling platter. This is a feast which, upon even gluttonous consumption, will leave you craving the kick of chilli and ginger; to sink teeth into crusty loaf and lick sticky sweet mango juice from fingertips.

As you navigate the potent culinary imagery, you’re also treated to gifts of legends and language; art and history tied to the power of loved ones as near as memory. In this, Anita has made the unfamiliar familial. This feast is a celebration of the mundane; “A Common Garment” indeed.
The Moth Presents
Occasional Magic
Edited by Catherine Burns

The Moth Presents Occasional Magic: True Stories about Defying the Impossible is about beauty and wonder, told through the most unlikely voices. Every story is personal, and each has something at stake for the storyteller. Whether it’s about a Korean girl adopted by Parisians, or a dentist pulling her first tooth, the stories are so authentic, and humanly vulnerable, it’s impossible not to connect with them.

What I love about this particular collection is how the most extraordinary stories can come from the most seemingly ordinary people. It really reminds me that everyone has a story to tell, and that diversity of voices is so crucial to our understanding and tolerance of each other.

Playing to the Gallery
By Grayson Perry

Playing to the Gallery has been on my read pile for some time. Perry is an English contemporary artist and author famed for his ceramics, tapestries, and his cross-dressing. This short book, only 144 pages, is packed full of Perry’s signature sass. It is a whirlwind journey through the contemporary art world. Perry exposes the ludicrosity and brutal mechanics of the world of high art. One of the delightful things about Perry’s writing style is that it is so accessible. He genuinely wants to connect to a diverse audience; he is overtly inclusive. Perry strips back the egos and clearly lays out how the odds are stacked against the majority of artists, yet he somehow managed to leave me with a sense of optimism for creative practice.

The First Bad Man
By Miranda July

Odd, but oddly satisfying is how Miranda July’s first novel hits you. At first, it’s a little too much to bear, but persevere, and the reader is rewarded with a quirky, and touching, ride. Cheryl Glickman lives a sad, austere domestic life while indulging in a rich, fantasy life. Awkward pining for love between her dowdy, middle-aged self, and an ancient, pervy member of the board of the company she works for is her primary preoccupation ... until Clee moves in. The surly 19-year-old girl wreaks havoc on Cheryl’s life, but proves the catalyst for bringing her life unstuck. For readers who enjoyed July’s story collection, No One Belongs Here More Than You, it’s worth stepping into the pages, and taking a longer walk into the absurd.
Where did the idea for *Hitch* come from, and what was the writing process like for you?

I travelled for a year, mostly on my own, and did a small amount of hitchhiking. While this gave me confidence in writing the encounters my protagonist, Amelia, has with strangers and the details of her life on the road in *Hitch*, what really fuelled my desire to write the novel was the sometimes overwhelming pressure I felt as a woman travelling alone. Through Amelia's story, I wanted to explore the tensions that exist as a result of the unwritten rules around "acceptable" behaviour for a woman, and the extra difficulties faced by someone like Amelia who is already vulnerable and bringing a set of her own private fears to the journey.

It took me over six years to finish *Hitch*. At first it was a process of making it up as I went along; I began with Amelia by the side of the road, unsure of where she was going and who might pull over. In later drafts the process was one of cutting back material that didn't reveal something about Amelia or add to narrative momentum in some way. Amelia is a well-defended person who is trying to avoid her inner world, her thoughts, memories, and feelings. In this way, she was difficult to get to know and difficult to write; I needed to create scenarios, characters, environments that would gradually reveal Amelia in all her nuanced and intricate truths.

One reviewer described your book as putting readers “through the emotional wringer”. How did you approach navigating that line between bleakness and hope in your story?

*Hitch* allows a reader to tap into Amelia's emotions and experiences via the safety of a book; via an act of imagination. Amelia's pain is pain that many people might feel; to say that it is "too much" and then look away is to dismiss someone's lived experience and to deny them empathy and compassion. This is one reason I don't shy away from "the emotional wringer" in my writing and in my reading. That said, there is hope in the book. I introduced characters who offer Amelia interactions and experiences
that are uplifting, distracting, and even fun. And Amelia maintains a close friendship with her best friend Sid, who she writes to from the road. This friendship provides the hope of an enduring bond and a place where Amelia can truly be herself. Amelia travels with a grit, and determination that in some ways are her own versions of hope. While she may at times appear to have given up, when she’s put to the test, she fights. There is hope in this resistance.

**The Australian landscape is almost a living character in your book. Do you have tips for writing rich, atmospheric landscapes?**

My advice would be to spend lots of time outside, just being. There is so much that is written into our bodies by our sensory experiences, and for me, this was what I tapped into when writing the landscapes that Amelia passes through. It can take surprisingly little to conjure a visceral experience for the reader. I had to learn to cut back on my descriptions, to select as few details as possible to convey a sense of place and of atmosphere. The selected details need to speak to the moment you’re trying to create; I use details not simply to populate the world of Hitch, but to say something about Amelia’s mood, desire, or fear at that specific time. Since Hitch is told from a close third-person perspective, I used elements of landscape as a kind of symbolism for Amelia’s inner world, so there is an interaction between my character and her environment that is both explicit and subliminal.

**What were your hopes for the book, and what pathways did you take to get your story out?**

I left an enjoyable, comfortable job to pursue a Masters in Creative Writing in the UK. I wanted to restructure my life around writing and give myself every chance to complete a novel. I began Hitch in the first weeks of the Masters and worked on it throughout, as well as for years afterwards. This was the most significant pathway I took, and it led to a strong writing community, and mentoring relationships with writers such as Philip Hensher and Tessa Hadley. It also led to me signing with an agent. At the best of times, I had a seed of hope that the novel would be published. I didn’t dare dream of this too often or too vividly, it often felt unattainable. The Penguin Literary Prize made the dream a reality.

**What has winning the Penguin Literary Prize meant to you personally and professionally?**

Since the release of Hitch I’m still grappling with what it means to have a novel out in the world. Winning the prize and working with Penguin Random House Australia has been an absolute joy—everyone I’ve encountered there has dealt with Hitch with such attentiveness and grace. I thought I was at a dead-end with the manuscript because I’d failed to get a publishing contract through traditional routes. The prize created another avenue for me, and this is really valuable. The prize has given me a really good start in what I hope to be a strong and enduring writing career.

**What’s next for you in your writing journey?**

I’m working on my PhD at the Australian National University. My second novel is a major component of my PhD and it’s a privilege to be given the time, space, and backing to work on this project. I am really excited to be immersed once again in the writing of a novel.

Kathryn Hind was born in Canberra and has now returned there after living for five years in the UK. She’s published essays and short stories in various Australian journals and collections and has had a poem published on one of Canberra’s Action buses. Kathryn began her first novel, Hitch, while studying in the UK, and in 2018 she was awarded the inaugural Penguin Literary Prize for the manuscript.
'KINDLING'

AFTER MARY OLIVER

BY NIGEL FEATHERSTONE
The only way to write a story is to put a word down on a page, then another word, then another, until a sentence appears.

A good sentence is clear and precise; it can also have hidden depths.

It takes time and effort, and perhaps a little heartbreak, to make a sentence sit up and sing, or put a hand on your shoulder, or stare at you in the face.

There is a difference between wanting to write a book and needing to tell a story: one is a product; the other is a great desire to explore, record, and communicate.

The first draft can be like an archaeological dig: clear away the dirt until you find the evidence of story. If you find nothing that makes your blood pump faster, try digging somewhere else.

Compare yourself to no one.

Today there are 7.7 billion stories and 7.7 billion ways of telling them.

As well as being an act of the mind, writing is an act of the body. Take note of your chest and heart, your gut, your arms and fingers, your legs, your crotch. When all of you is at work, your sentences will have more energy.

If your writing is giving you a physical reaction—goosebumps say—it is possible that your readers will have the same or a similar response.

When you put fingers to a keyboard, you type; when you write with a pen on a piece of paper, you compose.

Prose is not poetry, though both are cousins of music.

Allow life to rise from the page.

Read more than you write.

Put a moat around your writing time, pull up the drawbridge, and guard it with the biggest slingshot you can find. That also goes for your reading time.
Average writing can become good writing after it has been put aside to ferment.
~
Sometimes the best writing happens when your brain is switched off, for example when you're walking your dog, or when dreaming.
~
When something good happens with your writing practice, you have 24 hours to celebrate: drink champagne, eat French camembert, dance naked to terrible pop music in the lounge room—but then you have to keep going. When something bad happens with your writing practice, you have 24 hours to commiserate: drink whiskey, kick furniture, cry—but then you have to keep going.
~
The writer at a dinner party who tells you all about his novel-in-progress will never write a novel.
~
Confidence is a trickster.
~
Doubt is a loyal friend and is more helpful than you may realise.
~
There are no wrong steps. What feels like a wrong step now will reveal itself to be the right step further down the track.
~
Listen to feedback but make your own decisions.
~
Moving forward can come down to a brave choice and a safe choice. It is likely that the brave choice will be right.
~
Whenever you don't know how to proceed, play.
~
A child telling a story is always a master of narrative technique.
~
To edit a story, take it to an unfamiliar place—literally. It could be a library you don't normally use, or a pub, or the coldest room you can find. Wherever you go, it should irritate you; watch as you slash your work with a red pen.
~
Read your work aloud. If you find yourself wondering whether or not you should have a coffee or a green tea, you may have detected a weakness.
If you are worried that a potential reader will think you are mad you're potentially heading in an interesting direction.

~

Give all yourself to the telling of your story: think about it day and night, week after week, month after month, year after year—care about the details.

~

The story you are telling now may be your last.

~

Finish all stories.

~

Publication is the full stop at the end of the sentence.

~

For the stories that find a home, it was always impossible to predict where that home was going to be.

~

Accept invitations that make you feel as though you're going to faint.

~

It is better to make art that no one sees than to not have made the art.

~

Success is 10% talent, 20% luck, 50% hard work. No one knows what makes up the remaining 20%.

~

Financial reward for your writing should be non-negotiable.

~

Help the writing community grow and it will grow around you: attend a book launch, send a congratulatory tweet—whatever is your way.

~

If you love another writer's story, share your thoughts.

~

Be easy on yourself. Rest.

Nigel Featherstone's novel *Bodies of Men* is published by Hachette Australia.
ROUND OFF YOUR WRITING YEAR

2019 SECOND-HALF PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Our 2019 program of workshops has what you need to keep motivated, keep developing your writing and moving forward with your projects.

actwriters.org.au/whats-on

5 DECEMBER

Save the Date
ACT Writers Centre Awards

Save the date for our annual end of year celebration and presentation of the ACT Writing & Publishing Awards. With awards and fellowships presented across multiple genres and categories, this fabulous night of entertainment and chat is an opportunity to celebrate the success of our local writers and mingle with fellow literature lovers. The event gets bigger and better every year, so make sure you have it in your diary.
Setting and Place Masterclass with Jack Heath

Sprawling or claustrophobic, real or invented, past or future, the setting can make or break your story. In a small room in present-day Canberra, award-winning author Jack Heath—who has set his bestselling novels everywhere from outer space to a noir distortion of Houston, Texas—will show you how to build a world without slowing your story down or losing sight of the characters.

Making Your Book Work with Valerie Parv AM

Don’t know the right place to start? Have plot holes in the middle? You don’t need a formula, you need a road map—how to make one that leaves you free to write your story, your way. Discover selling secrets to push your writing further so readers NEED to know what happens next.

Freelancing with Ginger Gorman

Ever wish you could diversify your income streams through freelance writing? Or do you desire more flexibility in your approach to work? Professional freelance writers turn these dreams into reality through hard work and industry know-how. Kickstart your career in this six-hour intensive on the ins and outs of freelancing. This workshop is suitable for those who need help turning their writing skills into income or rejuvenating their freelancing career.

Picture Book Perfection with Irma Gold

In this workshop you’ll learn everything you wanted to know about writing picture books. As both an author and an editor working in children’s publishing, Irma will give participants an honest and realistic insight into the publishing industry. You’ll learn how to create work that young readers will love as well as explore and develop new ideas through exercises.

Tell Us What You Want

Dying to do a workshop with a particular author or presenter? Hanging out to learn about a different area of writing craft? Let us know.

The ACT Writers Centre plans each year’s workshop programming in advance so now is the time to tell us what you’re interested in; what you need as writers; and the expert teachers you’d particularly like to learn from.

Simply email admin@actwriters.org.au to tell us what you’re interested in.

All workshops take place in Canberra, primarily on Saturdays from 10am–4pm. Prices start at $155 (excl. GST) for members eligible for concession. Most workshops take place at the Harry Hartog Booksellers ANU store.
Bittersweet Endings

BY TONI JORDAN
You don't need a PhD in superhero movies to predict that at the end of most Marvel films, someone has to die. Whether it’s Phil Coulson in *The Avengers* (2012); Quicksilver in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), or *redacted* (too soon for spoilers: Ed) in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019)—keen observers of story can bet that some beloved (or, in the case of Quicksilver, some random) character is going to end up kebabled through the chest by a Norse god, ventilated by bullets to save Hawkeye and a child, or *redacted*.

Marvel studios are very good at telling stories, and they are specialists at this kind of ending: an ending where something good happens (both the external and internal story goals are achieved, hurrah!) and something bad happens (an important character dies).

Robert McKee, the famous screenwriting teacher and grump, calls this kind of ending “bittersweet”, and while it’s obviously not the only option for the tone of a fictional ending—there’s also “happy” and “bleak”—I think it’s the best. Making either a “happy” ending or a “bleak” ending successful is, I think, much harder for the writer. For me, bittersweet is the only kind of ending I’m interested in writing, or in reading.

Firstly, I think bittersweet endings are fundamentally honest. The world, as we all know, is not all puppies and sunshine and flowers. I find happy endings in novels to be wilfully deceitful because life is not like that and fiction, I believe, should in some way approximate life. I don’t mean that they should be, as Patrick White described Australian novels, “dreary dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism”. Novels can be a weird version of life—one with dragons or aliens, or set in the future or the past, or from the perspective of someone unexpected, or written in some way to challenge my view of reality—but I like them to be recognisable in terms of a lived experience.

Similarly, downer endings don’t convince me either. Life is not entirely depressing and sad. I laugh, a lot, every day, and I have fun often, and I love many people whose very existence brings me joy—and I’m sure I’m not alone.
The only accurate and honest ending, in my view, is one that reflects the nature of life itself—a little bit happy, and a little bit sad.

Bittersweet endings also, I think, provide a better reading experience. There’s a nuanced complexity of feeling that comes from finishing a book with an ending that’s bittersweet. In rejecting the simplistic—both the “happy” and the “sad”—I feel the author is allowing me to dwell a little longer in the swirl of emotions that the ending has generated, and also, that they’re requiring something more of me as a reader. They’re challenging me to walk an emotional line between the disparate emotions they’ve conjured, and making me think a little harder about why I’ve responded in the way I have. A bittersweet ending requires a poignant unpicking in the way a monotone ending rarely does.

When I’m writing fiction, I don’t usually think at all about the ending until I’m almost finished the first draft. (It has happened, rarely, that the ending has suggested itself to me before then but that’s been serendipity, not effort.) The entirety of the plot is something I mostly leave to the second draft, to be truthful. Then, I approach the plot from both directions: from the beginning (and I find the question “When precisely does this story begin?” to be often the most mind-fucking part of the whole process) as well as from the end.

When I think about the end, I work backwards. What part of this story do I want to end well? By that, I mean: what happy outcome will comprise the happy part of my bittersweet ending? And then: what will end badly? What part of this story will comprise the sad part?

Endings are more important than any other part of a story, for me. Like a perfect, slightly bitter, slightly sweet chocolate mousse at the end of a ho-hum meal, a wonderful ending elevates everything that comes before it and makes me consider the rest of the meal/story from a more generous perspective. I remember a number of books I was unimpressed by when in the middle of the story—like The Time Traveler’s Wife by Audrey Niffenegger, which I thought confused romance with creepiness, and insufficiently delineated the voices of its two protagonists—becoming utterly transformed in my mind by a sublime ending. Oh, that ending! Clare, as an old woman, waiting alone in the room by the lake! Knowing that she would see Henry again one more time before she died! I was both happy, and shattered. Which is perfectly bittersweet.

Toni Jordan is the author of five novels. The international bestseller Addition was a Richard and Judy Bookclub pick and was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award. Fall Girl was published internationally and has been optioned for film, and Nine Days was awarded Best Fiction at the Indie Awards, was shortlisted for the ABIA Best General Fiction award and was named in Kirkus Reviews’ Top 10 Historical Novels of 2013. Our Tiny, Useless Hearts was short-listed for the Voss Literary Prize 2017 and longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award 2018. Toni’s latest book is the literary mystery The Fragments. She lives in Melbourne.
War of the Worlds by HG Wells was published in 1898, so when I recently re-read it to prepare for a new short story anthology, I was worried the story and the language would be so dated I’d find the book unreadable.
ot so. Wells had so much foresight in this book, as in most of his work, that it is as relevant today as it always was, and just as shocking. One theory is that he was inspired by the colonisation of Australia and subsequent treatment of the local inhabitants, and you can see this in the ruthlessness of the Martians, and the utter destruction wrought. I think Wells was also passing commentary on the Industrial Revolution, and that he was looking into the future to see how much damage would be done. The Martians pump toxic fumes into the air, and they exude red tendrils that thicken and spread at an alarming rate.

The anthology I was preparing for is War of the Worlds: Battleground Australia (Clandestine Press), edited by Steve Proposch, Christopher Sequeira and Bryce Stevens. Their concept is that not all of the Martians died in that initial epidemic. Some landed in Australia and were not destroyed here. The book looks at three time frames: Contemporary stories, which consider what happened soon after that first landing; Stories from our time, so things that could be happening now; And, stories from the future.

I re-read the book and watched the movies. I listened to the audio soundtrack, which I’ve always loved. They are all different but have the same elements of fear in them, and ask this question: What would we do if attacked by a stranger/enemy we didn’t understand?

I’d forgotten how bloodthirsty the novel was. The image of Martian machines draining the blood from humans (like the factories sucked workers dry?) The murder of the parson, which seems to happen as a sidenote somehow and gives us insight into the main
character that I don’t think he would want us to see. People panicking so quickly they forget about community and helping others, and only think about saving themselves. In the novel, we can’t imagine London ever going back to normal, but still people will get on with life, changed, but that washing still needs hanging out and those potatoes still need peeling. Wells found the horror in the ordinary, and how quickly people turned on each other.

Underlying it though, is the idea of getting home, of finding loved ones. This is another reason it resonates today; this stuff is still at the core of who we are as people.

All of this played on my mind as I developed my story. As often happens with these things, the final link for me happened when I listened to the Longplayer https://longplayer.org/; a song that will play for a thousand years. It brought to mind the mournful moaning call of the Martians in the soundtrack.

In the book, there are five landings. I wondered what would happen if there was a sixth, much later? What would our world be like? What would WE be like?

I also thought about how we change when we leave home, and how home changes the moment we leave it, thinking of the Martians being so far from home.

Other authors explored different elements of the original story. One of many great stories, Angela Meyer gives us a landscape where war has returned with the Martians, and a troubled girl finds the telepathic remains of a Martian.

Jason Franks wrote a hilarious and disturbing tale where some environmental agency public servants encounter a shadowy Martian enclave they suspect was set up with human help.

Rick Kennett’s eerie tale is about an isolated rural station boundary rider discovering a damaged Martian cylinder.

Jenny Valentish wrote a stunning first-person account from a Martian/human hybrid working in one of the more notorious areas of adult entertainment.

My story, ‘The Sixth Falling Star’, is set a thousand years in the future, when the Longplayer comes to an end, because I wondered if that would send a signal to the next wave of Martians to come visit. Here’s a short excerpt:

“Four of them waited. Big, grey rounded bulk, the size of fat horses, they glistened like wet stones. Two dark, large eyes, monstrously vital and inhuman, set deep in a rounded head above lipless mouths that drooled and quivered. They had no chins; instead the flesh seemed to merge into the thick, ridged skin below. They heaved and pulsed. It had taken her many years to understand this was not a form of agitation but their standard way of being. Some had two long tentacle-arms, others had four. She thought they lost them fairly easily but had not yet figured out if they grew them back or not.

There were others, lolling in the reddish water, only their eyes emerging, watching her as she moved one body after another within reach.”

War of the Worlds: Battleground Australia was published by Clandestine Press in 2019. The ACT Writers Centre has one copy to give away. Simply email admin@actwriters.org.au to claim it.
Tragedy, Rejection and Triple-Chocolate Biscuits—The Rewards of Perseverance

BY PENEOPE HANLEY

“But how are you going to depict the documented injustice and tragedy that has been the lot of talented women artists for centuries without your novel being one long wail of despair?”

This was the question my PhD supervisor asked when I told her my idea for a novel as the creative component accompanying my PhD’s theoretical component.

Call me naïve, but I aimed to forge a plausibly happy ending for *After She Left*—even if it took me three generations to do it. The historical facts that inspired my idea were tragic: French sculptor Camille Claudel’s life (trapped in an asylum for decades) and my grandmother’s life, also of thwarted artistic talent (marriage to a gambler, five children in quick succession, a fall from a horse wrecking her back, a fire destroying her houseful of modernist paintings …)

A series of *What if...? What if...?* questions kept surfacing in my mind when thinking about the initially spirited approach of both these women, and how their courage and creativity could have continued to animate their own lives and creative output, and could also have been a legacy enriching future generations. That didn’t happen.

But it happens in my novel.

I knew, after I graduated in 2009, that a novel manuscript that pleased a handful of academics would not necessarily please a commercial publisher, but I began submitting it—and collecting enough rejection letters to paper the walls of my flat.
Did I become disheartened during those years as I worked my way through an ever-diminishing list of publishers?—Only briefly. I had a busy, stimulating professional and personal life, and I was also sustained by two things in particular.

Firstly, Tim Parks, a favourite and prolific writer, cheerfully told ABC radio interviewer Margaret Throsby that before he achieved success, his rejection letters could have papered the walls not just of his flat, but of Buckingham Palace.

Secondly, halfway through my decade of rejections, I was awarded a Varuna Fellowship to work with literary guru Peter Bishop on an historical novel manuscript. After some enlightening discussions with him, and sustained by Varuna chef Sheila's triple-chocolate biscuits, I rewrote the novel.

More rejections followed, though I came close with a couple of publishers.

During those years of rejections, I knew that all I needed was a publisher to take a chance on me and assign a simpatico editor to improve the structure of my manuscript. I have no trouble writing dialogue, inventing characters or developing plot. It’s structure that has me floundering.

The last publisher I tried was Ventura/Impact Press. They made me an offer and assigned me an editor. She loved the novel, with its ‘juicy plot and fascinating characters’ but believed a restructure would strengthen it. I was all ears.

I’ve heard that a successful novel takes two people—a writer and an editor. Look at Fitzgerald and Hemingway’s editor, the famous Max Perkins, who had ‘an infallible sense of structure’—a phrase I believe also applies to my editor.

She identified chapters that needed to be diminished, and voices that needed amplification.

I agreed. I’d spent nearly all my PhD time on the theoretical part, which does not come easily for me. I wasn’t attached to my novel’s structure but had no idea how to improve it. The editor drew up a new potential structure.

It involved writing 22 new chapters of the same plot from a different point of view in a very short time. I drank too much coffee and ate too many triple-chocolate biscuits, but I did it. It was a delight to work with my own Max Perkins, sending drafts back and forth, re-checking facts and plausible possibilities for between-the-wars Sydney, and in general having a productive, stimulating time.

Of course, this was punctuated with some doubt and disagreement. To use Scott Fitzgerald’s phrase, I’m a ‘putter-inner’ and the editor a ‘taker-outer’. We had our tussles, but two minds on the structure led to a synergy that definitely strengthened the novel.

After She Left, published last May, did take a long time and many rewrites but my experience demonstrates why we must keep persevering even in the face of repeated rejection. There’s joy in creating a novel. We’re continuously improving our craft and though some of it is hard slog, we’re always inching closer to success—and having fun along the way.

After my ten years of rejection letters, I came across the Latin proverb: ‘If there is no wind, row.’ With that attitude and with the help of triple-chocolate biscuits, we’ll get there in the end.

Read an extract from After She Left on page 46.
WORTH THE WAIT:

PETER PAPATHANASIOU ON WRITING THE LONG ROAD

As Canberra author, Peter Papathanasiou, rides the seemingly idyllic wave of an acclaimed debut memoir, the geneticist-turned-writer shares the realities of his path to publication. Peter’s book, published as Little One in Australia and New Zealand by Allen & Unwin and as Son of Mine by Salt in the UK, charts the story of his parents’ emigration from Greece to Australia in 1956, their struggles to conceive a child, an extraordinary act of generosity, and a secret kept hidden for decades.
When did you decide to write the story of your adoption?

Mum sat me down one day in January 1999 and told me I was adopted. I felt an array of different emotions—from anger and betrayal to acceptance and curiosity and excitement. I thought, I’ve got to write this down. It was only three pages of notes in a Word document, which followed me from floppy disc to floppy disc.

I started with a short story that I first wrote at The New School in New York in 2006. I entered it in three awards, and it won two, one of which was the ACT Writers Centre’s Marjorie Graber McInnes award in 2007. It was wonderful early validation, but it was just the tip of the story’s iceberg.

What did your quest to be published involve?

After three years of writing the story, I had over 100,000 words. I was proud of it but knew it needed work, so I decided to do a residency at Varuna where I had Carol Major as a tutor. She told me: “You don’t have to write this chronologically.” It was freeing to know that, but also hard to hear. I now needed to construct a compelling structure.

By 2011, the manuscript had improved, so I thought I might submit it to literary agents. I must’ve sent it to about a hundred agents in Australia and the UK but had no luck. An agent in London responded: “Look, everyone has a story, that’s nothing special. To be a real writer, you have to write a work of fiction.”

It wasn’t meant positively, but that stuck in my mind.

So, I wrote a work of fiction. Along the way, I did a course at Arvon Foundation in Yorkshire and worked with a professional editor sourced through Jericho Writers in the UK. This time, I sent my manuscript to only a dozen agents, and received contract offers from three.

I was overjoyed. But that feeling was short-lived. After signing with an agency in London, my agent sent my novel out to ten select UK publishers, but had no offers. They then asked what else I had; I offered my memoir, but the agent wasn’t keen to take it forward.

So, I wrote a third manuscript, another novel, which was part of a Master of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of London. By 2018, it was ready. We crossed our fingers, and my agent sent it to the same ten publishers. I thought: “Oh man, what if I have another failure? She’ll drop me.” And that’s ultimately what happened.

What were you feeling by this stage?

Major depression. My memoir had undergone 14 drafts, and both my novels went through about seven or eight. People asked why I didn’t self-publish, but I really wanted to stay the course. I was hugely proud of all three of my manuscripts, but they were still just half a million words sitting on my hard drive.

How did you come back to your memoir?

When I’d finished it in 2011, the book didn’t have an ending. I’d had to manufacture one, which technically made it a work of fiction.

With seven more years of life passing from 2011 to 2018, the book now had an ending. I went back, removed anything fictional, and changed names where necessary. I read my writing with 7 more years of experience, and saw where chapters weren’t working.

Without an agent, I was now cast back into slush pile land. I decided to send it to publishers directly, and to unpublished manuscript awards.
How did you stay motivated?
I’m tenacious. I’m disciplined. I like getting stuff done. It was similar as a scientist—you had to keep going, otherwise you’d have worked for three years with nothing to show for it.

Then, a publisher in the UK called Salt asked me to send the full manuscript of my memoir. I signed with them, and they allowed me to hang on to Australian and New Zealand rights, which was very supportive of them.

After submitting the memoir to the Allen & Unwin ‘Friday Pitch’, they asked for the full manuscript, and decided to take it. By Christmas 2018, six months after my London agent let me go, I’d signed two publishing contracts. It all happened so quickly, but it also reflected all the work that had gone into the manuscript over many years. I also signed with a great new literary agent.

What’s it like to have your story out in the world now?
Many of the family members I write about in the book have passed away. My mum and my brothers in Greece said: “We’re so happy for you, you’ve been working away at this for so long.”

The other important thing is the idea of documenting something for your kids. I’ve got three boys aged 4, 2, and now a newborn just born in 2019.

Is there catharsis in memoir?
It is very cathartic. You’re ordering your thoughts, documenting what you went through, and adding other people’s thoughts. When Mum told me that I was adopted, I felt shocked and felt deceived and anxious, but then I felt curious and excited. My mum, she felt relieved. It was a secret she’d carried all those years.

How does it feel to be an author?
Being published is a relief of its own. It’s all been worth it. There’s something very romantic about creating a book, a volume. It’s important to know that I’ve spent over ten years on this, and it’s not wasted time. The book is validation for all that time and effort, which makes me want to write even more.

What advice do you have to help other writers maintain hope?
It sounds like a cliché, but if you believe in what you do, you will get there. You will find a way. It’s true, success is when preparation meets opportunity. Preparation is working at your craft, reading a lot, seeing what works and what doesn’t.

Keep going. Question yourself. Question why something might not be working. Be open to feedback. Just keep going and know that there are many opportunities out there now. It almost becomes a full-time job to submit your work. You’re cast into another world then: writing a cover letter, writing a synopsis. Taking part in the ACT Writers Centre HARDCOPY program (2014) helped with that. That was my first time in the same room with a literary agent. It was the first professional course I did in Australia, which gave me that introduction to the industry.

And rejected works? They’re not failures. They make you a better writer.

Win!
To win one of 3 signed copies of Peter’s book, Little One, simply email admin@actwriters.org.au
NEW TERRITORY SHOWCASE

BRUCE: the one-puppet show that turned a foam mattress into a star

BY 2019 NEW TERRITORY BLOGGER, ROSALIND MORAN

The ACT Writers Centre is proud to partner with the National Library of Australia, The Street Theatre, Sue Terry of Whispering Gums, and the Canberra Writers Festival on NEW TERRITORY: Adventures in arts writing. NEW TERRITORY is a program that is committed to developing a deeper conversation about the arts: why we make art, how do we engage in art, and to what end? We aim to develop the arts writers, thinkers and provocateurs of the future.
Created by Australian company The Last Great Hunt, **BRUCE** ran in June at The Street Theatre, Canberra.

Bruce has come a long way. The star of the eponymous lo-fi puppetry show is quite literally a block of yellow foam carved from a mattress the show’s creators found by the side of a road. A beautiful example of ‘trash puppetry’. A bizarre, but fortuitous, meeting.

I’m delighted to confirm that **BRUCE** is every bit as zany and fun as its origin story. The show’s set and cast requirements are minimal, with the performance only requiring two performers—both act as mime and puppeteer—dressed in black on a dark stage. Yet, with a mere two actors and a yellow foam puppet, **BRUCE** delivers a whole range of quirky characters and a time-travelling, action-movie-esque plotline.

The storyline cartwheels between past, present, and future, and while it takes some focus to follow from the start, the play rapidly hits its stride and becomes both darkly humorous and more than a little absurd. **BRUCE** includes a car chase, a rescue from a burning building, a revenge plotline, a marriage proposal, and even a musical montage where our hero goes on an emotional journey to the tune of Dido’s *White Flag*. Until you’ve seen a piece of—now surprisingly endearing?—yellow foam sing along to the words “I will go down with this ship”, you haven’t lived.

Indeed, it is ultimately the talent of the actors, as well as that of the sound and light technicians, that brings this play to life. The dramatic blockbuster plotline is rendered comic through the very medium of its puppet protagonists, and the puppeteers draw this humour out right to its limit. No matter the intensity of the scene, tension is always diffused by the sheer entertainment to be found in seeing the performance brought to life by a single foam block and a pair of white-gloved hands.

Over the course of the play, the actors manage to depict everything from a moveable bridge to the inside of a womb (yes), using mime and puppetry alone. It’s an impressive show of skill. And more delightful yet is the degree to which each character in **BRUCE**’s story becomes recognisable simply through their individual voices and mannerisms. We see—we know—the man with the Zimmer frame; the precocious schoolgirl; the sceptical farmer; the overeager host of the televised book review show.

In the end, perhaps what it is most impressive about **BRUCE** is the way the show’s creators and actors do so much with so little. The mime and puppetry merely traces the picture. However, it does so with such convincing artfulness that it remains effortless and enjoyable for the audience to fill this tracery in themselves.

Rosalind Moran has written for anthologies, websites, and journals including *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Feminartsy*, *Demos*, and *Writer’s Edit*, among others. She was awarded 2018 Undergraduate Awards Global Winner for her research into biopics and has featured as an artist at the Emerging Writers’ Festival, the National Young Writers’ Festival, the National Multicultural Festival, and Noted Festival. Rosalind is also the co-founder of *Cicerone Journal*, a fledgling literary venture that is currently the recipient of competitive arts grants from both the ACT Government and YWCA Canberra.
1. **LOOKING BACK**: Create a character based on your younger self. What motivated you then and what was your focus? What did you wear and who did you identify with?

2. **SEPARATED**: Write a love story about two people who are destined to never meet.

3. **MYSTERY MAIL**: You run into an old friend you haven’t seen for many years while grocery shopping. They ask for your mailing address and say they have a parcel for you. What could they be sending you and why?

4. **CREATING CONNECTIONS**: Find a cosy place to sit where you can look out at the street. Write a character description based on three different people who pass by alone. Create a scenario that could connect them.

5. **ABSENCE**: Try writing a poem that imagines a world without poetry.

6. **INSPIRE**: Children are generally full of wonder about the world. What if you met a child who had none? Write a story that sells them on the magic of existence.

7. **MINDFUL**: Find a quiet space, close your eyes and listen for at least five minutes. What can you hear? Try to clear your mind and experience only the present moment. Write about any aspect of this exercise.

8. **NEWSWORTHY**: Watch or listen to the news cycle today. Choose two unconnected stories and try merging them into one narrative.

9. **CELEBRATE**: When and what do you celebrate? Does the prospect of a birthday party fill you with excitement or terror?

10. **ART LOVER**: Visit an art exhibition and choose one of the works on display. Imagine your protagonist is the artist. Create a new title for the work and write about what motivated them to create it.

To submit a writing prompt to appear in a future issue of *BITE*, send an email to admin@actwriters.org.au
PhD meets poetry: Penelope Layland on academia, elegy and inspiration

BY CLAIRE DELAHUNTY

Penelope Layland had her doubts about marrying the creative and the scholarly through the practice-based PhD she completed in 2017; exploring elegy in a secular age.

Fast forward to 2019, and the fruits of this unlikely approach, Things I’ve Thought to Tell You Since I Saw You Last, (Recent Work Press), have brought Penelope her second shortlisting for the prestigious Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry.

“My PhD explored why elegy still works, when the secular poet no longer has recourse to God and religious life and the typical conventions and consolations of elegy. To do this, I interrogated this research question both through creative process, and from a scholarly angle,” Penelope explained.

“I was quite sceptical when I started about how this would work. Some people start with the creative first, and then the scholarly. I did both at the same time, and it worked well.

“I’d be reading some literary theory and some psychology, and that would spark the idea for a poem. Each part fed off the other. It evolved.”

It’s perhaps little surprise the former journalist, parliamentary staffer and speech writer had a natural knack for bonding art with analysis, much as her career has done.

“I certainly didn’t get sick of it over the five years, because you’re using the whole of your brain,” she said.

When ACT small press imprint, Recent Work Press, approached Penelope about developing and publishing a poetry collection based on her...
PhD project, she also incorporated works that didn’t stem directly from the project.

“I had to make decisions about what was strong enough for a published book,” Penelope said.

In her exploration of elegy, Penelope continued a tradition established in childhood, of probing ideas that interest her through words.

“Poetry in my personal life has always been a way of trying to make sense of things,” she said.

“I started by mucking around and exploring words. When I was in my twenties, some of these explorations started getting published in magazines.”

Penelope’s early works found homes in publications like *Southerly* and *Westerly*. She embraced early mentorship from Ian Templeman, head of Public Programs at the National Library, as well as poet and academic, Paul Hetherington, who supervised her PhD. Penelope also found support and comradeship through the longstanding Molonglo Writers group.

“Poetry is certainly less of a lonely pursuit in Canberra,” she observed.

“Part of the poetic activity here is really helped by the International Poetry Studies Institute at the University of Canberra, and their festival. I think that’s an extraordinary achievement,” she said.

It was in 2005, with her poetry collection, *Suburban Anatomy*, that Penelope received her first short-listing for the Kenneth Slessor Prize (awarded annually as part of the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards).

Accompanying her short-listing in 2019 for *Things I’ve Thought to Tell You Since I Saw You Last*, Kenneth Slessor judges’ comments said: “This volume, so skilfully and artfully achieved, consoles and instructs, showing us the difference between sentiment and sentimentality, importance and manufactured profundity.”

While Penelope is proud of her work, she echoes many artists in her experience of awards as “a temporary ego boost”.

“It was great, of course, but I get a little ambivalent, because I know that sort of thing—and even winning—isn’t the stuff that makes you happy in the long term. It really isn’t, especially when you look back on the highlights of your life.”

And, as Penelope steps into a new phase of life, “after the paid workforce” her creative plans and objectives are perhaps broader than ever, with many ideas in orbit.

“I’m doing some research at the moment which may or may not turn into a suite of poems looking into Dorothy Wordsworth, William Wordsworth’s sister. I’m intrigued by her life, being the quiet figure of support to a major poet,” she said.

“I also feel liberated in recent months to explore more political topics.”

As for Canberra’s pulsing poetry scene, Penelope feels only optimism.

“At venues like Smith’s Alternative Bookshop, you see people standing up for the first time and sharing their stuff. Poetry is personal, I always think, ‘oh my god, you’re so brave’.

“When I say ‘here’s a new poem’ it’s really six-months old and has been re-written. I suppose that is part of the beauty of having a work published. It makes you stop fiddling. That’s what every poet must learn how to do: let it go.”

Penelope Layland is a Canberra poet and former journalist, speechwriter and communications professional. She has been published in journals in Australia and abroad. Her latest book, *Things I’ve Thought to Tell You Since I Saw You Last* (Recent Work Press 2018) was short-listed for the Kenneth Slessor Prize in the 2019 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards.
The climate is changing as a result of human activity. We've emitted too much carbon dioxide and equivalent gases. We need to cut back.

Like many, I suffer climate change anxiety. David Attenborough predicts apocalypse as walruses topple down cliffs searching for shrinking sea ice. Meanwhile, our leaders debate franking credits. Who will save us?

After my last bout of crippling insomnia, I decided it was time to save myself via a major multi-arts project. It didn’t begin that way. It began as a book.
LESSON 1—YOU CAN SOLVE ANY ARTISTIC PROBLEM WITH A SPREADSHEET

I heard this at a writer’s con. I never understood it until I ran a carbon accounting project. I now have 50 spreadsheets and Excel skills to rival any IT geek. I recently made a series of interactive sculptures for “Art, Not Apart”. You can tell they’re art because they’re made from Lego, not spreadsheets, but there’s still a spreadsheet behind each piece.

LESSON 2—A DAY ON YOUTUBE MAKES ANYONE A TECH GENIUS

Two years ago, my only contact with the internet was as a user. Since then, I’ve built three sites, run a digital interactive art project, managed social media and blogging platforms and made short films and graphic design content.

I didn’t learn all this for kicks. I did it because I needed to. Blogs and articles need images. Books need promotion. Professionals need a profile. I found the tools I needed online, either free or cheap. I used online reviews and how-to guides. I like Canva, Strikingly, Pixabay and Unsplash but there are many others.

LESSON 3—YOU CAN SUMMARISE ANYTHING

Twitter gives you 140 characters. I summarise my blogs in 80. The journey, data and anecdotes are interesting but if I can’t say what I mean in one sentence, I don’t understand it. The carbon economy is complex. So is international denuclearisation. That never stopped Trump from Tweeting it. Nonfiction needs less poetry and more clarity.

LESSON 4—DON’T GIVE UP THE DAY JOB

I’m incredibly grateful for my ACT Arts grant and Art, Not Apart. I pitched other funding applications that failed. One said my work was “too commercial” (Ha! Wish I lived on their planet). I’ve earned less than $10,000 on a two-year project. When I spoke to Creative Partnerships Australia, they thought I was doing pretty well.

Making a living from writing books is almost impossible in this country. People told me this when I was young, and I never believed them. I believe the data. A 2015 Macquarie University survey found the average income earned by an Australian author from their creative work is $12,900. The mean income is only $2,800. I don’t make a living from my writing but I haven’t failed. I’ve achieved the industry standard.

Traditionally, there are two ways around this problem. Find reliable employment or marry rich. I’d like to say I’ve learned my lesson, except my current job is running a start-up. Ah well, if I were rational, I wouldn’t write books.

LESSON 5—PROCRASTINATE PRODUCTIVELY

I’m delighted with my new book so far. I haven’t written it yet (don’t tell my agent) but I have a website, visuals, software, data and a wad of life material. My low-carbon lifestyle changes also make me think we can actually fix the climate, if we simply get on and do it. Here’s hoping my book works out the same way.

Jo Clay is the author of The Carbon Diet at carbondiet.com.au, and is CEO of recycling company Send and Shred at sendandshred.com.au
I once worked in sales with a manager whose catchphrase was “Hope is not a doing word”. Poor man had never met Aunty Dolores.

Aunty Dolores was born in Ireland, the youngest of six children and herself a mum of five. She wasn’t your typical Irish mother of the 80s as she could drive a car, hung out with Sting, and ran—from his castle no less—Chris De Burgh’s fan club. In a country not known for its optimism at the time, Aunty Dolores was an unwavering force of positivity.

It was the mid-80s when Batchelors, the Irish rival to Heinz, ran a competition. To enter, you had to remove the label from a can of beans and complete the entry form on the back, which included writing, in 10 words or less, a slogan for Batchelors Beans.
The prize for this competition was a car. Not any car, but an Irish-manufactured TMC Costin. The chances of winning this car were infinitesimally small, but higher than the chances of ever actually owning a TMC Costin through any means. The TMC Costin was a lightweight racing car that was only manufactured for a few years before the company, from Wexford, went bankrupt in the late 1980s after producing what is reported to be less than 40 vehicles. A totally impractical car for an Irish family of seven, with its two seats and soft-top. A car, that Aunty Dolores won.

So how did she win? Well, she employed her own "magnetism" to send out "dynamic thought-wishes", techniques she learnt reading Al Koran's book How to Bring Out the Magic in Your Mind. Al Koran was a performing mentalist and mind reader famous in the 1960s, who went from humble beginnings as a hairdresser in England to the heady heights of The Ed Sullivan Show in the USA. Aunty Dolores read Al's book and was an instant devotee and dedicated student, following his methods with belief and determination.

Aunty Dolores would meditate and visualise the car. She put pictures of the car on her fridge. She drove past the dealership every day to see the car. She imagined herself driving the car. She organised a test-drive of the car for which she was given a raffle ticket in a side competition the dealer was running. By the end of that week Aunty Dolores was the owner of a new TMC Costin racing jacket. She acted like she owned the car, spoke like she owned the car, and now dressed like she owned the car. It was total TMC Costin immersion.

Aunty Dolores shared the magic of her mind with her extended family and friends. She would give them copies of Koran’s book and encourage them to go forth and believe in themselves, striving to be whatever they wanted to be. She would sit and listen to their aspirations and never once question their—at times—audacious goals, no matter how ambitious. There was no generation gap with Aunty Dolores, she believed in everyone and never let the burdens of the generation before, dampen the spirit of her enthusiasm for the future.

When Aunty Dolores won the car, she kept it for a short period and enjoyed driving around like the rock star she was. She had done what shed set out to do and as her family—like many in Ireland at the time—needed the money, she sold the TMC Costin. Her generosity was not limited to her enthusiasm for the power of the mind, however, as she shared the proceeds from the car sale giving many in her family cash to further their own dynamic thought-wishes, such as the £100 given to her nephew so his rock band could record in a studio.

As for her immediate family, the pains of writer’s cramp from filling out bean can labels seemed a distant memory as they embarked on the gastronomic journey of eating the remaining 14 dozen label-less cans of Batchelors Beans stored under the stairs.

In our world today, where maths and science can de-myth many of our beliefs, we are only at the beginning of understanding the power of our thoughts and our ability to alter our destiny by changing the way we think. Aunty Dolores was a pioneer in this field, and still today this remarkable woman can’t help but exude positivity to all she meets proving once and for all that hope is, most definitely, a doing word.

Find ACT Writers Centre member, Jo Pybus, on Facebook @JoPybusAuthor. Jo is currently writing her first novel.
On Wednesday the 17th of April, Canberra’s premier poetry slam BAD!SLAM!NO!BISCUIT! drew to a bawdy close. It was an auspicious occasion; the final event was also the poetry slam’s 10th birthday. This was no small feat; BadSlam ran on a slavishly maintained routine. Not a single month’s slam was missed within that decade.

The rules of the slam were simple: Sign up at the start of the night and drink away the nerves. When your name was called (pulled from the hat of a nameless “dead bush poet”), you’d get up and perform your poem. No props, no music, your original material, with 2 minutes on stage (or 2:30 if you didn’t mind having a point docked). Anything beyond that would get you dragged off the stage to the repeating chant of “BAD! SLAM! NO! BISCUIT!”.

The judges were randomly picked from the crowd, and scored your poem between 10 (an excellent, if sometimes unwarranted score) and negative infinity (a terrible, if sometimes warranted score). None of this came as any
surprise, for the rules were outlined at the start of each night, to a script BadSlam veterans knew by heart.

Outlining the rules was an ordeal. The process would take half an hour at least; meeting the judges longer still. But you couldn't rush the night, not when the MCs were rambling and fighting on stage like a Punch & Judy puppet show, with plenty of audience interaction liberally sprinkled throughout. But this was part of the ritual of Bad!Slam!—part of its garrulous charm.

We'd stand for the BAD!SLAM!NO!BISCUIT! Canberra National Anthem and declare our allegiance to a YouTube clip—a nonsensical karaoke video montage of our town's sights. We'd laugh and curse and distract the MCs with our heckles, only to bring them back in line minutes later. Whenever the hosts' attention wandered (which was often) they'd be forcibly pulled to task by raucous attendees shouting "Poetry Slam!" to remind them where they were. Newcomers learned their lines on the fly; by the end of the night they'd be heckling like old hands.

But this was, at its core, a poetry competition. Being a competition, BAD!SLAM!NO!BISCUIT! had prizes: First prizes, plural.

Perhaps you performed the highest scoring poem of the night; that earned you first prize. Were you the first poet to perform on the night, or perhaps even a first timer? Tick off any of these (and other) categories, and you'd be crowned an award-winning poet. Since they weren't mutually exclusive categories, poets would routinely leave the slam as multi-award-winning poets.

The prizes themselves were odd and often cracked, but that felt right in a poetry slam where absent judges were replaced on a whim, to be declared "dead in the dumpster out back".

I attended BAD!SLAM!NO!BISCUIT! events for years before ever working up the courage to share a piece myself. I would attend to support schoolmates-turned-poets and marvel at the wordcraft on display.

Back when The Phoenix Bar looked like a wicker and brass-stuffed op shop, I would press myself against the wall, pint in hand, and peer over the masses to the tiny stage in the corner. I didn't understand poetry, but I knew I enjoyed it. At Bad!Slam!, that was enough.

My first poetry slam was there, back in 2012. I didn't perform until 2017, but when I did? I was hooked. Through BAD!SLAM!NO!BISCUIT! I found a career, but more than that, I found a community, a home, and harbour of my own. When writing was therapy, I was permitted to share my experiences as if they—as if I—had worth. Because they allowed it, I came to believe it. Once I did. My oft-rocky mental health improved, and my poetry began taking me around the country—even overseas. My whole life's course was altered by this oddball poetry slam, on that tiny stage in the old Phoenix Bar, and I will forever be grateful for that.

A leviathan died on Wednesday the 17th of April, 2019. You'd be forgiven for not knowing at the time. But now you do.

The void left by the Slam's absence is palpable, and the scene feels all the more quiet in the cold winter nights of Canberra. But as nature abhors a vacuum, so too do creatives without outlet grow restless.

Though whatever comes next will have very large shoes to fill, I have no doubt that Bad!Slam!'s legacy will never truly leave Canberra.

Jerzy Beaumont is a poet and writer, as well as a familiar face to our members in his role as an ACT Writers Centre Administrative Officer.
FIND THE POETRY IN CANBERRA

THE CANBERRA SLAMBOR EE
Gang Gang Café, Shop 4/2 Frencham Place Downer, ACT
Last Friday of every month, free entry, 3-minute slots.
Sign-ups from 7:30pm, poetry starts at 8. Doesn’t cost to enter, but donations towards feature acts are collected throughout the night.

THAT POETRY THING THAT IS ON AT SMITH’S EVERY MONDAY
Smith’s Alternative, 76 Alinga St, Canberra ACT 2601
7pm-9pm. Every Monday night, excluding NVQ & Mother Tongue nights
Canberra’s most frequently occurring poetry night, That Poetry Thing, shares their Smith’s stage and slot with Not Very Quiet and Mother Tongue Multilingual poetry, so if you find yourself free on Monday nights there’s something for everyone here.
Most TPT nights have a half-hour open mic to start the night, followed by two featured poets. Open mic nights cost $10 for waged entry, $5 for students and the unwaged. Book launches (which frequently don’t feature open mics) are usually free, so as to spare up attendee funds for book purchases.

NOT VERY QUIET
Smith’s Alternative, 76 Alinga St, Canberra ACT 2601
7pm-9pm. 3rd Monday of every month.
Not Very Quiet at Smith’s Alternative hosts the third Monday night every month at That Poetry Thing That Happens at Smith’s as a space for women’s poetry.
Not Very Quiet journal for women and poetry (eds Moya Pacey and Sandra Renew) publishes two online issues each year, usually in March and September/October.
Featuring poetry readings with invited poets, launches of the Not Very Quiet journal issues, fund raisers for refugees, book launches and special feature events. There is often an open mic session for women and female identifying voices, but not always. There is a door charge ($10/$5) for readings and events with feature poets, but not usually for fund raisers, or book and journal launches.
Contact: notveryquiet@protonmail.com, Website: not-very-quiet.com
Mother Tongue
Multilingual Poetry
Smith’s Alternative, 76 Alinga St, Canberra ACT 2601
Dates TBA, 7pm–9pm.

Like your poetry multilingual? Mother Tongue is a friendly, non-competitive open-mic where all respectful voices are welcomed to share poetry in languages other than English. Reading slots are four minutes long, it can be original or a piece by another poet, and you are encouraged to give either a brief introduction (or a full translation if you prefer) in English, the shared language of the audience. Entry prices vary ($0–10), sign up in advance by emailing: mothertonguemic@gmail.com

Like their Facebook page and/or sign up to the mailing list for more info.

Annual Events

Poetry at the House
ANU, University House
2nd Wed of the month, 7pm.

Meals are available beforehand. Cost: $10 waged, $5 unwaged. For bookings please email gpage40@bigpond.net.au

Poetry at Manning Clark House
11 Tasmania Circuit, Forrest ACT 2603.

7:00 pm entry for 7:30 pm start. $10 entry includes nibbles and wine and door prizes.

For further enquiries, please email the poetry coordinator, Dr Hazel Hall: hazelshall@gmail.com

Australian Poetry Slam Canberra & Queanbeyan Heats

The Australian Poetry Slam is the sole national affair for slam poets to compete with the best for the title of Australian Slam Champion. With qualifying heats all over the country, it’s anyone’s game. More information is available at: http://www.australianpoetryslam.com/finals.

(Be sure to check out the updated slam rules while you’re there.)

National Folk Festival
Exhibition Park
9th–13th of April 2020

The National Folk Festival is Australia’s longest-running, major folk festival, with a solid poetic contingent core to its program. More information is available at: https://www.folkfestival.org.au/
POETRY EXTRACT:
This is Home
Introduction from Tania McCartney

Working with Jackie French and creating the illustrations for *This is Home: Essential Australian Poems for Children* was one of the greatest joys of my career. The National Library of Australia is our country’s literary heart centre, and to bring heart to this book, I photographed a series of textures around the library and grounds—cement, paving, tiling, bark, grass—to use in the illustrations. Along with an astonishing array of poetic talent from all walks of life and slices in time, *This is Home* is designed to touch the heart of little people. And big ones, too.

—Tania McCartney, children’s book author and illustrator

**A DESSERT SKY**

*Jackie Hosking*

Down the track, towards the beach beyond the ocean, out of reach cream cake layers meet the eye spread between the sea and sky orange jelly, jam and sponge down towards the brine they plunge where each begins it’s hard to tell the line betwixt the sky and swell
They left the vine-wreathed cottage and the mansion on the hill,
The houses in the busy streets where life is never still,
The pleasures of the city, and the friends they cherished best:
For love they faced the wilderness—the Women of the West.
The roar, and rush, and fever of the city died away,
And the old-time joys and faces—they were gone for many a day;
In their place the lurching coach-wheel, or the creaking bullock-chains,
O'er the everlasting sameness of the never-ending plains.
In the slab-built, zinc-roofed homestead of some lately taken run,
In the tent beside the bankment of a railway just begun,
In the huts on new selections, in the camps of man's unrest,
On the frontiers of the Nation, live the Women of the West.
The red sun robs their beauty and, in weariness and pain,
The slow years steal the nameless grace that never comes again;
And there are hours men cannot soothe, and words men cannot say
The nearest woman's face may be a hundred miles away.
The wide bush holds the secrets of their longing and desires,
When the white stars in reverence light their holy altar fires,
And silence, like the touch of God, sinks deep into the breast
Perchance He hears and understands the Women of the West.
FACES IN THE STREET

Henry Lawson
(abridged)

They lie, the men who tell us for reasons of their own
That want is here a stranger, and that misery’s unknown;
For where the nearest suburb and the city proper meet
My window-sill is level with the faces in the street
Drifting past, drifting past,
To the beat of weary feet
While I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.
And cause I have to sorrow, in a land so young and fair,
To see upon those faces stamped the marks of Want and Care;
I look in vain for traces of the fresh and fair and sweet
In sallow, sunken faces that are drifting through the street
Drifting on, drifting on,
To the scrape of restless feet;
I can sorrow for the owners of the faces in the street.

Extract from This is Home: Essential Australian Poems for Children by Jackie French (selected by) and Tania McCartney (illustrator), published by NLA Publishing in 2019, ISBN 9780642279385, $34.99 RRP.
EXTRACT
Penelope Hanley’s After She Left

Three women. Three generations. One city.

After She Left

Penelope Hanley
They were all in the kitchen—Maureen, Jimmy, Nessie, Steve and Melanie—when Keira came home and joined them.

“Too many cooks,” Mel said, shooing them out except for Steve.

Keira asked what they’d been doing all day as they settled round the table in the adjoining dining room.

“Fixing some things around the house,” said Jimmy.

“That’s the landlord’s job,” said Keira.

“Does he do it?”

“No.”

“That’s okay, then. Did you notice Mum’s cleaned the house from top to bottom?”

“Yeah, fantastic—thank you!”

“And I looked through your photos, Keira,” said Maureen. “There are some lovely ones of Alan. I hadn’t realised how serious it was until Saturday.”

“Maybe I hadn’t, either. But he was the first real grownup I’ve ever dated.” Her voice was wistful.

“He knows so much and it felt so right with him. I felt as if he took my hand and pulled me up to a higher plane—one of classical music, architecture, film, politics…”

Maureen raised an eyebrow, appraising Keira for a moment. “But it was more than a type of teacher/student exchange, wasn’t it?” she said.

“Mmmmmm. It was the way he smells.”

Jimmy burst out laughing and Maureen joined him. Keira gave a rueful laugh.

“Mum,’ said Keira, ‘you know I’m on the Pill, don’t you?”

Maureen fished a cigarette out of her pack and lit it. “Better than having an illegitimate baby.”

Steve dashed in with fistfuls of cutlery and set the table while Maureen continued: ‘Specially with a man who wants to have his cake and eat it, too.’

“Ah, a man after my own heart,” said Steve, heading back to the kitchen where they heard the loud snap of a tea-towel on his jeans. “Ow! Just kidding, Mel!” said Steve and then yelled out, “Red or white wine, people, any preferences?”

“I drink anything,” called Jimmy.

“Surprise us,” said Maureen.

Keira continued. “That’s simplistic though, Mum, to be fair, when Alan and I had agreed that jealousy’s an old-fashioned concept of bourgeois possessiveness.”

“You can have all the high-minded ideals you like about that but when it comes to love, the heart knows what it wants, and it generally doesn’t want to share what it wants with someone else.”

“The heart has its reasons that reason cannot know,” said Steve, dashing in to put salt and pepper shakers on the table. “Pascal said that.”

Mel came in with a dish of grated parmesan. She looked at Keira, enthusiasm sparkling in her blue eyes. “There’s an article in Cleo about how to get over a break-up. It says you should buy a new dress, put on make-up and go out with anyone who asks, in fact, ask your exes out—anyone good-looking—if it’s probable that you’ll see your ex—your current ex.”
“Yeah, Keir – never forget: there are plenty of fish and chips in the sea!” yelled Steve from the kitchen.

Nessie carried in a tray with six glasses on it and said, “No, Keir, you should throw yourself into your work—nothing better for the dark night of the soul.”

“Don’t elevate my pain to a philosophical crisis,” said Keira, “I’m only going through a dark night of the heart.” She sniffed an exaggerated theatrical sniff.

“I wouldn’t dismiss your pain so lightly,” said Nessie, “when jealousy hits someone who thought that jealousy was an outmoded bourgeois convention, that’s a serious philosophical blow.”

“It’s not so much jealousy, but that he was dishonest for so long.”

“How long?” asked Steve, sitting down next to Maureen with a bottle of claret and a corkscrew.

“I don’t know. I was too angry to stick around and find out.”

“Anger is therapeutic. It brings up repressed material.” Steve extracted the cork with a loud Thock! “This is what you need.” He sloshed the red liquid into a glass and thrust it towards Keira, who took it. “And as soon as you feel up to it,” continued Steve, “go and see lots of comedies.”

Keira burst into sobs.


Penelope worked for two decades as an editor and is now a freelance writer. Her other publications include a novel and twenty short stories, as well as books commissioned: Creative Lives: Personal Papers of Australian Artists and Writers (NLA, 2009) and Inspiring Australians: The First Fifty Years of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (ASP, 2015). She has a PhD in Communications from the University of Canberra and a BA (Hons) in English Literature from the Australian National University. She loves books, cinema, travel and dancing the Argentine tango.
Excerpt

Songspirals, Gay’wu Group of Women

Songspirals
Sharing women’s wisdom of Country through songlines
Gay’wu Group of Women
We invite you to read this book to find out more about songspirals, and particularly about milkarri. We Yolŋu women from North East Arnhem Land in northern Australia, we cry the songspirals, we keen the songspirals—this is what we call milkarri. Only women keen milkarri. Milkarri is an ancient song, an ancient poem, a map, a ceremony and a guide, but it is more than all this too. Milkarri is a very powerful thing in Yolŋu life.

Ŋuruku miyamanarawu Dhangoala aaaaaaaa…
Wana nyerrpu miyaman ɲunha marrtji Banupanju.
Miyaman marrtji Balwarri Nepaway, Maywundjiwuy.

*Of that body of water I sing, I sing of the body of water.*
*The arm of the paddler is knowledgeable, over there is Banupanju.*
*I am singing about Balwarri, the whale, Nepaway, the open sea.*

When Yolŋu people sing of water, we are singing our deep knowledge of water. We are singing our connection to water. We sing of that body and of our own body, our own bodies of water. For we are not singing of something that is separate from us. We are not singing about water but singing water itself. Of that body of water we sing. We sing of the body of water.

Ŋuruku miyamanarawu Dhanggala aaaaaaaa.
And when we sing of that water, we remake that water, and we remake ourselves and our connections with water and all else that is Country.

Songspirals are many things. They are a story, a big story. They are ceremony with a story in it. They are not a made-up story. Wuymirri is telling a story about that body of water and the whales we see as we journey in our boat, as whales and as ourselves.

When women cry milkarri our tremulous voices sing a story about pain, heartbreak, hope, loss, anger, frustration, happiness and love. When we say love, we are talking about what binds us together. We are talking about loving our family, our land, our life, and loving who we are and where we come from. Yes, because when we cry milkarri for our Country, us women are claiming our self and the land, we are one.

We’re going to be talking about Country a lot as we talk about keening milkarri, because keening milkarri helps create Country. Milkarri enlivens Country, brings it into being again and again as we all unfold together through songspirals.

We sing and keen milkarri for everything, and it is the singing and doing milkarri that brings everything into being. We cry milkarri for everything, from the smallest living creature that lives in the earth to the furthest stars that we can see, for maggots and flies, for the soil and the deep roots. It’s a big responsibility.

We let that feeling flow through us. Let our body be that body of water of which we sing. Let our singing and crying milkarri be that body and our body, and know that we and Country are one, that we are Country, that we must do milkarri, name Country, harmonise with Country so that our knowledge, our sound, the vibration inside us brings Country alive, makes it sacred again and again and again. Of that body of water we sing. And that water sings us.
We start from Bawaka, with the boat, a canoe, that takes us on this songspiral. We could start from many places, as long as they are Yirritja places and are related to the right clan. We could start at Daliwuy Bay or Dhanaya, with that boat. The boat is sailing forever, not coming back. We are sailing to infinity, going on and on and on.

This is a traveller’s story, a traveller’s song, a navigator’s song. This is what a family would do in a canoe. The one in the front would know the way to go and know if there are rocks they can’t go through. They know their way. The eyes are looking and the hands are paddling.

"The arm of the paddler is knowledgeable, over there is Baŋupaŋu." When we sing that the arm of the paddler is knowledgeable, we are saying that the paddler knows where all the places are. This is a deep knowledge, held in their body, in their arm. They name those places, they know those places and so they enliven them. They honour them. They bring them into being, again and again.

The paddler is looking at those places, they know the places are just around the corner, over there. Even with the speedboat as we go out today, fishing or doing other things, we name the places, we know they are there. We know they always have been there and always will be there. It is an acknowledgement of those places. They are still there, were there all the time, are always there in the songspirals.

So our songspirals are in many times. They are in the past and the future. They are in the present. They are eternal stories that talk of our journey after death. And they are everyday stories that talk of us fishing in speedboats. Because—and this is important—the everyday is eternal too.

For Yolŋu, there are layers of depth and meaning in everything. In a songspiral, we cry about getting wet in the rain or feeling mädirriny (the south wind) and so many things that happen on Country. These are not inconsequential. The wind does not just blow. It communicates, it tells us things, it has its own story and Law, its own ceremony. The wind is its being and its becoming. It co-becomes with us and with Country.

So when we sing of a wind in a songspiral we are evoking all those things and more. Fishing and sitting and feeling the breeze are everyday things, but they are also sacred things, deep things, knowledgeable things, meaningful things. Sacred, yes, but not like a religion, not in a way that means they are more special or more linked to our creation and our being than anything else. Everything is sacred. We do not believe in this or that. We are those things. Songspirals are those things. Songspirals are life.

When someone sings this song, they are singing about the paddler seeing those places. So the singer is also with the paddler. The singer sees it, the singer is there. They are that water, and that paddler. We travel along the land. We travel along the water. They are thinking about those places, the trees, that raŋi (beach) where the paddler was born, where they grew up. It is all about remembering the paddler, telling a story about who they are, about their place and their journey, which is our journey too. Even a person who has never been there goes there, through those songs.

EXTRACT
Kate Cramond’s *Beating My Breast—
a diary of life and connection*
It was spring, nearly a year out from my breast cancer diagnosis. At a time when everyone expected me to dust myself off and move on, I felt worse than ever. So I started a diary—hoping to sift through the quagmire in my head and make sense of what was going on in my body.

2 September 2014

It’s another glorious spring day. My dog has found a patch of sunshine at my feet and there’s a currawong calling from a gumtree across the road. But this morning, like most mornings of late, I woke feeling sad. My hand went to my right breast, the one that had the lump. The lump that is now gone, along with a chunk of my breast. A physical reminder that there’s no going back.

Nonetheless my body is rejuvenating. The strange stiffness in my muscles from radiotherapy is fading, I’ve put on weight and have a funky hairdo. Somebody I work with said I look like Annie Lennox, woo hoo!

Yes, I’m going back to work. Going back… those words make me anxious. If there are any perks from having cancer, Changing Your Life should be one of them. Time to shake off the badness and move with the gladness. Or something like that.

My life changed immediately, sure. I sat around at home for months feeling like crap. My thoughts were muddled, my emotions down the toilet. I became needy, not something that sits well with someone like me.

I’m still needy.

Nature has given us this incredible ability to think and feel and want, but despite our best efforts we’re confined by the demands of our bodies. It’s just a quirk of physiology that lets us believe that our minds are somehow separate, that we can rise above our chemistry.

Let me tell you about chemotherapy, just to prove my point.
1 June 2015

It's officially winter now. Three weeks until the shortest day of the year, but not the coldest. Did you know it's often colder after the winter solstice? It takes a while for the earth's deep warmth to dissipate, and even as the days are lengthening there's a similar lag before the earth gathers heat again.

I enjoy this time when the days are closing in and the cold is here to stay. It's as if I've been given permission to look inwards. To step back from things for a while.

Yes, it's true I've been doing that for over a year and a half now, but this feels different. My head is clearing, my body is growing stronger—even if at a snail's pace.

When I was young, I imagined there was a real me who just needed locating. (There she is—isn't she great?) Once found, I'd be this true person who made sense. To be honest, I never really stopped believing that until... you know. Cancer Kate came along.

Is this a blinding revelation? No. But it's kind of entertaining.

Let me start with Tamoxifen. It's over six months since I last swallowed a pill and I can still feel its effects. Mostly in those wobbly moments of gloom before rising. Or when a tidal wave of hopelessness crashes over me, convincing me that I'm useless, washed up and pathetic beyond imagining. Tamoxifen has this way of digging out my deepest darkest fears, my most shameful emotions, and burying me in them.

In the past, I knew these feelings and sometimes felt their hot breath, but rarely got burnt. More and more, that is again who I am.

I'm returning to my own peculiar brand of weirdness. Yay, she's back! But who is she?

Ah, back to my point.

I am a chemical creature—sometimes heartbreakinglly so. By now I've made that pretty clear. The food I eat, the chemicals I put in my system or that find their way in, and the chemicals my body manages—hormones, neurotransmitters and more—they all affect me. But I'm more than chemicals: I'm a cloud of energy and atoms influenced by... pretty much everything.

We all know how the weather influences us and, perhaps less so, the earth's energy fields around us. Some places are invigorating, others heavy and lifeless. We don't know why, we just feel it. Then there's people. Whether we notice or not, we're all affected by the energy of others. Think of the people we love to be around, and the ones who make us cringe. Some people bring out the best in us, others the worst.

I feel like one of those Magic 8 balls that you shake and it gives you an answer. Shake me today and receive "signs point to yes". Tomorrow, "reply hazy, try again". Or my favourite: "cannot predict now". Yep, that pretty much sums things up. There's no standard, no yardstick at my centre. Who I am changes, day by day. I'm cool with that. For today at least.

Kate Cramond grew up on an orchard in South Australia, and fondly remembers climbing trees and pelting her brothers and sisters with apples. At university she studied biological sciences, in between bushwalking, climbing mountains and driving all over the place. After that she settled into an assortment of environmental jobs, in between writing stories, marrying and raising two awesome daughters. Getting breast cancer wasn't exactly on her "to do" list, but it did give her plenty to write about. She hopes her words will help others.
Harry Hartog booksellers has just launched at the Australian National University. The store has a large range of new and second-hand books as well as graphic novels and gifts. We met with Store Manager Glen Williams and Events coordinator Katarina Pearson to see how they’re settling in to the ANU campus.
How have you found being located within the Australian National University campus?

G – In a word, unique. The fitout, like all Harry Hartogs, is completely individual and the mix of merchandise that we stock and sell. Unique. The location - front and centre of a beautiful, peaceful new precinct in the heart of Australia’s premier university. Unique. It’s a truly lovely place to work.

“We have been welcomed with open arms and have embraced in return.”

Since opening, the shop has played host to a large number of events and workshops. How are you finding the level of engagement with students and the wider community?

K: To my absolute delight it has been overwhelming! The original concept of having Harry Hartog ANU at the heart of the new Kambri precinct was to offer a literary hub supportive of not only the University itself but the wider Canberra literary community and it is proving to be just that. We have been welcomed with open arms and have embraced in return. Working together with the likes of the ANU meet the Author series, ANUSA, ANU Literary Society, various faculties, local and interstate authors and the ACT Writers Centre have all been contributing factors, helping to strengthen the bond within our local community. I can see this developing even further, offering a powerful sense of belonging and support on so many levels, admired nationwide!
Katarina, you've been in the book selling industry for a long time, what has kept you so involved?

K: Pretty much every aspect of the industry. Firstly being surrounded by such wonderful knowledge that books have to offer on a day to day basis is just an amazing feeling. The opportunity of continuous discovery is an exciting premise to build ones career on. The local literary community is another aspect of the industry that cannot be rivalled – the talent, commitment and full hearted support, motivates me on a daily basis to promote all it has to offer as far and wide as possible. The daily interaction with customers, fellow booklovers has also been a great influence in the longevity of my working life. Being able to advise, assist and guide readers to the next great read or simply share similar book related experiences, comes with great satisfaction.

What is your favourite section of the store?

G: History. Finding interesting stories about things I never could have dreamed would have happened. The world has seen some fascinating events.

K: Being the Events coordinator at Harry Hartog ANU, I would have to say it is the Upcoming and Previous Events Section. The selection of titles is so eclectic which just illustrates the broad range of events we do. From personal journeys, local, national and international fiction to political commentaries – there is something there for everyone! They are all new releases making each one very current and topical – great section to discover something new and pick up a flier about what new events are coming!

What are you reading at the moment?

G: A pre-release copy of Silver, the new novel by Chris Hammer (October release). I love, love, loved Scrublands (his debut) and couldn’t wait to get my hands on the new one.

K: Well...where do I start! I tend to read the books we have had an event for – thus the list is constantly growing! Just finished Nigel Featherstone’s Bodies of Men, Zoya Patel – No Country Woman, Jono Lineen – Perfect Motion, Joanne Ramos – The Farm.

Glen, do you have any books you consistently recommend to customers?

G – Scrublands. Great book, local author. The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton. I read this at school and loved it "mumble mumble" years ago and I find myself still recommending it for males at about 15, which can be a challenge to get reading sometimes. Among others.
UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES & COMPETITIONS

27 SEPTEMBER

Red Room Poetry Object

Australasia’s largest free poetry-writing competition for young people. Poetry Object ignites imaginations by inviting young writers (Years 3-10) and their teachers to create poems inspired by treasured, curious or talismanic objects.

https://cutt.ly/sweDjfs

30 SEPTEMBER

NWF/joanne burns Microlit Award

Entries are now open for the 2019 joanne burns Microlit Award. Finalists in this award will be offered publication in the Spineless Wonders’ anthology, Scars.

Entries have a maximum word count of 200.

https://cutt.ly/PweJKRP

30 SEPTEMBER

Anne Edgeworth Writers’ Fellowship

This opportunity is provided to an emerging writer in the ACT Region. The Fellowship is worth $5,000 and is to be used to advance the recipients’ education in the craft of writing.

The Fellowship will be made for work in the field of poetry, fiction writing, non-fiction writing, screenwriting and/or playwriting.

https://cutt.ly/KwnNTMg

7 OCTOBER

Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing

Entries are now open for the 2019 New England Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing. Open to entries by published or unpublished writers from anywhere in Australia.

https://cutt.ly/WweHTB7

31 OCTOBER

Glimmer Press

Call for submissions. THRILL ME! will be an anthology of stories to make your heart race. Leave behind preconceived ideas about the thriller genre and see where your keyboard takes you. Glimmer Press are especially interested in stories that challenge the genre and venture into exciting new territory.

https://cutt.ly/dw1Atae

2 NOVEMBER

Odyssey House Victoria Annual Short Story Competition

This annual competition is open to writers of all ages and experience. This year Odyssey House are seeking entries that respond to the theme ‘Family’, which can be told from any aspect of familial relationships or how you perceive them.

https://cutt.ly/KweDvJI
YOUR HELPING HAND
FOR SELF PUBLISHING

LOW COST BOOK PRINTING FROM JUST 10 COPIES
FOR THE ACT WRITERS CENTRE

Bytes n’ Colours also provide hands on assistance in preparing your manuscript for printing as quality perfect bound books. Our design bureau service is also available to assist you with cover design and page layout templates.

Call our help desk for friendly step by step advice and a copy of our Printers guide for file preparation.

Help desk: 0437 441 950

WWW.BYTESNCOLOURS.COM.AU