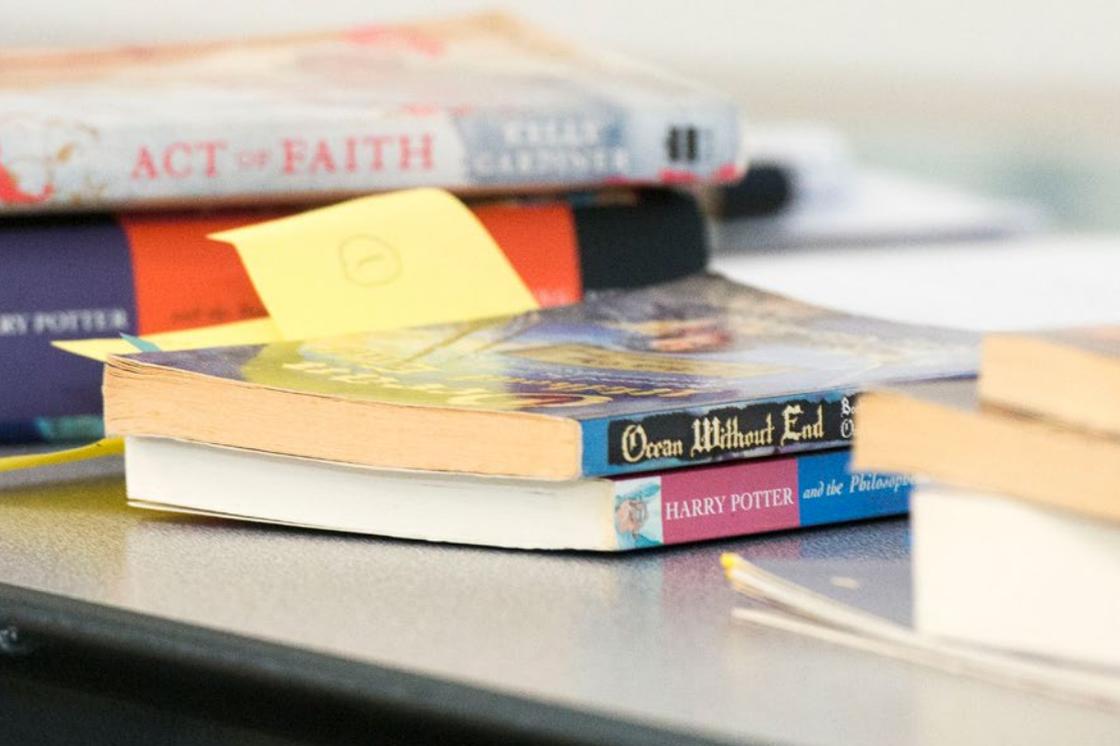




LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

Young
Writers' Awards

Anthology **2017**



'I write because it's fun. Because I like creating something that I'm in control of. Because it's like being an explorer in an unknown country, finding my way through the dense undergrowth of plot and the uncharted wildernesses of character. Because I always figured that I could do what those writers I read did. Because I get to meet other writers. Because of the thrill I get when I see my name on the cover. Because of the thrill I get when someone says, "I liked your book". Because there are important things to say. Because reading's important. Because I want reading to be seen as a viable alternative form of recreation. Because it's an urge to tell a story. Because it's part of a long, long tradition going back to the dawn of time and I felt its call.'

Michael Pryor, Australian author – award-winning Australian author of over thirty books for children and young adults

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Anthology foreword

2017 marks La Trobe University's 50th birthday. We have much to celebrate.

For 50 years, we have been committed to delivering excellent teaching and student learning opportunities to local Victorian communities.

Our record of achievement is impressive culminating this year in our best ever performance in global rankings. La Trobe is rated 301 in the world, a leap of more than 200 places in just two years. Our Humanities and Social Sciences is ranked in the top 200 worldwide.

La Trobe University also proudly celebrates the achievements of its students, both past and present. We aim to ensure that our students flourish by offering a consistently high-quality student experience that is enjoyable, academically successful and leads to good career outcomes. Our goal is to improve students' employment prospects further by developing the sorts of skills and capabilities employers tell us are important to the future workforce.

The Young Writers' Awards foster one such skill, communication. Each year we invite Year 10 students from Victoria and guest border schools to submit a creative writing piece for review by our distinguished University Alumni and eminent staff members from the Department of Creative Arts and English. The standard of entries improves each year.

To hone skills further, La Trobe also hosts a series of intensive writing skills workshops across Victoria which has involved over 950 Year 10 students from many diverse communities. Positive feedback from students is overwhelming with over 74% indicating an increase in writing skills and confidence due to participation.

Today, we celebrate this year's entrants to the Young Writers' Awards. My congratulations to the students, their families and teachers. My best wishes to you for continued success in your creative writing and future careers.

Professor Anthony McGrew

Pro Vice-Chancellor

College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce

The Department of Creative Arts and English grew from the desire to harness the creative talents of students across the disciplines of Screen Studies, Visual Arts, Theatre and English.

Our students have the opportunity to study many forms of writing including fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, script-writing and storytelling across a range of platforms. We are therefore delighted to have this opportunity to support young Australian writers who exemplify the imagination and commitment to creativity that we aim to foster in our students, teaching and higher degree practice-led research.

The department leads our community in providing distinctive subjects and courses that allow our students the potential to draw on both theory and practice. We employ specialised creative writing staff, who as award-winning authors, offer the kinds of practical and reflective or analytical skills that drive Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe. Students in the Bachelor of Arts can take English and Creative and Professional Writing majors which combine genre study, literary history, theory and creative writing. In a more interdisciplinary framework, students can also take the Writing major in the Bachelor of Creative Arts where they have the opportunity to explore multiple forms of literary, professional and performance-based creative writing.

It is indeed exciting to see the breadth of talent in this collection of writing by young creative Australians. Our congratulations not only extend to these selected authors, but also their teachers, mentors and parents who nurture such creativity. We hope that you will consider a future with Creative Arts and English. The very best of luck with your current studies, writing pursuits and exceptional stories that we look forward to reading in years to come.

Associate Professor Terrie Waddell

Head of the Department of Creative Arts & English School of Humanities and Social Sciences College of the Arts, Social Sciences, and Commerce

RATTLED

BY VICTORIA ATTWOOD

“Give it back.” His mum used her no-nonsense voice, as she kept her eyes on the road.

“No.” Tommy was bored and sick of sitting in the car. Besides, Chrissy’s rattle was fun to play with. It made a nice jingly noise when he shook it.

“Please honey, just give your sister her rattle back.”

Noticing the missing rattle, Chrissy started to cry.

His mum sighed, changing lanes as she did.

Softly, as if her voice might ease the baby back to sleep, she demanded he give it back.

The toddler pouted, his mum was always telling him what to do and it was time he set her straight.

“No!”

“Tommy, if you give it back you can have a treat.” A treat? Maybe he should give Chrissy her toy back.

As the car stopped at a red light, he caught sight of a grown-up with golden hair looking at him from the bus stop. He wound down his window to wave at her. Smiling, she waved back. The baby wailed.

“Shhh. Shhh. It’s all right.” His mum tried and failed to soothe the baby whilst driving. Tommy started to taunt Chrissy with the rattle. He’d hold it out in front of her and then, just as she was about to grab it, he’d pull it away. He giggled at her screwed-up nose each time he took it out of her reach.

“Tommy stop that!” Stretching her arm behind the front seat, his mum tried to swat his hand away. She took her eyes off the road...

...

Waiting for the bus sucked. Lily needed to get home, she had a photography project due tomorrow morning. So really, when she thought about it, it shouldn’t surprise her that the bus was late.

Her phone beeped. Avery had tagged her in yet another cringe-worthy photo, captioned *#bestie*. God, she needed to distance herself from Avery. Like, she was sweet and everything but she was just too clingy for Lil to deal.

Glancing up from her phone, she noticed a red SUV pull up in the car lane closest to the bus stop. A woman sat in the front, tapping her steering wheel. A little boy was waving something around in the back. Maybe a rattle? Hearing a baby’s cry from the car, she decided it was definitely a rattle. Seeing her, the little boy opened the window and waved. She smiled and waved back. What a cutie – even if he had probably stolen his sibling’s toy. The lights turned green and the car rolled onwards.

“Good afternoon, how are you today?” the bus driver greeted her. With a start, Lil realised the bus had pulled into her stop.

“Sorry, I was daydreaming.”

“All good, we’re all entitled to–”. A loud smashing noise pierced the air. Lily whirled round to see a rattle fly up in the air.

...

"Seriously Jake, we need to hurry up." She tried to coax him into a faster walk along the path, its emptiness contrasting nicely with the busy road opposite it.

"Haze, it's only quarter past 4!" Why was she so worried?

"Yeah, but by the time I make the salad, get dressed, do my makeup and then drive at least 30 minutes to your parents' house..." With each word, she increased her walking pace. Oh, Jake realised, she was stressed to meet his mum and dad.

"Honey it's going to be fine, they'll love you."

"I know." Despite her bravado, she smiled and gave him a quick hug. Over her shoulder, he noticed a red SUV accelerating fast, too fast, on the opposite side of the road. Straight into the back of a car switching into that lane.

"Oh God..." He stared, unmoving, until he saw a bus driver abandon his post and begin to sift through the pieces of metal. "Ambulance. Hazel, call an ambulance!" he yelled, as he ran across the road.

"Mate, are you all right?" he asked, as a man shakily got out of his car – the one that had just been crashed into.

"Yeah... I'm all right. Go help the other car."

The car was completely totalled. Thankfully, the bus driver had already pulled out a hysterical toddler and was now reaching for another child.

Jake heard a moaning noise and moved to pull at the front of the car. "Hey, can I have some help? There's someone over here," Jake called, then sighed with relief at the sight of paramedics arriving.

...

"She-didn't-stop-but-she-but-I-thought-I-mean-she-it-was-fast-and-"

"Mate, stop. Just take a deep breath." Pete tried to sound reassuring. "Ok, what's your name?"

"I'm Johnny – err Jonathon Rethen."

"Johnny, I'm Constable Pete Gowan. Can you tell me what happened?"

Gulping, Johnny told him. As he listened, Pete couldn't help but sigh internally.

His birthday had been going so well.

His daughter had even made him breakfast in bed...

"Thank you, sweetie."

"It's the least I can do for you in your old age."

"Hey! I'm turning 48 not 84! You owe me a cake for that."

"Deal." Avery had laughed.

Damn! He was probably going to get home too late to eat it with her now.

"And then she drove," the poor guy blubbered, "straight into my car..."

Yeah, Pete could see that, as he turned to look at the scrap metal which had once been a SUV.

...

It had been quite an exhausting day. Opening the front door, Pete smiled to see a chocolate cake sitting iced on the kitchen table.

"Happy Birthday!"

...

After talking briefly to a constable, Jake walked back over to Hazel and buried his face in her arms. She stroked his hair. They stayed like that for a long time.

...

When Lily saw the bus driver, Bob, pull out the toddler, the pressure in her heart had lessened. It was going to be ok.

...

Inside the ambulance, Tommy still wasn't sure where Chrissy's rattle had gone, but as she wriggled happily in his arms, he didn't think she minded too much. His mum smiled at them as the paramedics carried her into the ambulance.

'With its multiple points of view, this is an ambitious story that cleverly engages with the theme by depicting a road accident, while also reminding us of how our lives intersect with those of others. The characters are drawn with great economy and their mini-dramas are convincing.'

YWA judge

AD ASTRA PER ASPERA

A ROUGH ROAD LEADS TO THE STARS

BY CRYSTAL CHOO

1860

10 miles to freedom

"Swing low, sweet chariot, Comin' for to carry me home!" The melody rings out into the silence, challenging anything in the vicinity to match its harmonious resonance. We were told to maintain absolute silence but we're close now, the border lies within our grasp and the fear of capture seemingly washed away with the rain. The excitement is tangible, dancing on the notes that sing out from the 15 slaves. The small horse-drawn cart travels at a pace not nearly quick enough to match the mood.

I look down at George, my younger brother, napping peacefully on my shoulder. It's been three weeks now since we left the plantation. Though the road has made it seem more like three years.

Richmond, Virginia. 350 miles to freedom

We stow away under the cover of a warm summer night. When I ask Mama where we're going, she gives me no answer, only instructing me to quickly gather my non-existent belongings while she awakened George. We hastily leave the cramped hut, miraculously not arousing any of the five other slaves we share the space with.

I try again to ask Mama where we're going but she silences me with a fierce glare.

"Don't speak again until I tell you to, understand?" I nod and close my mouth, following her into the darkness without another word.

...

"Mama, can we stop?" I look at my bare feet, the hours spent alternating between a brisk walk and run have rendered them covered in dirt and cuts. The first rays of sunlight will peek out from the horizon in a few hours. Mama agrees and I collapse onto a nearby patch of grass. She remains standing, looking out for something I can't see. Her eyes narrow at the dark before turning their attention to me.

"If I ever tell you to run I want you to take your brother and run, as fast as you can, never look back, you hear?"

"But what about you?"

"Don't you worry about me. My two children matter more."

"Three," I correct, but she ignores me.

"Now look here." She points up. It's a clear night and the amount of stars that litter the sky are innumerable.

"See that one star near the top there?" Her hand traces the sky and stops at one near the edge of the stars.

"If you're ever lost, I want you to follow it. It'll take you north."

"What's gonna be at north?" I question.

"Freedom," she replies, her eyes still on the stars.

200 miles to freedom

The underground railroad I am told, to my disappointment, is no railroad at all, simply a code word. Conductors are those who transport slaves, stations are safe houses, and we are the new passengers.

We're trekking through northern Virginia, hidden by the dense forest when I finally ask Mama the question that's been weighing on my mind.

"Are we doing this because of Tom, Mama?" She doesn't give me a reply but I can tell by her expression that we are.

Mama was never the same after Tom was sold. My older brother was strong, that's what everyone said, and by the time he was 15 he could cut down more sugar canes than anyone on the plantation. He commanded a high price and was sold to a bigger plantation down south in Tennessee. George and I cried and cried for days, but Mama, she didn't let a single drop fall from her eyes. People said Tom was strong but Mama, she was stronger.

"No one will be taken away, not anymore," Mama says, a hint of grief leaking through her armour. But she lied.

150 miles. 3 miles from the state border

We are a hair's breadth from the border when we hear it. The sound of hooves. Echoing through the night like the whispers of an impending storm. I look to Mama and find the colour has drained from her face. Slave hunters.

"So close as well." She mutters under her breath, so soft that I strain to hear it. She looks out into the darkness, moonlight emphasizes the sharp planes of her face. There's nothing there of course, but three miles beyond where we're standing is the next station, the first safe house in a free state, we could end the journey there if we wished.

"Mama, what are we gonna do?" I look to my mother, her face is set in an unreadable expression.

"Take care of your brother," she says planting a kiss upon George's head. She turns to me.

"Follow the North Star. It will guide you."

Panic seizes my heart in an unyielding grip.

"Mama, I don't understand."

"I love you." Her face softens as she briefly touches my cheek.

Her eyes gleam with unshed tears. Tears that would remain unshed for she would not show any sign of weakness. No, not my mother.

She parts George and I with a single word and does the same herself.

"Run."

...

George and I roam for a good two days before I spot it, the safe house. I call to mind the story of Exodus, told to me countless times at church, the Israelites brought out of slavery only to roam the desert for 40 years. But I am of a kinder fate. It only takes two days of cursing at the stars until they hear me and provide deliverance.

That night I finally let myself cry.

New York. 0 Miles

Everyone crowds the back of the cart, trying to get a glimpse of it, to construct a proper image of what it looks like – freedom. The street is painted in underwhelming shades of greys however judging by the faces of those around me you might as well have opened the golden gates of heaven.

The conductor stops the cart on the side of the road and relays more instructions to us about going further north. But we're only half listening until he says something neither me nor anyone sitting in that wagon will ever forget.

"You are free now."

All of us stand there on the side of the road. Some in confusion, some in awe, some happy enough to remain standing there for the whole day.

I do the only thing I know how to do.

I run.

But this time into the arms of freedom.

'This story was engaging, tense, and convincing from the first paragraph until the last. The quotations from songs work seamlessly – so do the shifts in time and place. There was a solid sense of each of the characters' anguish and determination, drawn deftly and quickly.'

YWA judge

BIG GIRLS CAN'T FLY

BY MEG FUNSTON

On a night like this, I'd usually be told to come inside. My legs are wet even through my jeans and the chill of the wind has found its way through the holes in my cardigan.

"It's dangerous to be up there, sweetie. You'll catch a cold," Mum would warn.

"You're not laying slating. Get down from there." Dad's never had much time for nonsense.

But neither of them are fretting over me today. Mum's packing her things, and Dad started a bottle at lunch-time. It's probably time that I started to pack, but to be perfectly honest, I'm much happier swinging my legs off the edge of the roof.

I used to think I could fly, maybe I dreamt it once, but when you're that young dreams are your reality. Violet and I came up here once, just to watch the sunset. Dad was supposed to be looking after us, but the footy was on, and he had a beer in his hand. I told Violet about how a fairy had given me some magic dust and that I could soar away with the wind if I wanted. I won't forget the arch of her eyebrow, inquisitive yet smug and competitive. I had everything to prove, she was older and smarter, but, if I could fly my inadequacy would be a distant memory. I wonder if she remembers my mum that day, running over from the driveway, dropping the groceries on the way and leaving Benny strapped in his car-seat crying.

"Get the f--- down from there." It was the first time I had heard my mum swear, and the first time I feared her. Once Benny was down for the night, Violet and I started to hear the shouting and the glass breaking. Doors were slammed shut and flung back open. The two of us hid under the blankets and blocked our ears. She was terrified, horrified, as it was the first time she'd heard something like this. I was used to it by this point, it just hurt my ears. Violet didn't come over again after that night.

I called her last night, Violet that is. I'm not sure why, maybe to say goodbye, maybe I wanted to prove that I wasn't lying, and that I'm finally using my magic dust and flying away. The phone didn't even ring, she'd disconnected her number and I don't have her new one. It seemed odd, usually she would have posted her new number somewhere. Maybe I should message her? I was going to go up to her today at school, but she was with so many people and none that I had met. I pull my phone out of my pocket, rubbing the smudges out on my jeans.

*Just letting you know, I'm moving.
So, bye I guess*

She didn't reply.

I wonder what people at school will say when I'm gone? What will they say tomorrow? In a week? Will they even say anything? People always talk about these things when they're dying, and I guess just that tiny bit of me is. I don't even know if there is anyone who will remember me. Violet might think of me, maybe she will remember that night. I guess my teachers will know I've left when they mark me absent. There are other girls at school who will know I'm gone, but as far as remembering me, I don't know if there's anyone.

I'm going with Mum tomorrow; I was never really offered a choice. Children should be with their mothers, at least according to her. She says Dad will be better off as his own man, rather than as a father. I don't know about that, but I know Mum has a job and a stable income and that I can't say the same for Dad. Technically Grandpa still owns the house, so it's Mum, Benny and I who are leaving. Tonight is the last time I will be able to sit on this roof, swing my feet off its edge. The last time that I'll wish to fly, because really, I'm not heavy and maybe the wind will catch me.

I stand up too quickly and my head blurs, it takes me a second but I shuffle my feet forward slowly, until my toes curl over the edge. The slope down is steep and the slating is still slippery from the rain, but I've been up here before, this is my roof and I won't fall, not on accident. I let the wind hit my back and extend my arms. Whether I fly or fall, I'm still leaving this place, I'm still vanishing.

It's the sound of Benny crying that snaps me out of it. I have forgotten why I came up here in the first place. I did not jump, I will not fly, nor will I fall and I know now why Mum swore. Little girls can't fly, and big girls know that.

'Big Girls Can't Fly instantly sets a mood, and the precarious position of the protagonist. The structure is complex, yet appears effortless. The mixture of longing, uncertainty and dream colliding with hard realities casts a spell.'

YWA judge

COMATOSE

BY ANTIGONY HAIKALIS

My eyes flutter open. As I slowly stretch, I turn to the man beside me and, barely suppressing a yawn, ask where I am. The man in the faded blue seat beside me tells me not only where I am but where we are going.

I wish that was how I woke up. Instead, I am jerked to consciousness as the man occupying the seat beside me stands up and shuffles past me into the aisle, elbowing me on the way through. I give an undignified shriek, but receive a head turn and sigh instead of the anticipated apology. He turns and continues his slow shuffle to the front of the bus where he pauses and waits for the bus to slow. Coming to a halt, the doors open seamlessly. He steps off, and we begin to move once more. "May I sit here?"

"...critical but stable condition...has she woken up yet? Not yet...difficult to determine with patients in a coma..."

An elderly woman smiles at me, pale blue eyes twinkling as she reaches into her purse and presses a yellow sweet into my hand. "For you," she tells me gently, hobbling to take the seat beside me. Taking the lolly from its plain wrapping and popping it onto my tongue, I gag at the overwhelming citrus flavour. I cough out a thank you. "I'm sure a lolly isn't what you really want, dear," she remarks. "You'd prefer answers." I nod. "You remember nothing." I nod. "This is your first time here." The last part is less of a question. She exhales deeply and indicates the window.

I watch as vast plains of green flash past, the occasional tree dotting the landscape, a sky devoid of clouds overlooking it all. "Is this your place?" I feel myself shake my head. "You stay here with me, dear. You'll know when it's your stop. Don't fall asleep now, it'd be a terrible shame for you to miss it. In the meantime, why don't you check your pockets?" I do so and inside find a coin and crumpled photograph. A young girl and her mother feature. "Do you know them?" the woman beside me questions. I don't.

"...thank you for letting us see her...hey honey... everything's going to be okay...you rest... we'll be here waiting for you..."

Outside, the landscape begins to change. The flat plains give way to rolling hills, the rolling hills become dense forest, and soon it is night. I nudge the woman beside me and ask where her photograph is. Does she have a coin, too? "No, dear, I chose my purse, see?" She displays a black handbag, the leather marked with creases from being well-used and well-loved. I ask how she knows all of this, when I woke up with no memory at all. She smiles. "I've been here a couple of times before, dearie. Now you just sit back and rest. Don't fall asleep now, will you?" I comply.

"...it's been days...condition improved...miss her... how much longer will she be like this...can't be sure..."

The day breaks in a burst of lavender and rose. The landscape has shifted to match, carpeted in a sea of wildflowers. I fiddle with the coin, running my finger across the grooves etched into the side. Every few minutes or hours or maybe days, the elder beside me asks me the same couple of questions. "Is this your place, dear? Do you remember?" Every time, I shake my head. She warns me, "Don't fall asleep yet, dearie." I don't. I'm not tired. But I notice every so often her head begins to droop and her eyes begin to close, and as time progresses it takes a firmer tug of the sleeve to wake her. The bus occasionally comes to a halt, and someone stands and leaves us. The little boy across from my seat falls asleep and doesn't wake up.

"...honey, we miss you...remember that we love you...your brother wants to talk to you...brought you my lucky coin...see ma...hey wake up! I thought the coin would fix..."

Elsewhere, two parents sob over the death of their son.

I ask the old woman how long this bus will drive for, how long this road is. "It will travel for as long as you see fit. The road is longer than you'll ever need." The bus slows; a couple embrace each other; she steps off the bus and he remains. He moves back into his seat, shuts his eyes, and doesn't wake up.

"...left you so many cards...if you're listening, why haven't you come back...we miss you, darling..."

Elsewhere, a newly widowed woman laments the death of her husband.

The old lady presses another lemon sweet into my hand. "Take this, dear. Make sure you don't fall asleep and miss your stop! I'll leave you here, it's my turn." I question her, ask how it can be her stop when the bus hasn't slowed down. She tells me, "Don't worry, dearie. I'm just going to have a short nap now. You talk to the boy over there, you tell him to check his pockets." I furrow my brow and oblige. He clutches a sunny yellow yoyo. He, too, remembers nothing.

"...honey, listen...a few weeks...they don't know if you'll wake up...come back soon, please..."

I turn to the elderly woman to ask her if the strange feeling in the pit of my stomach means I'm nearing my stop. But she's asleep, and no amount of sleeve-tugging will wake her. The bus is slowing now. I take a chance. As it comes to a halt I'm ready and standing by the door, and soon I'm outside. The bus rumbles off on a road that stretches far into the distance in both directions. I gaze down at the photograph, coin and lolly. And then I wake up properly.

"M-ma?"

"You're... you're finally awake."

"She's awake!"

"Honey, you're home."

Elsewhere, an elderly man weeps over the death of his wife.

'This sophisticated story creates a sense of intrigue by leaving the reader to create their own backstory as to what has occurred to the protagonist. I was particularly struck by the line, "The road is longer than you'll need". This is indicative of the author's impressive resistance to the temptation to over-explain. The ability to leave things unsaid is one of this story's strongest features.'

YWA judge

THE ROAD OF REBIRTH

BY IMAN IBRAHIM

The bundle in her arms grew heavier with each step.

Her booted feet hit the dusty road with a steady *thump, thump, thump*, and every movement reverberated through her frail, weary body.

The bleak grey sky overhead bore down on her, but the mother continued her journey. She had not expected to find what she sought, had not expected the road to be real, but to her surprise – and perhaps relief – she had found it.

She'd parked her car around the bend, and after she had taken out the unmoving bundle from the back seat and the shovel from the trunk, she'd walked through the dead, overgrown grass and found her way to this barren stretch of dusty road. The ground underneath her feet was littered with yellowed weeds and small pebbles, and each step sent clouds of dust billowing into the air. But still she persevered.

She had heard many tales of this road, whispered from the lips of once-distraught mothers and widows, passed down from one healed family to another, but there was never a reason for her to seek it out. Now, it seemed, she had no other choice.

The road stretched far and wide, and the end was nowhere near in sight. There was no sign of life, and no gravestones either – only large, rough boulders scattered here and there.

A distant crack of thunder caused her to pick up speed.

The mother found a patch of soft-looking earth on the side of the road and decided that it would have to do. She set down her bundle and the shovel she'd brought along, and headed towards the cluster of large stones nearby. She wouldn't need a big one – only one large enough to work.

She chose a dark grey, almost black rock, its surface nicked with imperfections but its edges perfectly rounded. This was the one.

The mother headed back to her chosen spot and picked up the shovel.

The first push was the hardest.

For a long while, all she did was dig. It was an effort to unearth the hard soil, but after the first few shovels, she regained a new strength. Each push was a prayer, each turn was a promise, and every time she discarded the soil, she bargained away a piece of her soul.

Just one more chance, she pleaded for. *I just need some more time.*

When the hole was big enough, she paused, leaning against the shovel and breathing heavily. Wiping the sweat from her brow, the mother stared at the hollow grave, and a tear fell from her eyes.

This was it.

Discarding the shovel, she bent down and picked up the bundle. Wrapped in a soft white blanket and weighing nearly nothing at all, it brought back memories of sadness, of white walls and empty silences and the feeling of being complete one moment and then utterly, completely hollow the next. It brought back the memory of pitying faces and the smell of sanitized hospitals and probing fingers and vacant words.

It brought back death.

Because this right here, this little creation in her hands...this was no longer alive.

She'd brought him here, to try to right this wrong that had been placed in her life, to perhaps give him a chance – even the smallest, slightest chance – of becoming a miracle.

So she placed that little treasure inside the grave...and then she buried him.

The last shovelful of dirt landed, and the mother released the shovel to look down at her blistered hands. She hadn't realised that she'd started crying until now, and she let the tears run down her grimy face and fall into the earth.

She lifted the rock from where she'd set it down earlier – steady and strong and stable – and placed it on top of the too-small grave.

Another explosion of thunder made her look upwards. It was closer this time, and as she stood there sobbing, letting the tears fall and the magic work, the heavens let loose their torrent of rain.

The droplets fell hard and fast, and the mother fell to her knees as she was drenched to the bone, as the sombre clouds unleashed their own teary wail and the hardened soil soaked up the rain. She braced her palms on the wet earth and prayed – prayed for a miracle and a rebirth and a blessing.

Just one more chance.

And when nothing happened, she shakily crawled to her feet and walked back to her car, still parked where she had left it, the doors hanging open and the backseat now empty.

It took her a long while to regain her bearings, and by the time she was ready to leave that road of despair and salvation, her knuckles had turned white from gripping the steering wheel and her mind had emptied of all thought.

She hadn't wished for much throughout her life – a happy family, a good life, and a nice home – and she had hoped that the one time she was given something truly amazing, something she wanted with all her heart, she would have been able to keep it.

But that was not the way it had worked, and she would forever carry that loss in the deepest, darkest part of her soul.

• • •

*A few days later, a basket is laid down
on the doorstep of a lonely house.*

A small, delicate wail emanates from the bundle.

Inside the lonely house lives a mother,

*A mother who carries the burden of loss and
guilt and regret with each breath she takes.*

But the basket is her salvation.

*Because inside the basket, wrapped in
a white blanket, is a healthy baby boy.*

*And around the boy's throat lays a necklace
of dark grey, almost black stone,*

*its surface nicked with imperfections
but its edges perfectly rounded,*

Steady and strong and stable.

'A terrific piece of speculative fiction that leads the reader down one fictional path, only to carefully reveal a whole new story. The burden of grief borne by the mother, and all the mothers before her, is portrayed with great clarity. Well done!'

YWA judge

ON THE ROAD

BY CLEMENTINE MCNABB

On the road, everything is beautiful.

The sun rises, an egg yolk moving with the elegance of a principal ballerina. The car window paints rainbows on Finn's lips, his mouth slightly ajar with the promise of sleep. His hair sits across his forehead in curves like the ocean. I wish we had longer together. I would fit myself between his broad arms, the panels of his chest rising and falling. He would hum in my ear; riffs with no meaning that would float in my chest, sinking to my toes until my whole body hummed with my love for him.

In our car, we have three major safety precautions. One is a police radio, which Finn took from his dad's car. Our phones have signals that only connect to each of our phones, not the cell towers above. Lastly, our number plate is from a middle-aged couple who live in Connecticut and have three dogs.

I pray every day that it will be enough.

Ever since The War, there has been a two-child policy in every single household across the country. There was and still is an epidemic, environmentally the earth has never been worse. Carbon emissions have soared, oceans are rising every day and the extinction rate is higher than any time in history. So the answer was decided. A care worker would be assigned to each district and it was their job to monitor the birth rate of each family.

The penalties for breaking the policy slowly began to increase as the number of rebels expanded. The government's effort to control the rate of births seemed futile, until they brought in the last policy. If a family were found to have more than two children their last child would be killed. It sent outrage through the country instantly. Abortion clinics overflowed and the industry transformed into the multi-billion dollar medical franchise it is today. Contraception sales sky rocketed.

And yet here I am.

My mother conceived me without knowing it. A hormonal imbalance in her system, which caused her contraceptive implant to be useless. She is also a devout and good Christian for whom abortion is the very death of her soul. What was she to do? I was born in the attic amidst the grainy smell of storage boxes and my dad's fear. That's all my life has ever been. I have lived in my house for sixteen years. My parents, the best people I have ever met, kept monitors out the front of our house in case I needed to be hidden quickly. The fear killed their marriage and slowly I could feel my mother going insane. I left six months ago, with a boy that refused to let me go alone. I left my mother a note in between the pages of her favourite cookbook. It is all for them I hope they realise. Mum and Elise and Danny, is all I think about when I am driving. They are finally safe.

Finn is our minister's son. His father has done things to him that Finn only tells me when it gets so dark outside we can only see our breath in our small cabin. He wants to see the ocean with me, maybe get a little hut for us to share. I am selfish for letting him come with me when I know what will happen if we are caught. He keeps me sane.

The petrol tank is dangerously low. On the horizon, I spot a small station just past the next corner. We try to make as little stops as possible so we will restock food while we are here. Finn wakes up as we turn into the small station, his eyes sleepy and hair crinkled.

"I'm grabbing gas and some food," I say, reaching over to kiss him gently on the forehead. He laughs and follows me, as I knew he would.

The door chimes eerily as we walk in and I can smell the acrid scent of age. Finn's hand intertwines with my own as we step up to the counter. From what I guess is from the backroom, a tall man with craters like the moon pickpocketed across his face steps out. He smiles, teeth sharp and mustard coloured. My stomach hides in my toes as a police officer strides out with him. They are both smiling.

"Now, which one of you is Sam Kennings?" the man with yellow teeth says, flicking his beady eyes in between us.

Finn has gone still beside me, his heart barely beating. Finn knows my full name is Samantha Rose Kennings. My body has gone cold beneath me, this spirit a separate entity, watching on with horror. Saliva coats the back of my throat, holding my voice captive and Finn steps forward.

"I'm Sam," Finn says, his voice as smooth as chocolate. Only his hands give away his nerves.

I want to scream but there is no air in my lungs. The man with yellow teeth snickers as the police officer hands him an envelope thick with money. The officer strides around the counter and clicks handcuffs over Finn's upturned wrists. I cannot look Finn in the eye.

"On your way ma'am, sorry to do this. Enjoy the rest of your trip," the officer says to me, his voice terribly loud in the small office.

I am underwater and Finn is on land. I am kicking to the surface, the sun metres above my head, every muscle burning with the desire to do something. Finn does not turn around as he is escorted out the back door. It is only when the door to the station is shut that I can finally scream.

...

On the road, everything is beautiful.

The sun rises, an egg yolk moving with the elegance of a principal ballerina. The car window paints rainbows on the passenger seat and I smile as a wink of blue appears on the horizon. I am nearly by the beach, Finn. If only you were here.

'In a short piece, this young author quickly establishes a complex, interweaving narrative, creates four vivid characters plus some shadowy ones, and sets them in an ominous physical and psychological landscape. The writing is deft, and in its alternations of mood – from lyrical-romantic to brutal-realistic, to elegiac – demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of the power of language to conjure imaginary worlds. This particular imagined world is a dystopia – and derives perhaps from the current vogue, but I'd predict that this talented young writer has the potential to create more original worlds in future.'

YWA judge

A JOURNEY OF SELFLESSNESS, LOVE AND ROADS

BY WILLOW PLEX

I wake to feel warm sun in my face and Nalani gently brushing hair from my eyes. She stands and walks to the stream we are camped by and dips her feet in. "Nal, what's up, why are you up so early?" She lets out a high pitch whistle that hangs in the air before being carried away by a soft breeze. I know this to mean that she wants to move. I pack up the plant cuttings we gathered last night in our small but reliable backpack and start attaching it to our rusted bicycle. Nalani passes me a banana that we happily share while we ride towards the highway. I peddle lazily as Nalani whistles a tune and the birds come to swoop alongside us as Nalani stretches out her arms to caress the air. I have always been amazed with her affinity to animals and her connection to the nature that surrounds us. She smiles and I get so distracted that I drive over a bump in the track. She whistles a laugh and continues chirping to the birds.

I met her 10 months after the world as we knew it ended. It was after the riots and the outrage at the unthinkable, no more babies were going to be born. It was declared officially by scientists two weeks after all the pregnancies ended in miscarriages, some being carried to term but being stillborn. I was famous for being the initiator of a better outcome than waiting for mankind to decay. I went on air proposing that we end our selfishness because the world wasn't ending, our species was, and if so, we should leave it better than we found it.

Nalani was working at a major hospital in Melbourne when we met at a conference. The hospital was chosen because of its continuous and reliable resource stream. We met to discuss how long we could make medical supplies last for. She passed me a note asking to go out for dinner, I agreed and that was when I learned how special she was and how much love I was capable of. Nalani was born without a voice. She came out with her fists flailing, drawing in breath and trying to scream but it was silent. Her inability to draw attention to herself was never an impediment or hindrance, she learnt to whistle when she was younger and taught herself sign language to communicate.

For years, 22 to be exact, people around the country have worked towards our cause. We began with the buildings, tearing them down to turn cities into mountains of jagged rock and twisted metal littered with broken glass. We destroyed and disposed of what we could and then let nature do the rest. The broadcast I created was played nationally for months, our progress was filmed and soon we received videos of millions of people following our lead. International communications were cut off soon after but with the help of thousands of labourers we maintained electricity for 13 years and produced pickaxes, farming tools and materials to make us sustainable for as long as the youngest generation would live.

Now, our main job is the roads, they have taken a lot of labour and effort so a few years ago Nalani and I left the city to come help in the country. We now spend our days breaking holes in the tar to plant cuttings of trees that will upturn these roads that humans use to create a map of gravel fences trapping the countryside.

I speed up as we ride over the ditch that separates the trail and the road. I can see the radiating cracks we created yesterday, I look in the other direction to see unaltered road that will be our job for today.

Nalani rides along with the cuttings we made last night as I swing my pickaxe deep into the gravel. This work has made my muscles swell and my body to hold a strength I have never known. I am the more masculine but Nalani is leaner and strong in her own ways.

After a few hours we come to a crumbled bridge with a stream flowing through its remnants. We take a break and I watch Nalani while she walks in to the shade and kneels by a rabbit. Fear of humans was bred out generations ago. I watch her gently approach the creature as the sun paints her skin with pools of light. I sit down on a smooth boulder next to her and hold her unoccupied hand. I trace patterns along the creases in her palm and draw invisible maps of yet unseen paths along her arm. She turns and smiles when I reach her collarbone. Her smiles are what I live for, they are what I strive to give her in the remainder of our hopeless lives.

Her eyes twinkle a threat and suddenly she splashes me with water from the stream. I hear the rabbit's footsteps as it quickly retreats from the perceived threat. She laughs silently at what I can only assume is a look of blatant shock on my face.

Nalani gives me a quick peck on the cheek to assure me of her love. I return the favour by picking her up and swinging her around to see the look of wonder as blurred colours spin around us. We collapse in a dizzy heap on the soft grass bank by the water.

She lets out a high pitch whistle so I pack up our belongings and reach for her hand. We continue on our journey, erasing the roads of men and women to instead make way for the nature that surrounds us.

Just two women on a journey of selflessness, love, and roads.

'In a dystopian future, two people learn about communication, community and love – together. It's hard to build an entire imagined world in a short piece, but this writer has managed it beautifully, capturing both the wide view of the world destroyed, and a close-up of an intimate relationship. Great stuff!'

YWA judge

THE ROADS WE CHOSE

BY ANNABELLE SAVILLE

LOG #5504, Monday, 24th August, 2075

I don't know if anyone will ever hear these words, if anyone is even out there anymore... or if this thing even works. It gives me little comfort to talk to myself day in and day out, but it gives me even less if I don't speak at all. So, here I am, speaking into this small, rusted device with the hopes that someone may be out there to fix this or to respond. A small part of me still believes that someone is out there listening to my voice on the other side, even though signals have been down for the last 15 years, and that maybe, just maybe, someone will reply one day.

They say there was once a time when the grass was green, the water ran clear and the skies were blue. When trees weren't scarce and dying, and storms and droughts didn't last for weeks. They say that manmade structures stood proud and solid, not as the crumbled ash and ruin that we see now along cracked and dusted roads. They say these roads were the manmade paths used for thousands of years, carrying crafted machines and technological transport like cars. We don't see many of those things anymore: I haven't seen the manufactured skeletons in more than a year. Maybe the floods drove them into the expanding sea; maybe the storms sank the carcasses into the deep earth. The roads that led nowhere and everywhere became useless. They hold no purpose in this age, only acting as a reminder of the history that led to this travesty.

The roads are a reminder of what we lost and could never replace, of the pathway that could have led to a better future, of green grass and blue skies again. Now, they are bare of any machines, of any people. Who could have known that the future they deemed to be prosperous and beautiful would be like this?

A future of pain and suffering, of death and disease. A future where less than .001% of the last known 9.7 billion world population would survive. We are alone. Now, we don't know how many of us are alive. We don't know if we are the last persons on earth. Sometimes, I believe I am the last person on earth. Radios and electromagnetic signals crashed the day this all started. Then the final warning sounded over every televised broadcast: a warning of Doomsday, the Apocalypse; that scientists had made a mistake and had lost control; that we had no time to fix the problem. It was already too late.

The power went first. Satellites continued moving through space but lost connection to the stations on Earth. Next came extreme temperatures – from the hottest days to the coldest – and people started dying from the sicknesses they brought. After that, the earthquakes hit, rumbling the rising seas and causing floods and tsunamis. The coastlines and islands were destroyed; no one heard from any survivors. No one ever survived those catastrophes.

Storms were long and dangerous, sweeping away high buildings and destroying others. I guess they weren't kidding when they said natural disasters would be more frequent, more intense and would last longer.

Money didn't save anyone; you couldn't pay the rising tides to spare your home or family, nor could you pay the sun to cool down – especially when it wasn't the initial problem. The sun wasn't making the Earth warmer. We were. We used all of our fossil fuels, pumping carbon emissions into the atmosphere's blanket, too much for the atmosphere to clear. And that's what it was, a blanket. It was our insulation, keeping us warm and keeping us sheltered, but the carbon was too thick and too heavy, the blanket began to suffocate us, the heat became overwhelming and eventually could only be reflected back to us on the surface. But insulation is insulation, and it doesn't discriminate; so just as we got hot, we could get cold too. We never gave it enough time to clean itself of the problems we speared into it. We were so scared of living without our luxuries that we didn't think of the terror our children would face when they realised that the world was ending.

But that's the road they chose, right? That's the road we chose. If only we'd have thought about the consequences of our actions. Newton knew before any of us, didn't he? 'Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.' We were killing the Earth, so the Earth started killing us. It hurts more to say that the Earth didn't kill me by lack of trying; I think it wanted me to suffer. It wanted all of us to suffer, alone with our thoughts. You hurt people the most by making them lose everything they care about. We lost humanity, we lost ourselves.

The First Days were stressful: people didn't want to believe that it was the end, that there wasn't a solution anymore. Everyone wants a solution to a problem they caused, but no one ever wants to be the one to take action. 'I'll live my life as I want, and my kids can fix it,' but that doesn't work when your kids pass the torch, too.

Eventually, that torch burns the hand that holds it. We held the burning life of the Earth, our home, in our hands, and instead of putting out the fire that was killing it, we let it turn to ashes along with everything we – and it – cared for.

Humanity. Wow, we were full of it, weren't we? We wanted to believe that we were at the top of the world, the apex of all species on Earth... in the universe. Nothing else mattered if it didn't benefit us. If only we had chosen a different road to travel down, one where we realised that life was made for everything, equally, and wasn't centred around us.

Maybe Earth picked the only road left.

'The author uses strong, clear imagery to create a desolate, apocalyptic vision of the future – I was especially impressed by the clever use of theme, and how the character's voice speaks compellingly to the reader from a distant time.'

YWA judge

THE MAP OF MY WORLD

BY DIJANA SMOLJKO

**The roads of my world,
They lie before you in an array of carefully
strung words.**

The letters are fused in dark ink
But I can assure you my world is not
black and white.

This is no time for concrete thinking
For you must know that there are cracks
in even the finest paved roads.
Please, be abstract,
For it is the only way you could grasp the
sinuous bends of life;
Blurring the lights into swarms of red hues
Until you're not sure who's giving way.
It is in these moments you must reflect
On the rippling roads that raised you.

The story begins on a winter's day,
It's June the 9th by Furlong Road.
Perhaps the day is startlingly warm
Just like the apparent sunshine I was born within.
But I never knew that sunshine had bleak walls
and hospital beds
So maybe this place is where my story ends too.
But I mustn't get ahead of myself for the end
is far
And the streets are beckoning to be
dissected apart.

Barely a year old christened on Hodgkinson
Street,
A small Croatian church you wouldn't know
how to pronounce.
As you sit between the pews the baby is crying
And she only lasts two hours in her
christening gown.
Even as a child she fears crowds,
All day she is lost, crying for clarity.
Except for a moment when dried tears cling
to her face,
With weary parents who haven't slept in
months.
A precious moment of perfect insanity –
Because she laughed the whole way home,
that girl.
Hodgkinson Street reminds me exactly who I am.

Driving along Pecks Road on a Thursday morning
You'll see a grandfather is driving his
granddaughter to school.
He's been up since 6 am and he's already read
the morning paper.
This is before he started falling over
And gradually forgot people he used to know.
He gives the girl a chocolate bar
And before she leaves he always tells her –
"The most important thing in life is to be good."
That was all he asked in the commotion of
her world,
Yet there was something tremendous in its
simplicity.

As she grows the girl will reach crossroads
But Pecks Road will always remind her of
the goodness of life
And the person she'll always try to be.

Drive by Odessa Avenue and you will find
her conflation,
A collection of events crammed in one.
Peer through a window of her stolen
Saturday morning –
11am is the time she will be most agitated.
For 10 years she has spent her Saturdays
struggling in defeat to grasp a language
she cannot conquer.
You might ask why she wastes her time,
all these mornings,
And it's a question she frequently asks herself.
Something in her won't give up
Because it feels like she is giving something back
To her grandparents who fled their war torn
country,
Risking everything to give her a better life.
The girl can't understand how these classes
she detests
Make her love their country even more.
She hopes that in years to come
She will thank her 16 year old self
For never giving up on Odessa Avenue.

You are drifting towards Oxley Street
Where the fondest memories are unearthed.
It is just before midnight on New Year's Eve
Where a girl stands with a sparkler in each hand.
She won't say it but she's afraid they will
sing her
And is staggered when it ignites her instead.
Her smugness is visible because her brothers
are fast asleep
And she has never been up this late.
She is by the beach beside her best friend
With trinkets of music serenading her ears.
Her liberation is no match for her exhaustion
But sleep never surrenders before its
opponent relents.

For now the transfixing glow sticks drain her fears
And allow her to shrivel in the crevices of her
daydreams.
This is how Oxley Street stole her heart,
The sea air coaxed light out of the darkest night.

The girl has reached the brink of 15
And she has unveiled a foreign world.
Here by Tranquility Drive
The cars race on different sides of the road
And her family are a globe away.
Watch now as she fervently writes by her
top bunk;
She is telling herself not to forget the lessons
life teaches,
That changing is not an option,
To always stick by her morals
And that she shouldn't be afraid to be by herself
sometimes.
America taught her about space and discovery
But it also taught her how to survive.
Amongst the chaos of her trip
She never stopped to feel the tranquillity –
It had always been there
And it followed her all the way back home.

The roads are vulnerable now, you see,
For they have been exposed.
Don't be fooled, this was not my life,
But merely a sequence of events plotted.
Look closely and you will find amidst the gravel
The eyes of a young girl reflecting back.
If you gave me a map of my world,
These are the roads you would see marked.

'The opening lines of this poem are striking, as is the exhortation for the reader to "Please be abstract". The idea of structuring what follows around events, memories and characters associated with different roads is an inventive way of engaging with the theme. The writing is confident and arresting.'

YWA judge

INTO THE JAWS

BY ALEX WEBB

The rain hits the café's windows in vicious grey sheets, echoing a dull roar.

Tucked behind the onslaught there is a mess of soggy hair and rain-streaked cheeks and wearily-set mouths and noses pinked by the cold, bobbing on a mess of long coats that have been darkened with rain, and tall collars pulled up over scarves.

The rugged smell of wet wool and the bitter one of hot coffee is thick in the air.

Baristas yell orders at people as men yell orders at phones. The sour shriek of a bell pinned to the door sounds every few moments, and in sweeps the sound of the rain's pounding fists against the pavement, along with its taunting, frigid breath as another desperate, wet bundle of a human scrambles into the warmth.

There is a woman, here, among this mess.

She sits quietly in a corner by one of the front windows, dislocated from the chatter and bustle. She seems only to stare emptily at the rain's assault, her small table crowded with cold cups of coffee.

This woman seems so small and ashen, a sort of weathering that comes from within. There is little wonder that the mess seems oblivious to her small sliver of a presence, flowing around her like a river would divert around a rock to meet on the other side, unperturbed.

There is a sadness to her eyes. Not only a pain, but a deep exhaustion, as if some bright spark has been worn down by some harsh, persistent grating. Lines of pain are etched from the corners of them, webbing out over her temples. A small circle of brown hair is pulled back from her face.

She is draped in a dark coat that looks too big for her, bulking her small frame in awkward shapes. On the lapel are three thick walnut buttons tacked closely to the fabric, shining brightly, and an odd, pink one, frayed so much that it hangs barely by a thread, the colour worn off of it to a pale rose.

The woman fiddles carefully with the pink button on her coat now, feeling every shape and groove the same way a blind person might feel something to try and grasp what it might look like.

If maybe someone of the mess had noticed this woman, they might have seen that she was not staring emptily at the rain. Maybe, if they had looked close enough, they might have seen that she was, in fact, staring out at the tar jaws of the road, at the cars rushing over them in quick, sweeps of colour, at the dark figures hurrying across.

Maybe they would have seen the look of longing, so fathomless and consuming, on her face, that they might have wondered what, exactly, she was looking for.

...

The pavement outside is slick and black with rain. Empty, other than cars tearing past in a spray of frosty, muddy water. The echo of slapping rain swallows almost all sound. The sky, the pavements, the roads, the filthy water leaking down the front of shops are all painted in hollow tones of grey.

Against this bleak world is a tall man, silhouetted in the shape of his coat, sweeping the pavement with its length. It is weighted heavily with rain, water seeping from its hems to hang around his feet like strings of glass beads.

He smiles oddly against the dull world crashing around him. It is a broad, warm smile, a goofy sort of smile. A distant one. As though he is smiling at something that no one else can see.

Beside him, just as strangely content, is a little girl, grinning toothily, her hand in his. She wears striped rainbow gumboots, brown hair flipping behind her small, bright face in wet strips. She skips along the pavement into puddles, shrieking happily as the murky water sprays up at her.

The two move together along the street in their small, delighted world.

The man stops and leans down to his little girl,

“Do you want a hot chocolate?”

She jerks her head up at her father with a wide grin. Water runs from her eyelashes and over her pale cheeks like melted wax.

She starts to jump, nodding her head frantically.

Her father laughs softly and reaches down. Swinging her into his arms, he takes her and sets her down on a bus stop bench.

Then he squats and reaches into his pocket, pulling out a handful of notes as thick as his wrist. They glisten with water.

“Here,” he says, pressing the notes into her little hand, “Go get some hot chocolate.”

The girl smiles so wide that all her missing teeth are on show.

“Okay.”

She goes to jump down, but her dad grabs her before she does. He looks at her so deeply that years later she thinks he might have been trying to see right into her soul. His hair falls into his eyes in lank, dripping pieces.

“Give Daddy a kiss before you go,” he says.

And she rolls her eyes and put her tiny hands onto his cheeks, leaning in and kissing him on the nose. Then she quickly slips down and away.

The man straightens up and watches her dart into the doors of the café, the bell clinging cheerily behind her.

...

When the little girl comes from the café, cradling a small take-away mug of hot chocolate steaming into the air, she walks across the street to the bus stop bench.

“Dad?”

Laid across the wooden bench of the bus stop is a dark coat, saturated with water. Rain sparks off of a pink button on it. It looks like a bright wink against the dark tongue of road, long and taunting, behind it.

...

Maybe, if someone had been watching this woman. Maybe, if they had looked close enough into her lined face.

Maybe they would have seen that behind those weary eyes, is a weary little girl.

‘The piece demonstrated great strength in structural development and the writer has crafted a carefully constructed plot and this in turn was sustained throughout the piece. The entry was further characterised by the use of appropriately deployed descriptive devices that enhanced the descriptiveness and quality of the work.’

YWA judge

Judges

EMMA ASHMERE

Dr Emma Ashmere's short stories have been widely published in journals, anthologies, and newspapers including *The Age*, *Review of Australian Fiction*, *Griffith Review*, *Sleepers Almanac*, *Spineless Wonders*, and the National Gallery of Victoria's *NGV magazine*. She has a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Adelaide, and a PhD on the use of history in fiction from La Trobe University. Her debut novel *The Floating Garden* was shortlisted for the 2016 MUBA prize.

DR ROGER AVERILL

Dr Roger Averill is the author of a novel, *Keeping Faith*, and a travel memoir, *Boy He Cry: An Island Odyssey*, which featured on Radio National's First Person.

Roger's most recent book, *Exile: The Lives and Hopes of Werner Pelz*, is a biography of his late friend Werner Pelz, who taught him at La Trobe University in the 1980s. *Exile* was shortlisted in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and won the Western Australian Premier's Non-fiction Award. Having gained a PhD from La Trobe in 2000, Roger now teaches at Victoria University. He has a new novel, *Relatively Famous*, coming out in May 2018.

MARK BRANDI

Mark Brandi's writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Age*, *The Big Issue*, and is often broadcast on Radio National. He has won many awards for his fiction, including the 2016 UK Crime Writers' Association Debut Dagger for his first novel, *Wimmera*, which he developed during two residential fellowships at Varuna.

Brandi graduated with a criminal justice degree and his career includes roles as a political advisor and project officer in the Victorian Department of Justice, before he changed direction and decided to devote himself to writing.

Originally from Marche, growing up Italian in a rural Victorian town continues to influence his work. He now lives in Melbourne and is currently working on his next book.

See markbrandi.com

FRANCES CUSWORTH

Fran Cusworth is the author of four novels. Her most recent work is the romantic comedy *The Near Miss*, which followed *The Love Child*, *Hopetoun Wives*, and *Sisters of Spicefield*.

She is a journalist who has been published widely, including in Best Australian Essays. She won the Guy Morrison Prize for Literary Journalism in 2013, and has a PhD in Creative Writing.

She has taught fiction and non-fiction writing, been employed as a staff journalist for The Herald Sun, AAP and Fairfax, and works in health communications. She is an Honorary Associate in La Trobe's School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

You can read her work at francusworth.com

MORAG FRASER AM

Morag Fraser is a writer, literary critic and former judge of many Australian literary prizes, including the Miles Franklin Literary award (2005–2011). She has been chair of the Melbourne Writers' Festival and of Australian Book Review. Her M.A., from La Trobe University, focussed on the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer, and her books and articles have ranged across literature, American politics, theology, poetry, art, higher education, film and gardening. She has taught literature and communications at VCE and university level for decades, and was a Higher Education columnist at the Age for many years. From 2003 to 2009 she was Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University.

In 2004 she was made a member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to journalism.

KELLY GARDINER

Kelly Gardiner writes historical fiction for readers of all ages. Her latest novel is *1917: Australia's Great War*, recently shortlisted in the NSW Premier's History Prize.

Her previous novel, *Goddess*, is based on the life of the swordswoman and opera singer, Mademoiselle de Maupin.

Kelly's other books include *The Sultan's Eyes* and *Act of Faith* – both shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and Children's Book Council Notable Books – *Ocean Without End*, *The Pirate's Revenge*, *The Silver Swan*, and a picture book, *Billabong Bill's Bushfire Christmas*.

She teaches creative writing at La Trobe University and is the co-host of Unladylike, a podcast about women and writing.

NEIL GRANT

Neil Grant was born in Glasgow in the Year of the Fire Horse. He has sung 'Throw Your Arms Around Me' on a five and a half thousand metre mountain pass in Ladakh, India and loafed in the bombed-out Buddha niche in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. He has published three novels for young adults – *Rhino Chasers* (Allen & Unwin, 2002), *Indo Dreaming* (Allen & Unwin, 2005) and *The Ink Bridge* (Allen & Unwin, 2012). *The Ink Bridge* won the Fellowship of Australian Writers National Literary Awards (Barbara Ramsden Award) 2012 and the Queensland Literary Awards 2012. Neil's fourth novel, set on the Central Coast of NSW and the Sundarbans in West Bengal, India is due out in 2019 with Allen & Unwin.

A La Trobe graduate, Neil lives in Melbourne's outer north with his partner and a lot of books. He has three children.

CON MCGILLYCUDDY

Con McGillicuddy is a La Trobe Alumnus, having undertaken both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at La Trobe.

Con has been a secondary school humanities teacher in the northern suburbs over the last three decades. He has a range of interests which include music, gardening and more recently vintage wirelasses, mainly from the thirties era. This was then a fairly recently developed and then massed-produced technology which did so much to popularise what we now recognise as 'electronic mass media' even though it was via the 'valve.' Con's interest stems from the fact that this technology conveyed so much of the great social and historical turbulence which was to unfold, over the airwaves. Con is currently employed at RMIT Training.

JOHN MCKENZIE AM

Emeritus Professor John McKenzie AM is an eminent scientist, regarded as a world leader in ecological and evolutionary genetics.

John has served on numerous boards including Bio 21 and the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute. John is a visionary leader and passionate advocate for science education and is highly regarded for his mentoring of the next generation of scientists, teachers and research supervisors. He excelled in his role as Secretary for Education and Public Awareness of the Australian Academy of Science, where he pioneered an innovative science program being used in most Australian primary schools today.

John was awarded an AM in 2011 for service to higher education through administrative roles, to professional associations, and to the community. He also received a Distinguished Alumni Award from La Trobe University in 2014. John is a former Deputy Chancellor at La Trobe University and Life Governor of Ivanhoe Grammar School

FINALIST JUDGE

DR PADDY O'REILLY

Dr Paddy O'Reilly is an award-winning writer. Her novel, *The Wonders*, was the winner of the Norma K Hemming award and nominated for the Kirkus Prize. Her books have been also shortlisted for the ALS Gold Medal and the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. Paddy's latest book, *Peripheral Vision*, was published in July 2015 by UQP.

Her debut novel, *The Factory*, was also in the best books of the year lists in *Australian Book Review* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and was Highly Commended in the FAW Christina Stead Award for Fiction. It was broadcast in fifteen episodes as the ABC Radio National Book Reading.

She has written screenplays and worked as additional screenwriter for films.

Paddy has been Asialink writer-in-residence in Japan, a fellow at Varuna: the Writers' House, writer-in-residence at Kelly Steps Cottage, Tasmania, and The Lockup, Newcastle, presenter and reader at the International Conference on the Short Story in Toronto and Arkasas, and a full fellow at the Vermont Studio Center, USA.

See paddyoreilly.com.au



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Department of Creative Arts and English

ASSC College Secondary School Outreach

La Trobe Alumni and Advancement

Our distinguished Alumni and staff judges for their involvement in the Young Writers' Awards.

Dr Victor Talbot who undertook a PhD at La Trobe University in the late 1970s. Victor has been proudly supporting awards at La Trobe for many years and established the La Trobe Young Writers' Awards in 2015 through the creation of a perpetual prize.

Victor believes that through this Award, students will benefit by expanding their creativity and writing skills. They will also gain awareness of the importance of tertiary education and learn to appreciate the value of the role that philanthropy can play through encouragement.

Young
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