

Autumn 2022

Women's Ink!

The Society of Women Writers NSW Inc.
www.womenwritersnsw.org

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State Library of New South Wales



Editor's Message

Forty years before Lismore Library was devastated in the New South Wales floods, my primary school library was burnt down. Vandals broke a window and threw in a Molotov cocktail, razing the building to the ground.

The shock rippled through our community. As well as 8,000 books and many historical items, it destroyed a piece of our hearts. Even as a 9-year-old I knew that a library was more than just a place that lent you a book.

On a recent *ABC Conversations*, author Susan Orlean discussed the particular enchantment of the library. Orlean is the author of *The Library Book*, the story of the 1986 fire in the Los Angeles Central Library and the broader story of libraries as a vital part of society.

'It's not the same as simply going and buying a book you want,' she says. 'A library is about the surprise, the serendipity of what you might come across, the shared space, the fact that this is something that belongs to a whole community... it's the sense that you are browsing through this great communal brain.'

Ursula Dubosarsky, author and former Australian Children's Laureate, encourages kids not to overthink it, to just explore, grab. 'Maybe half of them, maybe all of them you won't like. Next time grab a few more rather than thinking too much about it... In the library you can make a million errors of choice.'

For me, the library was always a quiet sanctuary away from the noisy schoolyard. And a year after the fire it was where our school librarian Miss Willis handed me a copy of *Playing Beatie Bow*, the book that made me want to be a writer.

This issue's front cover is the traditional borrowing card in the front of a book to show support for Lismore Library.

Jacqui

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Giving Women Writers A Voice.



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President's Message

BY MARIA MCDUGALL

At the start of this new year, I feel encouraged to be surrounded by such an industrious and dedicated committee of volunteers. To stage any successful event you need a willing pair of hands. The Sydney Olympics owed its success to the team of volunteers. The Society of Women Writers NSW also has a talented team and I am proud to work alongside them.

Our events will continue to engage inspiring speakers in a variety of genres. From life-affirming novels to practical strategies for writing poetry and many more delights, we cover topics that affect daily lives.

The aim of the society is to empower women, to support each other, and to offer understanding for the important issues so many women are facing today. Our writing provides an opportunity to throw a light onto these concerns. Sometimes, just a casual chat with a like-minded person at one of our events can spark the compulsion to put your feelings down on paper. For others, the competitions we offer spur them to action and enliven the imagination. Our National Writing Competition holds an added impetus. The short-listed writers have the opportunity for their work to be included in the Centenary Anthology to be published in 2025. Send in your entries. They all have a chance.

Sadly, last year there were no entries to the Di Yerbury Residency in Devon. The impact of the pandemic has thrown uncertainty into our lives. No applicant will be going for 2022, but two of our members have deferred plans to travel later this year or next. My advice is to set out your thoughts on a plan and apply for this residency. The outcome may result in a wonderful experience in a different writing environment, immersed in the landscape around Devon.

Entries are now open for our Book Awards. Many members took the opportunity of lockdown during the pandemic to complete works and have them published. The sales of books saw a record rise worldwide during 2021. We look forward to receiving a record number of members' publications.

The day after her win in the Australian Open, Ashleigh Barty said to TV reporters, 'You dream, hope and never know'.

Maria McDougall



Your
Magazine.
Your Voice.
We Need
You!

Women's Ink! is
a contemporary
collection of
women's voices in
the form of articles,
essays, interviews,
Q&As, fiction,
poetry, non-fiction,
book reviews,
commentary and
more.

Women's Ink!
showcases our
members' writing
and shares our
members' voices.

Submissions
for
**Women's
Ink!**
are now
open.

Submissions
close
15 May 2022

Competitions are Open

It's that time again! Announcing the 2022 Members' Book Awards

Members are invited to submit their books published between
1 July 2020 and 30 June 2022.

4 CATEGORIES:

Fiction
Non-fiction
Poetry
Children/Young Adult

PRIZES in each category are:

Winner Trophy and Certificate
Two Highly Commended Certificates
One Commended Certificate

plus The National Writing Competition 2022

Member and non-member women writers are invited to submit
entries for the following categories and prizes:

3 CATEGORIES:

Short Story - Fiction
Short Story - Non-Fiction
Poetry

PRIZES for Short Story Fiction and Non-Fiction:

Winner \$500
Highly Commended \$250
Commended \$100

PRIZES for Poetry

Winner \$300
Highly Commended \$200
Commended \$100

For more information and terms and conditions,
visit our website: www.womenwritersnsw.org

It's Australia's oldest library, established in the 1820s for colonials who were desperate to read books. We're speaking with the editor for The State Library of New South Wales, **Cathy Perkins**.

Hi Cathy, can you share with us what you do as editor for the State Library of NSW?

I work with a team of graphic designers, communications specialists and one other editor to produce the Library's publications, exhibitions and web content.

Until recently, my main role has been as editor of the Library's magazine, *Openbook*: to commission and edit articles, organise photography and oversee design.

How did you begin working in this role?

In 2006 I saw a job advertisement in the newspaper for an editorial and design officer at the State Library.

Before that I had worked as a bookseller, publishing assistant, literary agent, editor in trade and legal publishing, and communications officer at the Australian Society of Authors.

Openbook. We've expanded the magazine beyond the Friends membership and beyond the Library's walls, so it's become a lively and beautifully illustrated publication for people who love literature, art and history.

Are you involved in things outside the magazine for the Library?

I've always edited and proofread exhibition text, web content, annual reports, signage and promotional material alongside the magazine.

This year I'm taking a break from the editorship of *Openbook* to pursue a PhD in nonfiction writing. I'm still working part-time at the Library on everything other than the magazine.

Can you tell me something about the magazine and its creation that we might not know?

We're lucky to have fantastic inhouse photographers working on the magazine.

As editor, I'm often the stand-in while the photographer is getting the lighting and location right, and over the years I've pretended to be the actress Juliette Binoche, the novelist Frank Moorhouse and many other writers,

historians and artists in locations all over the Library.

You're an author yourself, can you tell me about your book?

A couple of years after starting my job at the Library I came across some letters by the writer Zora Cross to her publisher George Robertson.

I learned that Cross caused a literary sensation

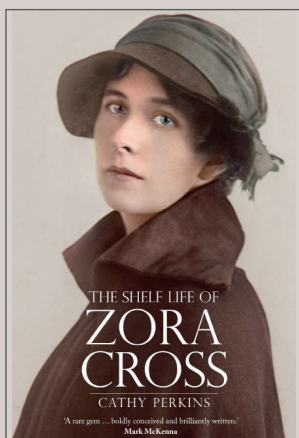


[Zora Cross] also came up against the artist Norman Lindsay, who refused to illustrate her book because he didn't think women could write love poetry...

I had an Honours degree in English literature, but I learned most of what I know about editing on the job.

How long has the magazine been going for?

There has been a magazine for Friends of the Library since 1988, and it's been through several incarnations under different titles. I edited SL magazine from 2009 to 2020, when it became



when her book of erotic love poetry came out during the First World War.

She was a well-known poet and journalist in the 1920s and 30s but had since been largely forgotten. In the Library and other archives I found hundreds of personal letters Zora Cross wrote to prominent literary

figures like Ethel Turner and Mary Gilmore. She also came up against the artist Norman Lindsay, who refused to illustrate her book because he didn't think women could write love poetry.

'Over the years I've pretended to be the actress Juliette Binoche, the novelist Frank Moorhouse and many other writers, historians and artists.'

My biography *The Shelf Life of Zora Cross* came out in 2019, and I've been encouraged by readers who have enjoyed reading about Cross's life and the times she lived in.

What are you working on now?

My current project is a biography of the writer Betty Roland, a Communist playwright in the 1930s who became a romance and children's fiction writer. I'm interested in how she re-entered the literary culture later in life by writing her memoirs. She was a member of the Society of Women Writers, and I would love to hear from any readers who knew her (c.perkins@unsw.edu.au).

What advice do you have for anyone who wants to be an editor?

There will always be a need for good editors!

I've found a great benefit in doing short courses in writing and editing through community colleges and writers' groups.

There's always someone you can learn from.



Cathy Perkins, Editor, The State Library of NSW

'My current project is a biography of the writer Betty Roland, a Communist playwright in the 1930s who became a romance and children's fiction writer... she was a member of the Society of Women Writers, and I would love to hear from any readers who knew her.'

The Best Job in the World: Tips, Tricks, and Lessons Learned After 35 Books

BY BELINDA MURRELL



'Fashions change, like any other industry, and it's important to have a feel for what is trending and what is not!'

When speaking at literary festivals and schools about my career as a writer, I often say that I have the best job in the world!

Over the last sixteen years, I have had 36 books published, mostly by Penguin Random House, ranging from contemporary junior fiction, historical novels for children and teenagers, to adult non-fiction.

These books have been published internationally, produced as audio books, won awards, pitched for TV and translated into various languages. My work has taken me on hectic book tours around Australia and fascinating overseas research trips. It has been a rollercoaster ride of challenges and incredible joys, providing so many life highlights and experiences.

Here are some of my insights from along the way:

1. Trust Your Team

While I spend many months writing each book, the publishing journey is very much a team effort. I have been incredibly lucky to work with publisher extraordinaire, Zoe Walton at Penguin Random

House and my amazing agent Pippa Masson at Curtis Brown, on more than 30 books. They have both been incredible champions for my books and I have benefited enormously from their wisdom and knowledge.

Every book is a team effort utilising the talents of my publisher, editor, proof-reader, and cover designer, then the specialists in sales, marketing, and publicity, who work so hard to get my book into the hands of readers. These experts all help me to make each book the very best it can be, so it is vital to trust the feedback of your publishing team. At a recent conference, a US publisher confided that many debut authors never get another book contract because they refused to accept the advice of their editors.

2. Keep Learning

I've been earning my living as a writer for over 30 years, since I left university, working as a corporate copywriter, freelance journalist, travel writer, and author. I love learning – whether it is enrolling in courses (a favourite was the Writing Memoir course at London University), reading articles and blog posts, listening to podcasts, or attending

publishing conferences and literary festivals. I always discover gems, whether it is to be reminded of craft, identifying emerging trends or gaining insights into the ever-changing business of publishing.

3. Make Writing a Priority

When my children were younger, and I was working as a freelance journalist, I wrote my first book at night, over two years, while my kids were asleep. Now, while writing is still a joy, it is also my full-time job, so I cannot sit around waiting for divine inspiration to strike. I am essentially running a small business, relying on daily routines and goal setting to help my creative process, manage finances and meet tough deadlines.

I work regular hours, setting strategic objectives and strict editorial deadlines throughout the year. For example, I set myself daily and weekly word goals, such as 1000

5. Patience, Passion and Persistence

Publishing is a highly competitive yet slow-moving industry, with book contracts planned out sometimes years in advance. Many aspiring writers report writing and pitching for several years before being published, so it is important to have buckets of patience. If you have talent, plus a burning passion for your stories and characters, then keep trying! Persistence is key!

6. Understand the Business

Publishing is a business like any other, and it is important to know how it works. Most Australian publishers are actively looking for fresh talent, keen to discover new books they love. Yet the flipside is that publishers need to sell books to create a profit. Their 'ideal author' can write and promote many successful books, rather than being a one trick pony.

Unlike the million-dollar advances shown in

'...a US publisher confided that many debut authors never get another book contract because they refused to accept the advice of their editors.'

words per day or 5000 words per week. I may be working on several books at once such as gathering inspiration, editing a current manuscript, or promoting a new release. For me, forward planning is essential as I sign each publishing contract based on a detailed synopsis.

4. Embrace your Community

Working from home can be lonely, but fortunately the children's writing community is welcoming and encouraging. My author friends help me celebrate successes and we support each other through challenging times. It helps to join and network through organisations like Writing NSW, Australian Society of Authors, Children's Book Council of Australia and of course the Society of Women Writers. These organisations run workshops, mentorships, advice services and social opportunities to meet other writers. Festivals and literary events (like the Writing NSW Kids and YA Festival) are also an ideal opportunity to connect with readers and other writers.

the movies, the reality is much leaner. A 2021 Australian Society of Authors survey found that 58 percent of authors do not receive any advance payment when signing a publishing contract for their manuscript. Others reported receiving a modest advance of less than



Belinda (right) with her sister **Kate Forsyth**, also an author, and the book they co-wrote, *Looking for Charlotte*.

\$2,000, while only 13 percent received an advance of more than \$10,000.

This advance payment needs to be earned out, through book sales. If the advance is covered, the author then receives royalties, paid twice a year, based on a percentage of books sold, usually 10 percent of the recommended retail price. More than half of Australian titles sell less than 2,000 copies, while only a small proportion sell more than 10,000 copies. Based on these figures, perhaps it is not surprising that the ASA survey found that more than half of full-time writers

'I cannot sit around waiting for divine inspiration to strike.'

earned less than \$15,000 per year from their creative practice, and that income had dropped significantly during the pandemic.

Another complexity is 'sale or return', where new releases are shipped to bookstores on consignment for 90 days. If the book does not sell by then, the bookstore returns it to the warehouse. Up to one-third of books are returned unsold, so publishers retain a percentage of royalties to cover this probability.

7. Diversify

It can be challenging to make a living writing books. Most authors I know rely on multiple income streams or have a 'proper' day job. In my case, much of my income is comprised of publisher advances, royalties, Education Lending Rights and Public Lending Rights. The remaining income is a combination of teaching writing, speaking engagements, journalism, writer-in-residence programs, and related literary roles, such as being Festival Director of the Writing NSW Kids and YA festival. Likewise, over the years, I have diversified the genre and age group of books I write – ranging from picture books, early chapter books, history, time slip, fantasy, contemporary realism, to biography and memoir.

8. Read Lots

It is so important to read lots, especially recent books in the genre and age group that you are writing for. Fashions change, like any other

industry and its important to have a feel for what is trending and what is not! Publishers often ask aspiring writers to name recent books they love and comparative titles to their own work. My agent, Pippa Masson, at Curtis Brown, says that the number one fault that she sees with aspiring writers, is "Not reading enough. It's the key ingredient to becoming a successful writer. Read widely and often!!"

9. Celebrate Often

All successful authors I know work extremely hard. Deadlines are tough and there is a strong pressure to proactively market yourself through speaking engagements, social media and promotional activities. It can be so easy to get caught up in the stress of working life and forget to enjoy the small achievements along the way. So I love to celebrate – cracking a bottle of bubbly with my husband, cooking a beautiful meal for my family, or taking an afternoon off to have lunch with a friend. Best of all, I love getting piles of letters from readers who adore my books. I feel so grateful to be able to write books which bring joy to so many readers.

Belinda Murrell will be teaching her not-to-be-missed **Writing for Children Workshop** as part of the society's September programme!

The **Writing NSW Kids and YA Festival** will be held on Saturday June 25, 2022, featuring publisher pitch sessions, writing workshop and panel discussions with some of Australia's best loved children's authors, sharing their tips and secrets to success.

www.belindamurrell.com.au



the fox and the rabbit

See

The fox running
With the rabbit fighting
Between his jaws
Dripping blood and adrenalin
Into the relentless
Pursuit of the end.

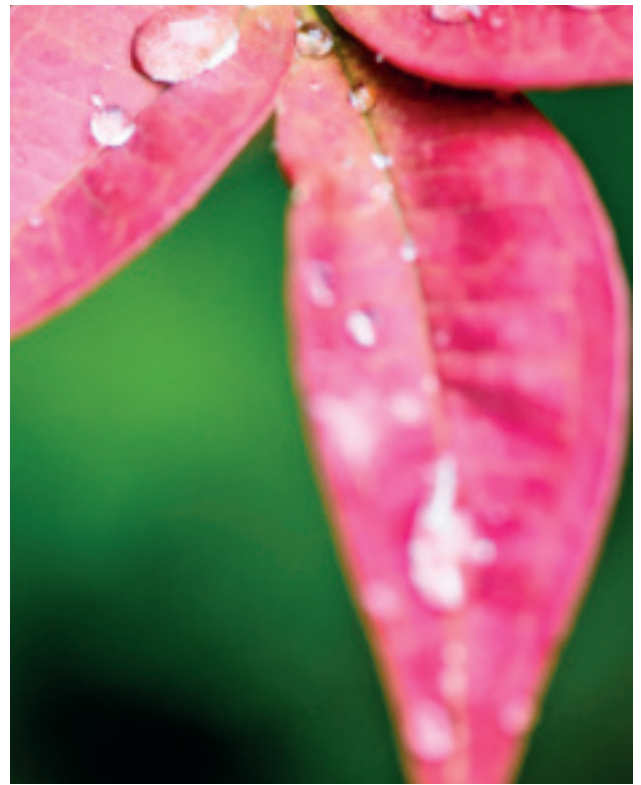
Not giving in.
Still fighting.

Me

I am the rabbit
Of you, the fox
Combatting patriarchal darkness
Around my body
Choking the spirit
And smothering the soul.

Not giving in.
Still fighting.

Joni Braham



pink

twisted and contorted
yet voluptuously
feminine
long legs and
bare breasts
arms akimbo

now pink shapes
then fleeting glimpses
play with my dreams
i'm at ease being teased
by your fragrance
under your leaves of green
angophora

Antonia Reisinger

The Power of Tears...

BY CATHERINE MCCULLAGH

Books almost never make me cry. I consider myself somewhat hard-bitten, approaching what I read with a jaundiced eye, challenging the writer to provoke an emotional response that I would rather sacrifice my first-born than betray. Yet there I was, in the middle of a busy hairdressing salon, my senses assaulted by the turbo-propulsion of massed hairdryers and chit-chat on the latest season of *Schitt's Creek*, trying not to weep like the newly bereaved.

I was utterly bewildered by my reaction. This was not a book I had expected to unlock the floodgates. In fact I'm not sure why I picked it up — possibly it reflected a perverse need to read about characters with more than Friday on their mind. It was a tatty copy of Alistair MacLean's *HMS Ulysses*, a haunting tale of war. Now, war stories generally do not have happy endings. It's an occupational hazard that someone somewhere will suffer a sorrowful fate. 'They need to stop doing that, someone will get hurt!' yelled a wag at the Anzac landing at Gallipoli, demonstrating a fine sense of irony as Turkish troops opened fire.

So I had expected *HMS Ulysses* to suffer a terrible demise — after all, stories of the Arctic convoys in World War II are not replete with sunny possibilities. MacLean's ship was unlikely to sail off into a rosy sunset with the dulcet tones of Vera Lynn wafting dreamily in its wake. So I was prepared. I was also prepared by the fact that we in the modern age have become

inured to violence and death. Quite frankly, we are submerged in it. The press and social media are dominated by tragedy and misfortune, dished up on a daily basis and devoured by an avid audience. Charities often assert that people suffer 'emotional fatigue' which sees the razor edge of their shock at the misfortunes of others blunted by the sheer volume of death and disaster that saturates the media. It is a simple truth. Once the initial shock has worn off, we look for the next sensation, the next opportunity to be shocked anew.

This is a challenge not only for the media, but

for the writer. There is no greater testament to authorly success than evoking a powerful response in a reader. Be it laughter or tears, or simply the satisfaction of a well-delivered story, we crave emotional reward in the form of reader response. It is in our craft that we shape that response, in the finely drawn characters who populate our pages, in the twists and turns of fate and the resolution that ends their agony or delivers them joy.

Are writers manipulative? But of course. Many of us seek to convey a message, to challenge or reassure our readers. To do this, we attempt to shape, or at least influence their response. We are seers, modern-day Cassandras and harbingers, therapists even. And this means that, above all, we seek a certain reaction. How we achieve this is the pivotal question, the crux of the writer's art. Every book, article, verse, every single piece of writing produces a response — otherwise it has failed.

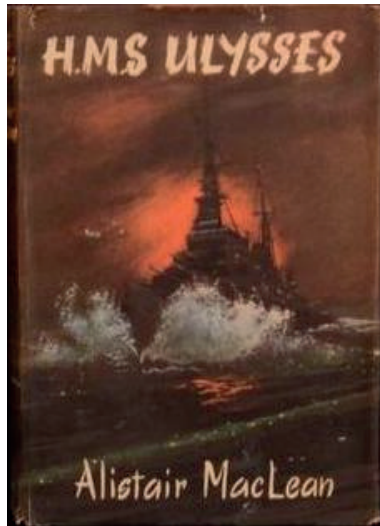
In my own books I aim to portray the triumphs and tragedies of my characters in such a way as to spark emotion. As every author knows, this is careful, patient work involving the gradual shaping of personalities, pitting them against callous fate and plotting their reaction. I often become fond of my characters and, should they die, I experience genuine regret. But I do not cry. J.K. Rowling is

I was utterly bewildered by my reaction. This was not a book I had expected to unlock the floodgates.

”

rumoured to have cried when she killed off Sirius Black; I was far less moved. So how did Alistair MacLean succeed where Rowling failed?

MacLean's book is brilliantly written, carefully crafted and exquisitely detailed. His characters are chronically flawed — indeed when *HMS Ulysses* puts to sea she is full of disgruntled sailors on the verge of mutiny. His characters suffer a sapping, mind-numbing exhaustion which leads many to make mistakes. These men are at the end of their proverbial tether — and this is at the very start of the story. So we expect them to snap and



break, we expect them to rebel, we consider them lost almost before they set sail.

But then we come to know them. We expect failure, disaster — and there is plenty of opportunity for both, with lurking U-boats, dive-bombing aircraft and the lethal chill of the Arctic. But somehow they hang on, and we become tethered to these characters, mesmerised by them. Isn't this what good writing is all about? Indeed. But it is not what makes this writing brilliant — it is the dazzling use of the unexpected.

When a story charts a certain direction, the reader is pulled along in its wake and any authors worth their salt will deliberately set out to undermine their readers' expectations. Readers love this sense of being undermined and they invariably return for more. But MacLean's brilliance lies not in simply effecting a U-turn in his plot. He delivers an extraordinary nobility where none existed, a triumph where it seemed impossible and a sense of worth where it could never have been found. It is not tragedy that makes this story so utterly poignant, it is the sense of redemption — benediction and absolution before the cross of vicissitude.

The final scenes are both disturbing and utterly profound in their portrayal of a failure to understand that is absolute. Those in distant authority who seek to comprehend the men of this ship fail dismally because it is beyond the limited reach of their experience, the pallid pull of their imagination. It is the pointlessness of the sacrifice, the sheer magnitude of which beggars belief, that is the last awful assault on the reader's senses. The terrible parallel between those who listen and he who tells in the final scene is so understated that it almost steals the story. This is genius at work. This is also the reason for my tears.

Catherine McCullagh writes historical fiction, much of it set against a wartime backdrop. Her latest book, *Love and Retribution*, was released on 5 January 2022 by Big Sky Publishing. Follow Catherine on Facebook at [/catherinemccullaghauthor](#).

Winner of the 2022 Abbie Clancy Award: Toyah Brooke-Webb

In March, Dr Teresa Peterson announced **Toyah Brooke-Webb** as the winner of the 2022 Abbie Clancy Award for her abstract '**I'm the kin: The Nonhuman Poetics of Laura Jean McKay's The Animals in That Country.**'

Toyah said, 'I am delighted to receive this year's Abbie Clancy Award. Thank you to the NSW Society of Women Writers for the generous support & to Dr Teresa Peterson for her comments. It was lovely to meet you all this month.'

The Abbie Clancy Award is awarded to a female honours and or post-graduate student attending university in New South Wales for an abstract of an unpublished research paper on the published or unpublished works of fiction or non-fiction of an Australian woman writer, journalist, playwright or poet.

Congratulations Toyah! You can read Toyah's winning abstract below.

I'm the kin: The Nonhuman Poetics of Laura Jean McKay's The Animals in That Country

Published amidst accumulating ecocrises and a global pandemic, Laura Jean McKay's novel *The Animals in That Country* (2020) is a salient work of speculative fiction. The narrative follows Jean Bennett – a foul-mouthed grandmother and aspiring park ranger – as a 'zooflu' sweeps through Australia. Those infected with the virus are suddenly able to 'hear' non-verbal animal languages. When her granddaughter goes missing, an infected Jean embarks on a road trip through the outback, accompanied by a bossy dingo named Sue. Beyond the park's borders, Jean finds a world gone wild with an excess of signification.

Drawing on the critical writing of Donna Haraway and Deborah Bird Rose, this paper will explore how McKay's novel represents nonhuman meaning-making. While 'talking animal' stories often anthropomorphise their subjects by translating animal language into a human vernacular, McKay challenges this trope, breaking with the conventions of syntax to create a poetic language that does not elide the alterity at the heart of the nonhuman. Enjambment, repetition,

and typographical markings become codical representations of animal embodiment: the curl of a crocodile tail, the twitch of a dingo ear, a strange semiotics of scent. Through a language of reciprocal gesture – and despite the species caesura – woman and dingo soon learn how to 'make kin'.

Haraway's term 'making kin' emphasises the intentionality of our entangled relationships with myriad human and nonhuman others. As Haraway writes, making kin "as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible". Yet kin is also contingent on stories, on histories, and narrative: kin's making (its poesis) is subject to the telling.

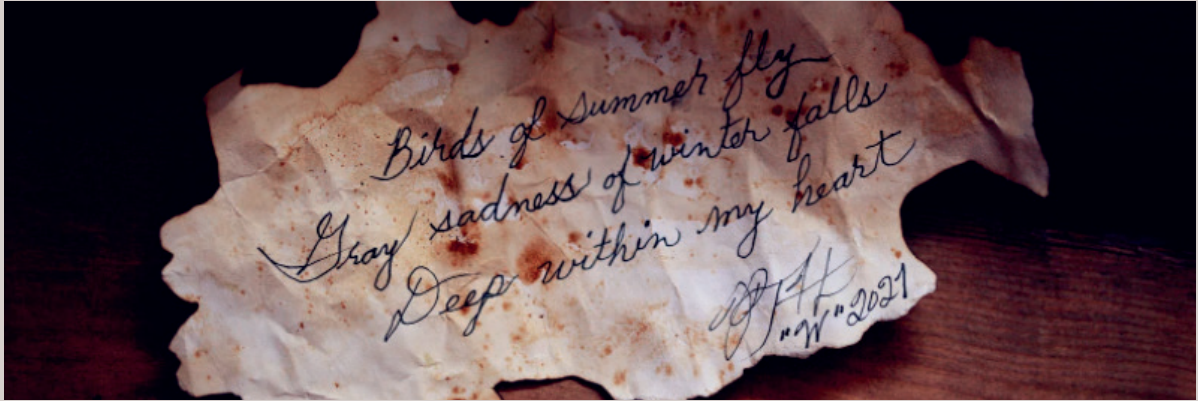
The Animals in That Country is prescient at a time when our entanglement with animals has produced new novel viruses, yet McKay's choice to occlude zooflu's origins purposely avoids using the nonhuman as a (metaphorical and literal) scapegoat. From bats, snakes, and pangolins, origin narratives of Covid-19 have attempted to shift the blame to various animals who are themselves the victims of unjust patterns of suffering. What happens when we stop using animals as scapegoats for the world's ills? How might attuning to our nonhuman kin produce an affective ethics of multispecies care? McKay's novel attests that survival in the Anthropocene means caring for all the critters of Country.



Toyah Brooke-Webb is a graduate student at the University of Sydney. She received her Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours from the University of Auckland. Her latest publications can be found in *Canadian Literature*, *Whose Futures?* (Economic and Social Research Aotearoa, 2020), and *Poetry New Zealand Yearbook* (Massey University Press, 2021).

Why Not Write ... a Poem?

BY MARGARET OWEN RUCKERT



'Once our words leave us, they become someone else's muse. Stories and poems are part of the endless recycling of ideas through communities.'

While addressing the audience at a recent poetry launch, I felt the prick of a negative vibe. One man seemed to avoid me, his head distinctly angled downwards.

Later at lunch, he asked, 'why do you write poetry?' The retired man spoke in disparaging tones of his work as a manual labourer, his dyslexia only realised late in life.

'Never did much reading or writing,' he said. 'Only used half my brain.'

We spoke of our backgrounds, our childhoods. I wrote my first poetry book at 8½, my age proudly displayed on the brown paper cover. We shared stories of those people fortunate enough to find a passion early in life, perhaps drawing, playing music, collecting stones. But he hadn't found anything.

Wanting to reach out to him, but not being up-to-date with current dyslexia information, I could only suggest that he ask friends or family to read the poems for him.

Then he mentioned how important audiobooks had been.

I realised that, during my talk, he had been visualising the imagery, the flashes of scenes in each poem. In this case, haiku.

Haiku is a demanding genre, both for the writer and the listener. Most of the haiku I had read twice, following the practice of other presentations. For listeners who missed a key word at the first reading, they had another chance. And for everyone, there was the delight of hearing it again! Obviously the poems were more important than the speaker. Looking at me would have been a distraction.

At the end of the launch, he took four books to share with friends. Poetry, which had been a non-event to him, had apparently changed his day.

Once our words leave us, they become someone else's muse. Stories and poems are part of the endless recycling of ideas through communities.

The only barrier in the way of sharing work is the publication step. But now, with so many sites asking for work, with blogs often uploading a poem a day, there are multiple opportunities for a writer's work to be seen. Heard. And enjoyed.

SUSAN STEGGALL

The Look of the Book



I was the type who looked at discussions of 'What Is Truth' only with a view toward correcting the manuscript. If you were to quote 'I am that I am,' for example, I thought that the fundamental problem was where to put the comma, inside the quotation marks or outside.

Umberto Eco, Foucault's Pendulum, 1988

For years I carried the above quote on a slip of paper in my wallet. As a writer, it resonated with my inner pedant. Three podcasts by Richard Beard similarly caught my writer's imagination.

If a book is judged by its cover, the pages inside also have a 'look' that attracts or repels. The eye scans the text for what Richard Beard, host of *Books and Authors* Podcast BBC Radio, calls pre-reading messages, such as chapter titles and numbers, or the 'little island of an epigraph'.

This standard convention aims for an 'optical comfort zone' that suggests: 'Read this book like those other books that look like books ... and this book will reward you too.'

Some authors subvert the standard approach. James Joyce aimed to eliminate from his pages any visual feature that he called unsightly, especially dialogue enclosed in 'perverted commas'. Aly Smith and Sally Rooney often don't punctuate their dialogue so that speech is integrated into the narrative flow. In some contemporary novels short blocks of text are separated by line breaks (white space) to move the reader quickly through fictional space and time, unlike 'those dense tombstone paragraphs favoured by Victorian novelists' which leave the eye searching for the relief of a chapter ending.

Punctuation is the visible furniture of a text and to the naked eye, over or under furnishing can influence the reading experience: 'Phrases too delicate to stand alone will be hammocked between protective commas or excused responsibility by a hedge of

brackets.' Elaborate punctuation might represent 'complexity of thought', but short full-stopped sentences are useful for driving the plot such as Lee Childs' *Jack Reacher* novels. By way of contrast, the first half page of Alan Hollinghurst's novel *The Line of Beauty*, contains two colons, a semi-colon, a dash and an exclamation mark as well as commas and full stops.

Unspoken prohibitions for conventional writers – avoid italics; bold; block capitals; variable fonts; exclamation marks and starting consecutive paragraphs with the same word – are ignored by experimentalists. In Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*, passages of several sparsely punctuated lines create 'disinhibited' textual shapes that 'flow the content of the novel between disparate characters and voices'. In *little scratch*, Rebecca Watson evokes the 'de-formatting' practices of social media posts in which punctuation and capital letters are often absent. If the Internet shapes how we see the world, it also influences the look of printed fiction. Authors can appropriate the forms of WhatsApp messages, emails, and Twitter and Instagram posts, like Jennifer Egan's, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Nonetheless, Beard says, fiction with 'reassuring paragraphs' and indented dialogue, endures:

'A book that looks more or less like earlier books, has a decent chance of being read in the tradition that it visually follows, as an immersive and addictive experience ... the appearance of the page helps to pull us in.'

HAPPY NEW YEAR

the old cockerel is tattered
lice-ridden ready to fade away
into the husk of pastness

a pristine bird flaps his wings
fresh and red as the wattles
on his head the countdown over
he'll crow and strut the stage

he sees a barge at anchor in the bay
primed for action watches
kids race and play on the sand
mums chat dads ease corks
from champers...three...two...one...zero!

raised glasses bubbles rise rooster animation
midnight – but something's not right
boom! the barge thunders into flame

rainbows of light rockets fire horizontally
fireworks snap crackle and roar
revellers flee
the cockerel takes flight his tail feathers blown astray
squawking fright and vexation he sees
the barge drift away blasting at random –
silence at last

the untried bird
shakes singed plumage
creeps back

rasps a shaky cock a doodle do
another New Year –
of peace and goodwill

The beauty and wonder of flight has fascinated us, man, woman and child, since time began. Birds remain a source of wonder and delight, in an age when many species are threatened by the effects of Climate Change and Global Warming. World-wide wild fires are catastrophic for bird life, flora and fauna. In an era when we see melting ice caps preventing polar bears hunting, sea levels are on the rise, and wild storms wreaking havoc, our very planet is under threat.

Birds could be a symbol of our hopes for a cleaner, greener future.

Decima Wraxall

Ink Drops

Felicity Pulman's favourite newsletter...

Every month I look forward to receiving Notes from a Book Addict from literary doyen Susannah Fullerton, who invites you to enjoy her wonderful world of talks, travels, writers' lives and literature.

Her newsletters are crammed full of information about writers living and dead, favourite books and poems, movies and TV series about books, and information about her many literary talks, videos, books, readers' guides and the fascinating literary tours she conducts, both in Australia and overseas.

Susannah's newsletters (and her talks) reflect her wit and humour as well as her vast knowledge of writers, their works, and the arts in general.

As well as being a popular presenter, she's also the patron of the Jane Austen Society in Australia, the Kipling Society, and also the international Heyer Society.



To sign up for Susannah's newsletters just click on the *Notes from a Book Addict* section on her website www.susannahfullerton.com.au to ask to become a subscriber.

Susanne Gervay on What's in a Name?

When names reflect the themes of your story, they enhance the authenticity of characters. Selecting the appropriate character's name is part of the journey of writing your novel.

Names are important in my *Shadows of Olive Trees* where the conflict is revealed of multiculturalism for young second generation women within the context of the feminism of the 70's. The friends are from Greek and 6th generation Australian backgrounds. I drew from my knowledge of the Greek community and the names of mythical gods. So Tessa and Athena became my main characters with the Australian born Jenny as the third authentic name.

In *Heroes of the Secret Underground* naming characters was pivotal to my emotional commitment to the book. It is a part autobiographical, historical, philosophical novel for young people drawing deeply on my family and heritage. The names of the grandparents in the novel had to be my parents, Zoltan and Verushka. Zoltan in

Hungarian means king. For me, my father was a king. The names gave me entry to the deep ideologies of growing up from a refugee family. It gave me entry to understanding a world at war.

So name your characters carefully. Invest in who they are. It is something I always do as a writer.

(Find out about how other members name their characters in our 5 Write Answers section this month!)

Jacqui Brown's Favourite Podcast:

I love listening to WriteLane, a podcast from Pulitzer Prize-winning Tampa Bay Times journalist Lane DeGregory.

In conversation with her editor, she explores the writing process (finding ideas, interviewing, seeking structure) as well as doing dives deep into a single story, breaking down the how and why. I highly recommend it!



What is Ink Drops? It's a place for mini contributions - nothing is too small! Whether it's a writing quote that's helped you, micro-fiction, vignette, a book recommendation, commentary, your best review, your funniest review, a podcast episode you've loved, whatever you'd like to share... from a paragraph down to a few words, use your imagination, it's up to you!

Ink Drops

The Shalott Trilogy by Felicity Pulman

REVIEWED BY RITA SHAW

I had never been a huge fan of science fiction and fantasy novels, however, when I started reading the first in Felicity Pulman's trilogy, *Shalott Book 1: Into the Unknown*, I was hooked from the first page.

Beginning with a normal history lesson at a regular Sydney high school, Callie's imagination, determination, and fierce loyalty to her family and her friends takes the reader on an incredible journey when she inadvertently transports herself and her school friends into their homework assignment.

Combining elements of *The Wizard of Oz*, *Alice in Wonderland*, British history, time travel and modern game technology, *Shalott Book 1* intricately intermingles the extreme poverty as well as pomp and circumstance of English medieval times, weaving an unpredictable path through Arthurian legend. The story skilfully captures the reader's imagination and curiosity to discover how five teenagers overcome multiple challenges facing them in their quest to meet King Arthur, Guinevere and Sir Lancelot, and of course the ultimate risks inherent in finding their way back home.

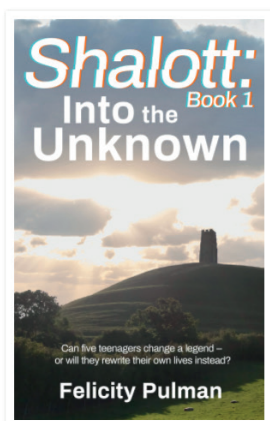
Shalott Book 2: Dangerous Magic places us back in the mythical, strange world of Camelot, immediately reviving memories of the previous book's ending but taking us deeper into black magic, superstition and the general lack of education which dominated society. Pulman accurately chronicles historical facts, such as the

bubonic plague, blending them into the storyline to directly affect the characters and provide serious problems to be surmounted. Callie battles her own demons and self-doubts to achieve her goals in returning to this challenging environment, then leaving just a little still to be achieved, making way for the third book.

In *Shalott Book 3: End Play*, Callie is forced to think outside the hexagon, fiercely protecting her sister and friends caught up in hand-to-hand fighting in a real life medieval battle, and overcoming serious physical challenges to achieve her real mission before returning home safely.

While Pulman created these unique books for young adults based on the poem *The Lady of Shalott* by Alfred Lord Tennyson, they can be enjoyed by anyone, all three consecutively or each one standalone, regardless of the reader's age or knowledge of the subject matter. All encompass fantasies dreamed by multiple generations for many years.

I can't wait to read further of Callie and her cohorts as they grow older, hopefully more daring in their quests and more familiar with how to move between time-warped worlds. Meanwhile, I can only hope that a film producer will see the real worth of this trilogy and pick up the movie rights.



5

One
Question.

Five
Answers.

Every
Issue.

Got a curious question?
Something you're keen to
know? Want to know how
other writers do it, don't
do it, or what their secrets
are?

Please submit your
questions to the editor:
jacqui@jacquibrownwrites.com

And if you'd like to be
asked a question, don't be
shy, my email is just there,
right above this paragraph!
I'm very friendly, so why
not put your hand up?

WRITE

What's in a name? Tell us

Kristin Darell

As a character-driven writer, I think character names are really important. A name has to feel right. I was once asked to change my protagonist's name in a story. I did, but it was so hard to see the character the same way.

When I'm out I take note of interesting names, especially when they stick with me. I heard about a girl named Phoenix and my mind gave her the nickname 'Nix'. I'm hoping to write her story one day.

Sometimes I don't feel like I name my characters at all. They come knocking on my imagination demanding to be let in. It's fabulous when this happens – but when it doesn't, there is always Google's top 100 baby name list!



Kristin Darell has enjoyed sharing stories as an author and journalist for more than 25 years. She is the co-author of a middle-grade science fiction novel published in 2016 and has contributed to a number of Australian anthologies. Kristin loves sharing her passion for writing in schools and works as the Program Manager for the Australian Children's Laureate Foundation.

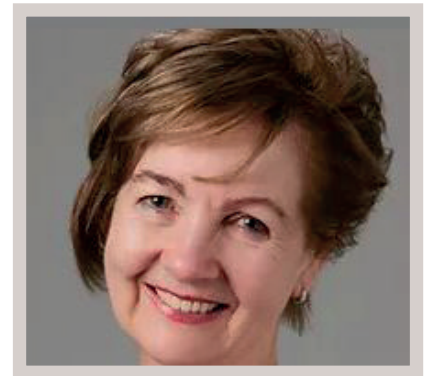
www.kristindarell.com.au

Valerie Pybus

As an impressionable young teenager emigrating to Sydney by sea, I was madly infatuated with a blonde Devonshire man, Graeme Furneaux. He was 22 and when he discovered I was a silly young girl he quickly vanished from my life.

When I wrote my book it was a foregone conclusion my protagonist would be named Furneaux. Graeme felt too modern and Christian suited my character as he discovered his steadfast Christian roots. It was easy to choose other Cornish names for characters indebted as we are with the miners who proliferated our early colonies.

Websites offer much information on roots of names and explanations. My visits to historic estates in Devon and Cornwall with slight changes in name spelling were invaluable.



Valerie Pybus has written seven books and travelled to more countries than she can remember. She has won numerous writing competitions and her stories have been included in numerous anthologies.

www.valeriepybus.com

ANSWERS

about how you name your characters.

Cat Sparks

For stories set in the near future, I select characters' names from real life 'most popular baby names' lists published for the year of their birth.

My current work requires names for far future artificial intelligence characters, which is proving every bit as difficult as it sounds! I've been trawling through strange old books such as *The National Encyclopaedia* – a dictionary of universal knowledge by writers of eminence in literature science and art, 1880, in search of interesting words that might inspire names or become part of them.

I rarely name characters in my first draft. They're all just Protag, XX or [Name D] as I lay down the narrative undercoat. Their true names reveal themselves over time.



Cat Sparks is a multi-award-winning Australian author, editor and artist with a PhD in science fiction and climate fiction; two collections – *The Bride Price* (2013) and *Dark Harvest* (2020) and a far future novel, *Lotus Blue* (2017). An environmental activist, she loves travel and is currently obsessed with photographing adorable birds and grungy walls.

www.catsparks.net

Anne Benjamin

I aim for names that fit characters' cultures and historical settings. Many of my stories reflect my identity of being from an Indian-Australian family, who regularly moves between the two home countries.

One challenge I have discovered in writing across cultures is of introducing characters whose names might be unfamiliar to groups of readers in either culture. Some Sydney readers told me they were confused by one story of my real-life experience which featured characters named 'Dorai' and 'Duraraj'. Now I look for names that are dissimilar, commence with different initials and maybe shorter forms. Given the rich diversity of cultural and geographic groups within India, the names I choose in different settings should accurately reflect the particular group/s.



Anne Benjamin is a Sydney-based writer with strong Indian connections. She writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She is published in Australian and international journals. Books include non-fiction, *Gemstones*, an anthology of short-form poetry written in collaboration with seven international poets, *Saffron and Silk*, a memoir of India, and an anthology of biographies.

Zena Shapter

I use lists and memories! Firstly, I keep a list of names I like, or have made up, taking inspiration from reading TV and film credits, or the news. Sometimes I like a name, but tweak a vowel or consonant. Sometimes I'll include a common noun that should be a name! Then, when writing, I pick names that match my characters' personalities, and make an alphabetised list of each name used, so my character names don't all sound alike or start with the same letter, as that can confuse readers. Memories help too, especially when selecting a baddie's name – who was the last person who crossed me?! Giving characters a name with personal memories can help portray them with feeling.



Zena Shapter is the Ditmar Award-winning author of *'Towards White'* (IFWG 2017) and co-author of *'Into Tordon'* (MidnightSun 2016). A writing mentor and editor, she's won over a dozen national writing competitions. She loves movies, frogs, chocolate, travel and potatoes and can be found online as @ZenaShapter and at www.zenashapter.com

Looking Back at our recent events!



NOVEMBER 2021

ENGAGING WITH CHARACTERS

WITH ROBYN MCWILLIAM

With ten participants we explored the techniques authors use to draw in the reader. It may be the voice that best matches the story. We looked at aspects of voice. Will the reader want to go on your character's journey?

Sometimes it's the behaviour of characters that draw the reader in. An example was *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman. Eleanor appeared to have no life and spent weekends inebriated at home. This novel started a trend with characters improving their lives.

Each participant jotted down some unusual behaviour they wanted to put their character through also trying out a different style of voice. We went on to look at a study of eccentric behaviour using James Rebanks' *The Shepherd's Life*. He was a sheep farmer in England's Lake District who thought himself an idiot but ended up studying at Oxford University.

As a writer we should know how our characters will cope, what skills and attributes they draw on and these must suit the story. We discussed empathy as related to understanding a character's thoughts and feelings. You cultivate empathy in your writing by capturing the experience of an emotion. I referred the group to my blogs on writing emotion well.

My fascination with human behaviour and the psychology behind it has led to references such as *Breathing Life into Your Characters: How to give your Characters Emotional and Psychological Depth* by Rachel Ballon. Our fictional journey should give some insight into the human condition while

entertaining our reader. Setting up questions in the reader's mind also gets them involved.

We embarked on a writing exercise using a different voice to reveal your character behaving in an unusual or eccentric way whilst trying to get the reader caring for them, or at least becoming involved in their emotional state. Many thanks to those who shared these pieces.

DECEMBER 2021

PERFORMING REDRESS: BEARING WITNESS THROUGH STORYTELLING

WITH DONNA ABELA

On the 8th of December, I put on my silk blouse and made my way to the State Library of NSW where I was to address members of the Society of Women Writers in person.

In my bag was a print out of my keynote address which had been postponed from its July slot due to the latest lockdown. In the work of women writers, I have found keys to creative doorways that otherwise would not have opened for me, so it was extra delightful to have forgone the Zoom option, and to be heading out the door to address fellow women writers in real life.

My talk was titled 'Performing redress: bearing witness through storytelling'. My work as a Narrative Writer for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has completely altered the course of my creative writing.

In my talk, I spoke about how that experience of bearing witness through storytelling continues to infuse my plays and my practice. I discussed this in relation to my latest play called *Prevail* which - like my July keynote slot - went un-staged due to the lockdown. No production of this play meant no photos to share during my talk. However, I

was wearing the opening night blouse I never got to wear, and that felt consoling, and fun, and somehow defiant.

My talk was framed with writers reading their work, and singing carols which had been prefaced with a glimpse into their origins and histories. It was a lovely afternoon, and I thank the Society for the invitation to be part of this end of year gathering.

DECEMBER 2021

THREE BOOKS PUBLISHED IN THE TIME OF COVID

WITH PIP GRIFFIN

Margaret Caro, the extraordinary life of a pioneering dentist, New Zealand, 1848-1938: her story in verse. Pohutukawa Press.

My great aunt, Margaret Caro, adventurer and dentist extraordinaire, was an inspiring role model. At 16 she married Jacob, a Polish Jewish physician at least 10 years older than her, and immediately went with him to work on the goldfields. Not only was she a feminist and social reformer but she worked very successfully in a male-dominated profession from 1880 to 1921.

Margaret was a towering personality, with a commanding manner. Jacob was much shorter but an equally strong character. And he needed to be! I used my imagination to flesh out her extraordinary life.

Virginia & Katherine: The Secret Diaries. Verses of imagined intimacy. Pohutukawa Press.

'Mansfield and her peers, including the Bloomsbury Group, lifted the veil of Victorianism and created a new way of living, seeing and writing that continues to resonate in our 21st century lives.'

Virginia Woolf is the most well known female peer of the short story writer Katherine Mansfield. Being a New Zealander, I've always been proud of Katherine and especially proud that the house she was born in was saved, restored and is now a Wellington museum.

Virginia and Katherine had a lot in common. On their first afternoon together, they discovered they were both 'after the same thing'. They were

'writing their lives'. My book imagines they had an intimate relationship, keeping secret diaries.

The Climb Back: poems for Ted. Ginninderrapress.

This poetry is a memorial to my late partner, Ted who loved tramping in wild places. It's a story of togetherness and separation. Arranged in five sections, they are early poems about our meeting and our relationship, and later poems of grief, remembrance and hope.



Save The
Dates for
these fantastic
upcoming
speakers!

11 MAY 2022

VALERIE PYBUS
REBECCA CONWAY

8 JUNE 2022

GABRIELLA KELLY-DAVIES:
MARY-ANNE O'CONNOR

13 JULY

LARISSA BEHRENDT
PLUS
5 MEMBERS SHARE
THEIR NEWSBITES

The Hanging Swamp

Cliff Boardwalk Waverley-Bronte

The wash, the shh-shh-shh of the wash
up here,
The endless wash underscoring meditations,
The hanging swamp not far below,
A hanging cliffside garden.
Not the smooth limestone of Nebuchadnezzar's build
For his homesick wife longing for the green of Persia,
But nature's sandstone cliffs, perfect golden chunks
With crevices and clefts.
Not gardens of olive, oak and pomegranates,
Nor pines and cypresses quince or myrrh
But banksia, melaleuca and coastal tea tree,
A hanging swamp, pockets of rainwater,
Myrtles, mosses and lichens, sedges and grasses
And the striped march frogs, tok-tok-tok.
And the common eastern froglets, crik-crik-crik.
Not aqueducts and sluice gate,
But marvels of nature's engineering
As old as Babylon, primordial,
An ancient terrestrial landscape
Still weathering, still changing
To the shh-shh-shh of the wash,
The endless shh-shh-shh of the wash.

Libby Hathorn

Women's Ink! Magazine: ISSN 2203-3017

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