

## Chair's Message

Happy new year!  
Hope you all had a good festive season  
and a relaxing break.



In 2018, we are looking forward to some exciting events, including a workshop on writing for film and TV; an expanded and uniquely focussed pitch program featuring over a dozen independent publishing companies and literary magazines which will include a specialist pitch day for poets; a picture book workshop, a non-fiction workshop, and much more! We'll be releasing the program very soon--watch this space!

Our AGM will be on Friday February 9, and all members are invited. We also invite you to consider nominating for the Board. Nominations will need to be emailed to the office by January 29.

Wishing everyone a creative and productive 2018,

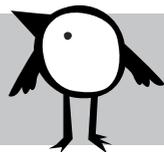
*Sophie Masson*



## A Note from the Editor

Welcome to the first newsletter for 2018. As Sophie mentioned 2018 will be a wonderful year of writing workshops and opportunities for members. In our January newsletter, we share poetry from NEWC member, Caroline Tuohey and Ann Lax, short stories, book reviews and feature article on critical thinking in reading and writing from Dr Alex Dunn at the University of New England. We are also excited to share new books from Dr John Charles Ryan and Dr Jane O'Sullivan. We love to share what our members are working on, we are only an email away - [newcnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:newcnewsletter@gmail.com). As Naomi Shihab Nye says, *words have a bigger life if you share them.* **Becky Holland.**

## Members' Corner



### Ornamental Cabbage by Ann Lax

It would have been a perfect morning had I not noticed the neighbour's lawn chair sitting on my bed of ornamental cabbage. My neighbour is a biggish woman about the size of Cassius Clay so, as might be expected, I am rather intimidated by her.

But nevertheless I asked her what I thought was an ordinary question for an extraordinary situation. "Why is your lawn chair in my bed of ornamental cabbage?"

"I threw it there. My slug of a husband spends all his time sitting in his lawn chair. If he wants his chair he can fetch it. And if he fetches it he can't come back"

The next day I opened my window to a less than perfect morning when I noticed my neighbour's husband sitting in the lawn chair in my bed of ornamental cabbage and frolicking at his feet was their Great Dane.

So I asked my neighbour's wife, "Why is your Great Dane in my bed of ornamental cabbage?"

"I put him there. He's my husband's pet. He bit the postman who's going to sue."

For no reason my husband could discern we moved house. We no longer grow ornamental cabbage.

### A Christmas Night by Caroline Tuohy

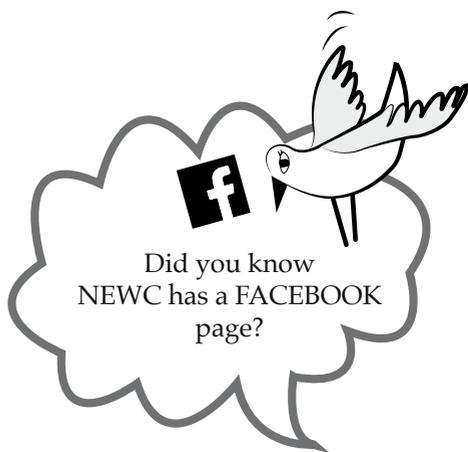
When all is calm on Christmas night,  
I sit alone in candlelight.

I think about the busy morn  
when presents had their paper torn,  
then shrieks and squeals of utter joy,  
as grand-kids found another toy.

While I ate cake, the girls made lunch,  
with everyone a busy bunch.  
And oh, the turkey was divine,  
so too the pudd, and fancy wine.  
Then all my family slowly walked,  
around the garden while we talked.

As evening fell they drove away,  
with hugs and kisses blown my way.  
And now there's only frail, old me,  
but I'm as happy as can be.

My day was filled with love and cheer,  
to last me through another year.



# New Partnership with Big Skies Collaboration

## An exciting new partnership with the Big Skies Collaboration

The New England Writers' Centre is delighted to announce that we have entered into a partnership with The Big Skies Collaboration. The Big Skies Collaboration brings together arts practitioners, astronomers and local communities to creatively explore and celebrate people's relationships with the cosmos within the 700 kilometre array (700KA) of astro-observatories in inland rural New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

The Skywriters Project within Big Skies has 110 members and invites professional and aspiring writers to author new stories, in any genre, about their own or other people's (or other beings'?) relationships with celestial phenomena in our southern sky.

The partnership between NEWC and Big Skies/Skywriters will extend opportunities for members of both our organisations, as well as greatly enlarge the range of our networks and mailing lists.

These are just some of the benefits for NEWC:

- Armidale will be included as a Skywriters Hub within the Big Skies Collaboration
- NEWC members will gain access to Big Skies Collaboration's info, newsletters etc
- The opportunity to be published on their website
- NEWC members will also be eligible to submit work for consideration in a very exciting project, the Skywriters Anthology—more on that soon!
- Big Skies members will gain access to all NEWC news and announcements and also get a special 'partner organisation' discount to NEWC events

This is a great affirmation of the potential for creative partnerships and productive links with regional, rural and remote writers and communities well beyond the borders of New England. Check out Big Skies Collaboration

<https://bigskiescollaboration.wordpress.com/>

# A Poet for All Seasons

**Corinne Buckland shares her thoughts and experience with NEWC's poetry workshops and shares her journey with us.**

In 2017 Armidale welcomed nature poet John Charles Ryan who took up a position at UNE. During the year he offered the wider community four-season based poetry workshops at NERAM, each with a beguiling title: 'Recollecting the Summer', 'Attending to Autumn', 'Wondering about Winter', and 'Sensing Spring'. John's deep love of poetry, his literary expertise, and his commitment to the science and conservation of nature inspired participants as we travelled with him into the joys of each season.

John provided us with a tantalising selection of poems from established nature poets, viewed through the lens of "Sense, Spirit, Science, Story and Song".

Each workshop included a tour of NERAM grounds by botanical experts who explained the intricate inter-dependencies of the regional flora. This encouraged us to more fully appreciate the astonishing complexity and grace of nature, and enriched the writing of our own nature poems.

Throughout the workshops John enlarged our understanding of the power of poetry to change the way we look and listen to our world. In this sense poetry, in its uniqueness as an



art form, can change the quality of our lives. We are grateful to John for this opportunity and hope he will continue his offerings in coming years.



## **Autumn by Ann Lax**

In her autumn years  
and through the mists of time  
she contemplates her childhood  
her memories forming  
a kaleidoscope of pattern  
and colour and change.  
Those years have flitted by  
like doves on the wing.

She often lingers at sunset  
when silence falls like a cloak  
over the world  
to glean knowledge from  
these images of the past.

She closes her eyes  
and the winds of rebirth  
blow through her being.



# NEWC Members' Published Books

## **Between Art and Poetry: New Perspectives on Tablelands Flora**

Recently launched at Reader's Companion, *Between Art and Poetry* is a collaboration between botanical poet John Charles Ryan and botanical artist David Mackay on the diversity and beauty of the natural environments and flora of the New England Tablelands.

The aim of this project is to foster greater dialogue between the arts and sciences, specifically, improved communication and mutual understanding between the visual arts and poetry, on the one hand, and environmental science, on the other. The ultimate purpose of the collaboration is to raise public awareness of the diversity and fragile beauty of the natural environments that surround us.

**John Charles Ryan** is a writer and research fellow in the School of Arts at UNE. Originally from the US, he lived in Perth for seven years before moving to Armidale in March. His botanical poetry books include *Two with Nature* (2012, Fremantle Press) and *No Requiem for the Forest* (2018, Hallowell Press).

**David Mackay** is a botanical artist, Macleay Fellow at the Linnean Society of NSW and doctoral candidate in the School of Environmental and Rural Sciences at UNE. For more about his

work, see: <https://davidmackay.com.au>

John Charles Ryan also launched his book, *Plants in Contemporary Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination* a study of the importance of plants to contemporary Australian, British and US-American poetry. Drawing from recent scientific studies of plant cognition, the book develops a view of poetry as an important means to understand botanical life.

It's time to renew your membership!

Adults: \$30

Students (under 18): \$15

Students (tertiary): \$20

Pensioners \$25

Organisations: \$50



# Members' News

## Published Book

NEWC member, Jane O'Sullivan, has recently had a poetry chapbook published in Ginninderra Press's 'Picaro Poets' series. The chapbook, entitled *Mondo Cane – Street Dogs of Italy*, is comprised of thirteen poems based on observation of the lives of dogs, be they the pampered pets or merely tolerated strays in and around the streets, cafes and public monuments of Italy.

*Mondo Cane* was launched at Reader's Companion, and copies of the chapbook can be purchased through Reader's Companion or can be ordered from Ginninderra Press –

[www.ginninderrapress.com.au](http://www.ginninderrapress.com.au)

The lead poem from the *Mondo Cane* chapbook has just won the runner up prize in the 'Artefact to Art Competition' of the School of Archeology & Ancient History, at The University of Leicester, in the UK. Jane will receive prize money and the poem will be included in a forthcoming specially commissioned book to be published by UK-based publishing house, Routledge.

**Congratulations Jane!**

## Congratulations!

Four of the winners in 2016's Thunderbolt Prize: Maryanne Ross (Fiction and Emerging Author Award), Ian Hood (Poetry), Maryrose Cuskelly (Non-Fiction) and William Bennett

(New England Award) have had their winning pieces selected for inclusion in the 2017 edition of the prestigious annual anthology, *Award Winning Australian Writing*, published by Melbourne Books. The book will be published soon. More below. It's a great extra accolade both for these winners' work, and for the quality of our Prize!

## RELAX AND WRITE RETREAT

Friday March 16 - Monday March 19, 2018

*A weekend of yoga and writing for women*

Whether you're a writer in need of relaxation and a good stretch, or a yoga practitioner yearning to write, this retreat is for you.

Writing buddies Helena Pastor and Edwina Shaw have been holding their own private writing retreats at Evans Head since 2005 to relax and write and share their stories. In 2017 they opened up their retreat to other women to do the same. So, come along and join our merry band of scribes and mermaids. Relax, write and enjoy yourself in a beautiful coastal setting with experienced workshop facilitators. Unwind with yoga and free your creative voice with lots of fun writing activities and workshops. Only a few minutes walk from Evans Head's glorious beaches.

More info:

Helena Pastor - M: 0447 334 665

E: [helenapastor2@gmail.com](mailto:helenapastor2@gmail.com)

<https://relaxandwriteretreats.blog>

# In the spotlight

## Critical Thinking with Dr Alex Dunn from University of New England

*"I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful and another deformed; decide concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed."* David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Sect VII

David Hume's words above seem to sum up what critical thinking is, at least in an academic context; that is, it's about examining and justifying one's beliefs. Hume was a philosopher, but his words should strike a chord with any writer insofar as the uneasiness he talks about is a disposition to be embraced. Why? Because it prompts writers and readers to consider what's being said, why it's being said, how it should be said, or whether it should be said at all. Of course, Hume wasn't the first to act on the feeling of unease surrounding unexamined assumptions. Plato's version of Socrates sought to not only act on his own unease but to actively make others uneasy too. He did this by forcing others to justify their convictions, and in the process those interlocutors found that what once seemed obvious became doubtful.

In this sense, critical thinking is not so much building a bank of what we know, but asking whether we're really justified in knowing what we think we know. Modern science backs up Socrates' humility towards knowledge. Take the Nobel Prize winning work of Kahneman and Tversky on cognitive bias for example. Like Socrates, these psychologists found that what people take to be reality is often very much a subjective 'reality'. Without going into too much detail, cognitive bias suggests that humans have evolved to use heuristics, or habitual responses to stimuli rather than careful logical analysis. This is important when someone has to make a quick decision (is that person a threat or friendly?) but it can lead us astray too (confusing correlation with cause for example – something Hume didn't do by the way).

I've focused on this uneasiness instead of trying to give you a knock-down definition that accounts for all critical thinking – because such a definition is either so unwieldy that the working memory can't accommodate it, or the definition falls short. What's the reason for this? As the Australian Academic Tim Moore suggests, it's because there simply is no essential meaning of what critical thinking is: it

means different things in different contexts. Moore says that instead of thinking of a monolithic idea of critical thinking we should, instead, consider it in terms of Wittgenstein's (sorry, another philosopher) idea of family resemblance. Think of the term 'game'. Is there one thing that is common to all games? The short answer is no. Some games involve balls, some computers, some are professional, some amateur, some are on paper, some require a playing field. However, we know a game when we see it! The same is true of critical thinking, it means different things in different contexts, but we often don't make these differences explicit.

I'm now writing in the context of an audience who are interested in writing. But, again, there is no one thing that writing is: writing is made up of multitudes of styles, genres and traditions. This being the case, what advice can I give to such a diverse audience in such a short space about how critical thinking could relate to them? If I can pass on one thing, I think that the unease expressed by Socrates and Hume is to be embraced. Philosophers and many other writers take this as a cue to dive deeper and find out what exactly is wrong with what's been said or thought, why it's wrong and how it's wrong. The disposition to do this can lead to interesting outcomes, and not just for philosophers. For example, if you're writing fiction, you might analyse why one character believes what they do. This will entail finding out what principles might inform their actions – be they unconscious or conscious. Further, how did they come to be like that? What social conditions were they in? All of a sudden the logic of narrative starts to lead somewhere.

I haven't talked too much about argumentation, inductive and deductive logic or a host of other skills and dispositions that make up the canon of critical thinking. But, taking on the idea of humility about knowledge, of looking for assumptions and then interrogating those assumptions, including one's own, is a vital part of critical thinking. The way we do this will depend on the context and the purpose of our thinking. This is where critical thinking becomes intertwined with creative thinking – we have a problem, how do we solve it? Common to Plato's Socrates, David Hume and contemporary psychologists like Kahneman and Tversky, is the recognition that humans are all too fallible, and one of our greatest fallibilities is failing to realise this. If the problem you are solving is how to start filling a blank page, perhaps you could think about Hume's unease and work out what principles guide your own action or those of others. I can't tell you what those principles are: if I did, you wouldn't be critically thinking.

# In the reader's chair with Roy from Reader's Companion

## How To Stop Time by Matt Haig

Let me start this review by simply saying "This is a great book". The author takes you on an unforgettable journey through history, showing how in reality time has changed nothing. Humankind continues to make the same mistakes and this is shown by someone who has actually lived for hundreds of years, the main character of the book – Tom Hazard.

If you liked Woody Allen's fantastic movie "Midnight In Paris" then you will love this book. Combining a journey through history with some very beautiful philosophical musings you will be engaged from page one. The story takes you on a journey through time and place, from Shakespeare's England to jazz age Paris to surfing in Byron Bay, and the story moves seamlessly.

Using quotes from the writer of some amazing essays from the 1500's, the philosopher Michel de Montaigne, showing that we can, in fact, learn from history. "There were many terrible things in my life and most of them never happened."

"That's the thing with time, isn't it? It's not all the same. Some days - some years - some decades - are empty. There is nothing to them. It's just flat water. And then you come across a year, or even a day, or an afternoon. And it is everything. It is the whole thing."



The main character has been in love only once, back in the 1600's. He sees his longevity as a curse and has avoided relationships as they inevitably end as he outlives everyone.

The author himself has battled depression between the age of 24 and 32 and the main character shows a person learning to cope with his depression.

This book is much deeper than it appears on the surface. While it is a fun romp through history (meeting Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald and trying a brand new cocktail with them, a Bloody Mary) it contains a very strong message about how we live our lives. This is one of my best books this year by far.

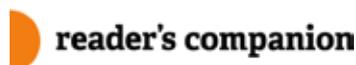
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