

New England WRITERS CENTRE

For people who love writing and reading

December 2013 – February 2014



THUNDERBOLT SUCCESS

Our first national competition—*The New England Thunderbolt Prize For Crime Writing*—was a great success, drawing more than 100 entries from across Australia.

Yve Louis is pictured (centre) receiving her certificate and \$200 cheque for the New England award from chairman, **Sophie Masson**, and poetry judge, **Michael Sharkey**. See pages 4–6 for full results of the competition, and also our website, where the winning entries have been published.

IMPORTANT DATES

The Centre will be closed from 4pm Tuesday, December 24, and will resume normal opening hours Tuesday, January 14.

The Drop-In Workshop will not be held in January. It resumes last Thursday in February.

The Board will meet Friday January 31 at 5pm, to consider our situation following our funding cut, and a date will be set then for the Annual General Meeting. If anyone wants to stand for the Board, or nominate someone else, please contact us.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

This has been an important and in many ways very successful year for the Centre, with several new programs inaugurated and new partnerships with other organisations formed.

The inaugural *New England Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing* was a real success, attracting more than 100 entries from all over Australia and raising the profile of the Centre nationally. The first *Booked In Festival* of Children's and YA Literature was also very popular, with a major author (**Isabelle Carmody**) and illustrator (**Anne Spudvilas**) featured, and fantastic feedback from attendees—some of whom had travelled all the way from Sydney for it!

The inaugural *Skype Sessions* which enabled local creators to interact with major agents, publishers and authors was an interesting addition to our program, and of course our usual events such as author workshops and Youth Online also featured.

As well, our collaboration with the School of Arts, UNE, and the New England and North West sub-branch of the Children's Book Council of NSW, over such events as *Booked In*, has proven to be very successful, and we are planning to continue that next year.

Sponsorship efforts were also successful, with all the award categories in the New England Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing sponsored in their entirety, by the School of Arts UNE, the *Armidale Express*, Collins, Dymocks, the Armidale Library, and Granny Fi's Toy Cupboard. As well, New England Travel and QANTAS sponsored some of the travel for the *Booked In* presenters.

However, despite the undoubted success of NEWC in bringing fantastic new and tried-and-true programs to our members and the wider community, there is a substantial cloud on the horizon, namely, funding. You may be aware that for the second time in as many years, Arts NSW has substantially cut basic funding to NEWC, affecting our operational budget (i.e., wages for our staff) and greatly straining our capacity to deliver our programs and services to members and the wider community.

In 2013, we were fortunate to make up that funding shortfall with generous donations from **John Walker** and his colleagues at the Macquarie Bank, from the Macquarie Foundation, and from the Small

Steps Foundation. Over 2013, the Board and Director have worked very hard to try and ensure that the sustainability of the Centre could be increased, and we have engaged directly, repeatedly and exhaustively with Arts NSW to try and find the best way forward with them and maximise our chances of getting a better operational grant this year.

Despite all our efforts and successes, however, they cut funding to us once again, and in fact in 2014 we will get even less than we received in 2013, which was itself a substantial cut in the previous year's funding. This is a serious problem for the Centre, and if a solution is not found by mid next year, it will threaten our viability, indeed, our existence. We are exploring various options to maintain the Centre's sustainability, including approaches made to the Arts Minister via our local State MP Adam Marshall, and ways of reducing the Centre's running costs by looking at the possibility of having an office within another organisation.

Subject to separate project funding from other funding bodies, we are planning to have a good line-up of events for you next year but feel it is important that as members you should know the Centre's situation.

We are also very much looking for ideas and input from our members, to help us improve our current and future position. For instance, do you have any links within the business community that might help us improve our sponsorship possibilities? What do you think should be our planning strategy for the future? On these and any other topics of relevant interest, all thoughts greatly appreciated.

- **Sophie Masson, Chair**

SUCCESS FOR NEW ENGLAND WRITERS in 2013

Bronwyn Parry published her fourth novel with Hachette, *Darkening Skies*, (the third in her loosely-linked Dungirri series). In January, Bronwyn was voted Australia's 26th most popular novelist in a poll run by Booktopia, and in March, her novel *Dead Heat* won the Australian Romance Readers Association award for Favourite Romantic Suspense of 2012. It was also a finalist in the Romance Writers of America awards.

Counselling psychologist **Lilian Wissink** published *The Creative Seed: How to enrich your life through*

creativity with Exisle Publishing. The book is for people involved in different forms of creative expression, including writing, performing, arts and crafts and also for readers who want to explore some form of creativity. The publication of the book led to numerous radio interviews across Australia and articles in popular magazines like *Madison* and *Better Homes and Gardens*.

Liz Horne, who writes poetry as **EA Horne**, won second prize in the Fellowship of Australian Writers (FAW) John Shaw Neilson poetry award with her poem, 'The Mask-Maker'. Another poem, 'Fifteen', won the FAW WA 2012 Tom Collins Poetry Prize.

Yve Louis won the inaugural New England Thunderbolt Prize (New England section) with her poem 'Blade', which focuses on the history of the five women victims of Jack the Ripper. She also won the Society of Women Writers Biennial Book Award 2013 (Poetry) for her collection *A Door in the Forest* published in September 2012 by Blue Tongue Press, Armidale.

Sophie Masson's new books in 2013 included *Scarlet in the Snow* (Random House Australia), a YA fairytale novel released in Australia, USA and the UK; *Two Trickster Tales from Russia*, retold by Sophie and illustrated by David Allan, a children's picture book published by her new venture, Christmas Press; and *The Romance Diaries: Ruby* and *The Romance Diaries: Stella* (ABC Books/Harper Collins), both published under the pseudonym of Jenna Austen. As e-books, she published *By the Book: Tips of the Trade for Writers* (Sixteen Press); and *Black Wings, a Novel of the French Revolution* (AchukaBooks, UK). Both these are available on Amazon as well as Authors Unlimited (ASA).

Forthcoming in 2014, Sophie has *The Crystal Heart* (RHA), YA fairytale novel. *Emilio*, (Allen and Unwin Through My Eyes series), contemporary middle-grade novel. *1914* (Scholastic Press Australia): historical novel for middle-grade readers, part of a multi-author series, the Great War, set in the First World War. *The Adaptable Author: Coping with Change in a Digital Age*, non-fiction book looking at how authors sustain careers (Keesing Press). In other news: *Moonlight and Ashes* (published in 2012) was shortlisted for the 2013 Davitt Awards, and Sophie was re-elected Chair of the Australian Society of Authors, and served on the Book Industry Collaborative Council.

Fiona McDonald published *A Popular History of Graffiti* with SkyHorse Publishing New York and *The Other Woman: a history of the mistress* was published by The History Press, UK. She was contracted to produce a book for Sky Horse called *Fairy Gardening 101*. She was the designer for Christmas Press's debut title, *Two Trickster Tales from Russia* and is illustrating *Two Selkie Stories from Scotland* retold by Kate Forsyth to come out in May next year.

Christine Perrott's *Patient Fortitude* was published by Sid Harta, and a 500-word piece she wrote about it for a Fairfax supplement on health and science was published in the *Melbourne Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Dr Marty Branagan, Lecturer in Peace Studies at UNE, published *Global Warming, Militarism and Nonviolence: The Art of Active Resistance* with Palgrave Macmillan.

Dr Jeremy Fisher, Senior Lecturer in Writing at UNE, published *How to tell your father to drop dead and other stories*.

Lynn Newberry published *Master of Illusion*, a historical mystery/romance set in the operatic world of late 19th century France, under the pen-name of Anne Rouen.

WHAT WE DID THIS YEAR

Sophie Masson: Early in 2013, in partnership with two creator friends who are also locals, illustrator David Allan and author/artist/designer Fiona McDonald (a NEWC member too), I started Christmas Press, a new children's picture book publisher specialising in traditional tales—folk and fairytales as well as myths and legends—retold by well-known authors and gorgeously illustrated in classic styles reminiscent of the places the stories come from. Our launch title, *Two Trickster Tales from Russia*, came out in early October and has attracted great support from readers, booksellers, libraries and fellow creators. We sold the first print run quickly and reprinted mid-November. An audio book edition of *Two Trickster Tales from Russia* will very soon be available (at latest December 1). This full production, complete with incidental music and sound effects, has been produced by Sounds Like Books, a small start-up that is the brainchild of my two sons, actor/video producer Xavier and musician/music producer/audio engineer Bevis. They also create book trailers: www.soundslikebooks.wordpress.com

We are planning three more titles in 2014: *Two Selkie Stories from Scotland*, retold by Kate Forsyth and illustrated by Fiona McDonald (May 2014); *Two Tales of Twins from Ancient Greece and Rome*, retold by Ursula Dubosarsky and illustrated by David Allan; and a special Christmas production called *Once Upon a Christmas*, which will be one of those lovely retro 'Annual' type books, with stories, poems, comic strips, recipes etc, and lots of illustrations—the book will be compiled and edited by our editor Beattie Alvarez (also a NEWC member). It's all very exciting! Have a look at our website www.christmaspresspicturebooks.com

I also created a website to showcase work that somehow fell through the cracks: www.sophiescabinetofcuriosities.wordpress.com

Beattie Alvarez: At the beginning of 2013, I set myself a goal—to finally finish the novel I've been working on for years—by the 11th of March! It's no surprise to any writers out there that my novel is still unfinished because life got in the way. I became the press and publicity manager for a new publishing house, Christmas Press Picture Books, becoming an editor for them as well. Through this I will FINALLY be published next year, in the Christmas Annual we're working on, alongside the likes of Kate Forsyth, Sophie Masson, Ursula Dobosarsky, Fiona McDonald and Adele Geras. Don't worry though, my novel WILL get finished, edited and published at some point!

Lilian Wissink: I'm currently writing a one day training program on The Healing Power of Creativity for a NSW state training organisation which is aimed at workers in community and welfare settings. This year I reread some of the classics and my favourite is still *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte.

Tim Marshall: About six articles published in *Australian Organic* magazine. Due for publication in November/early December—*Dung Beetles for Australia* by Bernard Doube and Tim Marshall. Several other publications nearing completion.

Helen Evans: This year I'm living away from Armidale so I'm not able to take part in any of the interesting activities organised by the centre. I have not been idle though. I have published two e-books on Amazon for Kindle. They are *The Busy Mothers' Guide to Happy Babies*, and *The Busy Mothers' Guide to Happy Toddlers*.

Miriam Verbeek: Another year of scribbling when there's time, though I did get some encouraging feedback and help from an editor who reviewed one of my books. Now it is time to put that feedback into action. My favourite book was by Brandon Sanderson, *The Way of Kings*, probably because I'm waiting for the next part to come out – though I was also blown away by two books that have been around for a bit and I've only just got around to reading: Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*.

WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

Skype Session 3: Pitching Your Work to Agents & Publishers – Pippa Masson.

Despite some technical hitches and a little confusion among most of us as to the distinction between a pitch and a synopsis, I found the session very useful.

The concept of a pitch, as Pippa outlined it, is to present your work in the context of a book-buying niche market towards which a publisher might direct it. Therefore a very brief summary of the book (2–3 pars, she said) sits within an outline brief on the origins and purpose of the work and what experience, etc that you, as writer, have brought to bear on the project. And from the discussion with her, I realised that a 600-word synopsis tells only half the story as it cannot adequately deal with themes that the narrative may bring to life.

I found Pippa's manner very reassuring and gentle; at no stage did she convey a superiority or a possession of privileged knowledge that could overawe beginners like most of us. I was very reassured by the whole experience.

The NEWC is very fortunate to have access to her experience and personality.

- Rod Wise

Youth Online

The Youth Online workshops were a valuable asset for my rural and remote school to assist in literacy and offer opportunities with established authors. I found the workshops to be rewarding and worthwhile for the students. We were able to integrate the workshops with the syllabus and our units of work to make them a valuable teaching and learning tool.

It was also a great opportunity to work with other school and children without having to leave our own schools which otherwise would have been time consuming and costly.

I would recommend the Youth online workshops to other schools and found them to be economical, well run and organised.

- Mick Collins
Principal, Boomi Public School

We didn't participate in many but the one we did was very engaging, interactive and the kids enjoyed it immensely

The teaching staff also enjoyed it and learned a few things as well.

- Berrill Ley
Principal, Bonshaw Public School

THUNDERBOLT PRIZE DETAILS

NEWC thanks the three eminent local judges – Bronwyn Parry, Xanthe Mallet and Michael Sharkey—who put so much effort into adjudicating this competition. Their insightful comments follow the list of winning and commended entries.

WINNERS:

The New England Thunderbolt Prize for **Crime Fiction**: First Prize: \$500, for a story of up to 2,500 words. Sponsored by the School of Arts, University of New England. Judged by Bronwyn Parry, best-selling author of four mystery novels, *As Darkness Falls*, *Dark Country*, *Dead Heat* and *Darkening Skies*. **Won by Emma Viskic, for 'The Hero'**.

The New England Thunderbolt Prize for **Crime Non-Fiction**: First Prize: \$500 for an article of up to 2,500 words. Sponsored by The Armidale Express. Judged by Dr Xanthe Mallett, criminologist, forensic anthropologist and presenter of TV shows including BBC 2's *History Cold Case* and the US-based series *The Decrypters*. **Won by Vashti Farrer, for 'The Only Woman'**.

The New England Thunderbolt Prize for **Crime Poetry**: First Prize: \$500 for a poem of up to 60 lines. Sponsored by Collins Booksellers (Armidale and Tamworth), Dymocks Bookshop (Armidale),

Chaucer on Bridge Street Gallery (Uralla), and the Armidale Dumaresq Memorial Library. Judged by Dr Michael Sharkey, eminent poet with more than 20 books to his name, who has also taught literature in universities in Australia, New Zealand and China, run his own poetry press and taught writing to prisoners. **Won by Mark O'Flynn, for 'Prison Factory'.**

New England Award: Extra prize of \$200 for the **best entry by a writer resident in New England**, sponsored by the New England Writers' Centre. **Won by Yve Louis, for 'Blade'.** The four winning entries can be found on our website at <http://newc.org.au/netpcw.htm>

They were also electronically published by the Armidale Express at <http://www.armidaleexpress.com.au/story/1887211/new-england-thunderbolt-prize-winners/>

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

Fiction:

Emma Viskic for 'Long Sleeves'
Felicity Pulman for 'The Last Breath of Christ'
Frank Leggett for 'The Sugar Shack'
Peter Rodgers for 'Family Trust'
JM Cochrane for 'Dead Man's Eyes'

Poetry:

Mark O'Flynn for 'Screws'
Yve Louis for 'Thunderbolt, Horse Whisperer'
Tom McIlveen for 'Alongside of Ned Kelly'
Delroy Oberg for 'Fallen in Love'
Casselisse Rowe for 'Ominous Alice'
David Campbell for 'Monster'
Allan Mitchell for 'What's On, Sherlock?'
Jann Karp for 'Ellen Rose Fuller Died 9th Jan 1891'

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Fiction judge Bronwyn Parry on the winning short story, 'The Hero', by Emma Viskic:

"This entry used the short-story structure adeptly, hooking the reader in to the mystery immediately, with a wonderful development of character through dialogue, narrative and reflection, and an intriguing, 'vicious' crime, keeping the reader guessing until the amusing twist at the end."

Non-fiction judge Xanthe Mallett on the winning non-fiction piece, 'The Only Woman', by Vashti Farrer:

"A truly winning piece, discussing some key themes in criminology, 'The Only Woman' was well written and interesting, and would very much engage a broad audience."

Poetry Judge Michael Sharkey on the winning poem, 'Prison Factory', by Mark O'Flynn:

"This most interesting poem takes the form of a prison monologue by a convict. I considered this the most impressive poem for its understated eloquence and original imagery."

Poetry judge Michael Sharkey on the winning New England entry, 'Blade' by Yve Louis:

"This intriguing poem of five stanzas with interposed 'stage directions' retells the story of Jack the Ripper from the angle of the women. In terms of its language and tight structure – including variations on images and phrases from interposed lines, it's something of a tour de force. This poem is testimony to the skill of a thoughtful and confident poet."

General comment from fiction judge Bronwyn Parry:

"I've enjoyed reading the 67 entries in the crime fiction section, which ranged across all styles of crime fiction—including dark psychological thrillers, gritty detective stories, haunting mysteries and cosy crime—with tones from deeply emotional, to edge of the seat, to light-hearted stories that left me smiling."

"Interestingly, unlike longer-form crime fiction which usually focuses on the investigative process from the perspective of the investigator, the majority of these short stories centred around the crime itself, from the perspective of either the victim or the perpetrator. At times this made for some dark and disturbing reading."

"In judging, for each entry I allocated scores for four criteria—story and plot structure, characterisation, the writing and use of language, with the final criterion being the 'wow' factor, encompassing originality and mastery in execution. Given the wide range of styles of crime fiction represented in the entries, these criteria I hope enabled me to remain as objective as possible and focused on the skills of the authors."

“My congratulations go to all the entrants, for putting pen to paper, working through ideas, completing stories and polishing them—this takes imagination, dedication, and discipline and makes you all winners, for doing instead of just thinking about it!”

General comment from poetry judge Michael Sharkey:

“What I looked for in the poems submitted was the particular appealing poetical qualities rather than merely the ‘story’ element that might be as well accomplished in prose. At the same time, I found that narrative is strong in all the poems, so I looked for the best union of narrative, verbal imagination, and outstanding poetical structure.

“A great variety of approaches appear in the poems submitted for the Prize. A handful of poems recount the Thunderbolt story or make reference to other nineteenth-century outlaws, in forms ranging from free verse to rhyming ballads.

“Some narratives are straightforward chronological accounts of a crime, and a few employ flashback techniques. Several poems are fairly clipped, producing a spasmodic effect similar to the abbreviated language of official police reports. A few poems tack on a ‘moral’ that compares violent crimes with white-collar crime, pollution from mining, nuclear fallout, and other violence against the ecology, and such. In some of the heavily rhymed ballad-style poems the effort to make the lines fall into a sound-pattern detracts from the impact of the story.

“Melodrama is apparent in some of the ballads and in some of the free-verse poems, though the impulse seems controlled in the most self-conscious-seeming of these. Sometimes, the poet’s desire to provide an ancient style of language clashes with more modern language, producing an uneven effect rather than the apparently unsettling tone intended.

“The very best poems of any sort combine verbal dexterity, interesting angle on the ‘crime’, crafty construction and tactful sense of sufficient information for the reader.

“All of the poems submitted struck me as competent; where some slipped occasionally in verbal register or had an awkward phrase, the overall impression was of serious attention to the craft of poetry.”

MEMBER LYNN NEWBERRY ON SELF-PUBLISHING

My secret dream was always to be a published author. For years, I scribbled away as a closet writer, afraid to confess. Finally, with my cupboards bulging with unfinished drafts and three completed manuscripts, I decided it was time to act. As a breast cancer survivor, I am very conscious that ‘now’ is all the time we are given.

A NEWC publishing workshop pointed the way. I found a web designer and an editor, fortunately for me, in the one person, and began the long process towards publishing. Straight away, there was a problem: another author, Lynn Newberry had the domain. Any marketing or search engine optimisation I would do could benefit her, not me, even with changes in spelling. I solved the problem by using the nom de plume, Anne Rouen.

While my research highlighted the difficulties of being conventionally published, it tossed up exciting possibilities in the world of e-books. There were two pivotal moments:

1. My editor suggested I publish *Master of Illusion* as an e-book while I looked for a major publisher, and;
2. I attended an author talk by Matthew Reilly. Wow! This was the most positive person I had ever met. Not only had he believed in himself enough to self-publish in the face of rejection, he was a man living his dream.

Right then, I decided to self-publish and live my dream, too. Succeed or fail: at least I could say I tried.

Self-publishing is a steep learning curve. It can be daunting and frustrating with the sheer number of actions to be taken. But it is also fun and exciting to step into the unknown and form your own publishing business. To see your book up there on the platform is the biggest buzz. And a five-star rating or a lovely review? Out of this world!

Will I do it all again?

Emphatically, yes! My second book is due for release in December.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of

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DROP-IN WORKSHOP

On the last Thursday of each month from 1.30 – 3.30pm at NEWC. You can drop in to read your work in progress and get feedback, or listen to and support others. Any style of writing is welcome—poetry, prose, drama—literary or genre.

This event is free to members, \$5 per visit to non-members.

Coordinator: Tom Penrose

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Areas/Interest

New England Writers' Centre

Anyone can join. The NEWC is open to anyone of any age, new and established writers, and readers too! It is for people who love reading and writing. Full annual membership including GST is \$30. For a couple—\$30 + \$15 for 2nd member; for tertiary students—\$20; for students under 18—\$15.

Cheque or direct deposit in our account: New England Writers Centre, BSB 932000, Account No: 618658. Please include your name when you make an online deposit and drop us an email to let us know.

CENTRE OPENING HOURS

Tuesday: 1 pm–4 pm
Wednesday: 10 am–noon
Thursday: Noon–4 pm

Director: Lesley Sly
Office Manager: Paul Prenter

The Board:
Chairman: Sophie Masson. **Deputy Chair:** Liz Horne.
Treasurer: Brian Neville. **Minutes Secretary:** Paul Prenter. **Consultants to the Board:** Jeremy Fisher, John Walker, Jim Belshaw. **Newsletter Editor:** Janene Carey.
Website Designer: Ingrid Kalf. **Drop-In Workshop Coordinator:** Tom Penrose. **Events Coordinator:** Fiona McDonald. **Business Development:** Beatriz Alvarez.
Youth Coordinator: Teresa van der Kraan. **Public Officer:** Paul Prenter.

How to contact us:
The NEWC is situated in the Neighbourhood Centre, 129 Rusden St, Armidale (between the Council Building and the Town Hall). Best access is via Cinders Lane car park.
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Post: PO Box 1219, Armidale NSW 2350
Email: admin@newc.org.au

Next newsletter: February

OUR WEBSITE
<http://www.newc.org.au>

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Trade & Investment Arts NSW



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MACQUARIE
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