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Brisbane Australia

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[Wilson, Rohan](#)

(2019)

*Daughter of bad times.*

Allen and Unwin, Australia.

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<https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/fiction/Daughter-of-Bad-Times-Rohan-Wilson-9781760529130>

# Daughter of Bad times

(abstract/evidence)

**NPA3 Original Creative Work: Textual**  
**Rohan Wilson**



## Abstract:

Climate fiction—literature dealing explicitly with anthropogenic climate change—gives insight into the ethical and social ramifications of this unparalleled environmental crisis. But writing about climate change often means engaging with the problem at a global level, where countries like the Maldives face inundation from rising sea levels. Writers who are crossing cultural boundaries and portraying cultures that are profoundly unfamiliar must learn to become adept at being fully present in these other cultures. My novel, *Daughter of Bad Times*, arose out of the complexities I faced when writing about sea-level rise and the population displacement that can follow. In order to minimise the risk of epistemic violence, I drew on the work of Kelly Oliver and Marcia Langton and their notion of bearing witness to construct an intellectual model to guide the task of writing across cultural boundaries in the Anthropocene era. Witnessing means listening, acknowledging, and responding to others in a way that is fully present and engaged. This model suggests a way forward for writers eager to engage with other cultures through climate fiction.



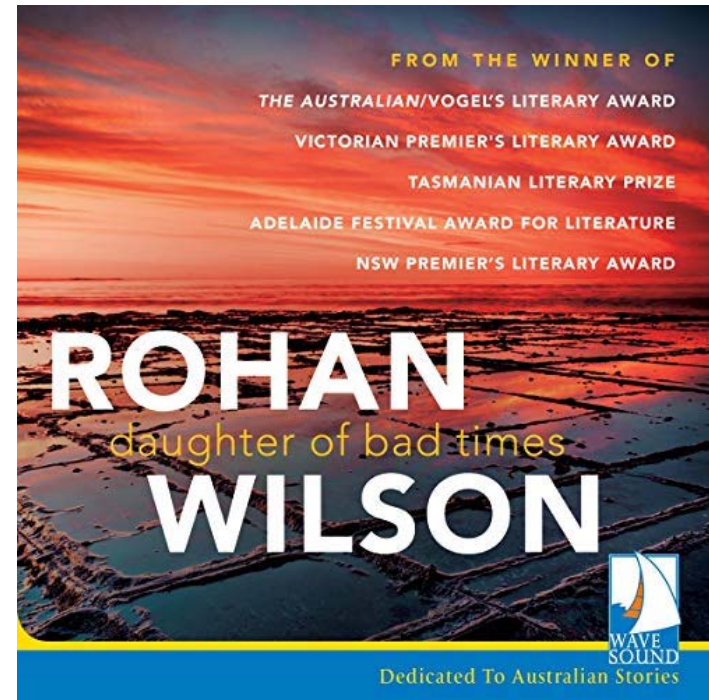
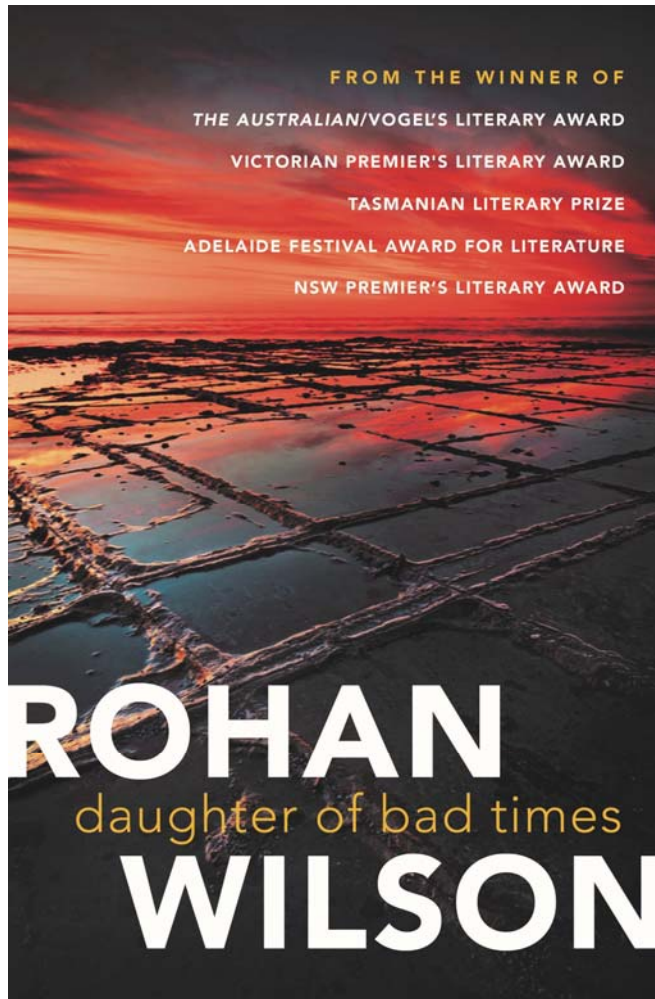


Figure 1: *Front cover, Daughter of Bad Times, 2019. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.*  
Figure 2: *Front cover, Daughter of Bad Times audiobook, 2019. Wavesound.*

Attorney-General  
Minister for Justice  
Minister for Corrections  
Minister for the Arts  
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Level 10 10 Murray Street HOBART TAS 7000 Australia  
GPO Box 123 HOBART TAS 7001 Australia  
Ph: +61 3 6165 7741  
Email: Ministergoodwin@dpact.tas.gov.au



Mr Rohan Wilson  
Unit 5  
88 Elphin Road  
NEWSTEAD TAS 7250

Dear Mr Wilson

I refer to your recent application for assistance under the Arts Tasmania 2015 Grants and Loans Program.

I am pleased to advise you that I have approved a grant of \$12,000 towards your project, *Eaglehawk IDC*.

The grant is subject to certain terms and conditions and must comply with State Treasury regulations. These are explained in the attached documents, which also include general information about this year's funding round.

This grant is subject to the attached deed being signed and returned to Arts Tasmania by you within 21 days of the date of this letter, in the absence of which the offer will lapse without further notice unless otherwise agreed by Arts Tasmania.

Should you have any questions, please direct them to Arts Tasmania at 146 Elizabeth Street, Hobart, or telephone 03 6165 6666.

I wish you every success with your project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Vanessa Goodwin MLC  
Minister for the Arts

DoNotReply@australiacouncil.gov.au @  
A Decision has been made on your Application to the Artist Services  
To: Rohan Wilson

Inbox - iCloud 26 November 2015 at 4:24 pm

Application Reference: 215625  
Name: Eli Malfia  
Email: [e.malfia@australiacouncil.gov.au](mailto:e.malfia@australiacouncil.gov.au)  
Ph: (02) 9215 9023

26 November 2015

Dear Rohan Wilson

**Re: Arts Projects For Individuals and Groups 2015**  
Congratulations on your successful application to the Australia Council for the Arts. We have approved \$49,500 for the following purpose: EAGLEHAWK IDC. You were successful in a very competitive environment and we look forward to receiving updates on the project's development.

**What do you need to do next?**

1. Log on to our [online site](#) with your email address and password. If you have forgotten your password, click on **Forgotten your password** and it will be emailed to you.
2. Go to **Grants & Grant Reporting** then **Grant applications**
3. Choose **Apply for a grant**.
4. Find your application under the **Submitted grant applications** heading.
5. Click on the yellow **Check decision** button.

Read through the funding agreement and make sure you understand the terms and conditions. You will need to accept the terms of the funding agreement by 26-DEC-2015. If you do not do so by this date, we will assume that you don't want the funding and we will withdraw the offer.

**Can I accept the funding agreement by email?**

You must log onto the [online site](#) and follow the instructions above to view and accept your conditions of funding. Payment of your grant is dependent upon you accepting the terms and conditions this way.

**When can I tell people about my grant?**

Your offer of funding remains confidential until the media embargo date on 11-DEC-2015. After this date you can tell people about your grant. A full list of successful applications will be available on our website after the embargo date as well as a list of peers that participated in this round of applications.

If you have any questions about your funding agreement, or cannot access our website, please contact Eli Malfia on [e.malfia@australiacouncil.gov.au](mailto:e.malfia@australiacouncil.gov.au) or (02) 9215 9023.

Regards,

Frank Panucci  
Executive Director of Grants



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Figure 1: Funding agreement letter (Vanessa Goodwin, personal communication, 8 Nov 2014)  
Figure 2: Funding agreement email (Eli Malfia, personal communication, 26 Nov, 2015)



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COVERSTORY

"I never had doubts about what my career was going to be. I always knew. I just needed to be able to support myself doing whatever work I could whilst writing in my free time. Eventually I would get somewhere."

Wilson attended Brooks High School in Launceston's Rocherlea. He says it was "a pretty rough public school in a pretty rough area".

"But, you know, you get out of it what you put into it, really," he says. "I loved English there and my teachers always gave me interesting books to read and were always telling me I was good at it, and I should stick with it. I had that validation all the way through."

A Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Tasmania followed, majoring in philosophy and history. In his late 20s he moved to Japan for five years to teach English as a second language. His plan was to make enough money to further his studies before launching as a writer.

In Japan, he fell in love, and realised just how much he was owed by authority. "I really, really had been told what to do," he says. "When I went to work for the corporation in Japan, they picked me up from the airport, they took me to my company housing, my wages were garnished – they would take the rent money out. They gave me a phone and they set up my phone contract. They did all this stuff. And they owned me."

"They could fire me at any time for any reason. If I was caught in a relationship with a student, I would be fired and sent home. If I was ever late, I would be fired and sent home."

It turned out to be handy because for the new novel, but at the time he says it didn't stop him flouting authority. Not after he met his wife-to-be, anyway, on the campus. "She was a student, yes, but she was also a staff member," he laughs. "So we found a little loophole."

Wilson and Mahlich have a son Alan, who is 14. He says his wife is his greatest supporter. "I had kept telling her, 'I've got to go back to Australia, I've got a book to write, I've got to get my degree,'" he says. "And she, to her never-ending credit, trusted me, believed that I could do it."

After their return, the family lived on a low budget in Launceston and he commuted monthly to Melbourne for face-to-face time with his PhD supervisor.

He didn't even promise her a Bachelor in the Albany Party, he thought there was little chance of that with his brutal reimagining of Tasmania's colonial frontier. "I knew that no publishers were going to be interested in it. I kept on because I thought it was important," he says. "I thought I felt like a book that must be read."

He was wrong about the first one, winning the robyn, which brought automatic publication with Allen & Unwin as well as cash, was his dream come true. "It was so enormous that it was dangerous to let myself think what it would be like to win," he says. "I had never published a single thing in my life, not even a short story."

His love for the book could get him into trouble, though, having just written his PhD on the contentious place of historical fiction in relation to non-fiction history writing.

"Fiction readers know it can be read metaphorically or allegorically, that we are not trying to talk about truth in the same way historians talk about truth," he says. "Nevertheless, we got measured against works of history. The history cops step in shaking their finger."

As he wrote *The Rising Party*, he remembered the caring Kate Grenville received from some historians for her 2008 historical novel, *The Secret River*. Believing his novel to be more important, he braced himself rather than backing off, doubling down on his research and his reimagining of the era.

"I was talking directly about the genocide," he says. "John Barman is still considered a United States in Tasmania – we have bridges named after him in the North – but he was a mass or less a bounty hunter. He was being paid by the government to



conduct campaigns against Aborigines. Writing about him was always a little risky and dangerous."

As it transpired, the history cops rested easy that time. And the Albany world went nuts, halting a major new talent in Wilson. Second novels are notoriously difficult to pull off after celebrated debuts, but Wilson did it. "A ferocious and brilliant sequel – there is a party of reason in *To Name These Lands*," wrote a reviewer in the *Australian Book Review*.

Having immersed himself in the 1820s and '30s for the Albany Party, Wilson shifted 50 years forward for book two, writing *To Name These Lands* in 1870s Launceston, when riots broke out after a ribbon company building a line in the North went broke and the government bailed it out, putting a levy on all the household along the railway line to fund it.

Writing the *Australian Book Review* Prize for his unpublished manuscript of *The Albany Party* in 2011 was a dream come true for Wilson, created on the day of his win with novelist Lisa Alpert, whose career the prize also helped launch back in 1980, Wilson and his wife Mahlich, pictured in 2016 with their son Alan, one during the author's five-year self-isolating regime in Japan.

"People were forced to pay to cover the losses of the shareholders in the 1870s," he says. "I was writing this during the global financial crisis in 2008 and that same thing was happening. And in Tasmania it was around the same time that [Damon Campbell] Carron was collapsing after prolonged public demonstrations. I saw a lot of parallels in all of that, and used those loose conditions to tell of Launceston in full-blown rebellion and revolution."

Wilson, Mahlich and Alan moved to Brisbane in 2015, just after publication of *To Name These Lands*, for him to start a job lecturing in creative writing at the Queensland University of Technology.

"My long-term goal was always to get into a university, because I knew that as a writer it's the best place to be," he says. "I pinch myself every day. There are so many great writers out there and there are so few of these kinds of jobs."

He says the institution takes focus as an enormous seriously, and builds writing time into its writers' day jobs. "They consider it to be of high value, so they put resources behind us and really give us a push. They are really keen on people taking on social issues and taking on political issues in their work and engaging in a community."

He embraces the lecturing part of the job, too. "Just being in a classroom and teaching is learning for me," he says. His mantra to students is to believe that what they do matters.

"I'm always trying to remind them that writing is important, writing is a way to speak back to power, and writing is a way to change the world to become what you want it to be."

As a tool of resistance with the power to influence minds, the pen is famously mightier than the sword. But it is a love that rules, says Wilson, and at its heart he sees *Daughter of Bad Times* as a love story.

"What I'm trying to say is that love is the only force that can't be controlled," he says. "It doesn't matter what kind of systems or programs governments put in place. Love is anarchic. Love will upset power structures. And love is the one thing that will drive people into open rebellion."

Daughter of Bad Times, Allen & Unwin, \$29.99, is out now



Figure 1: Front cover, *Tas Weekend* magazine (2019) June 8-9.  
 Figure 2: A. Drucker (June 8-9, 2019) 'Twists in the Tales', *Tas Weekend*, 6-10.

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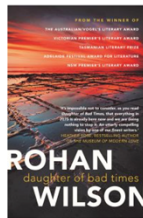
# SATURDAY PAPER

NEWS OPINION CULTURE LIFE FOOD PUZZLES SPORT THE BRIEFING  
PODCAST PAST EDITIONS

Edition No. 251 MAY 4 – 10, 2019

BOOKS

## Rohan Wilson Daughter of Bad Times



Great science fiction often tackles portentous real-world events. The genre provides a heady platform for the extrapolation of ideas, imagining what might happen if a current situation were pushed to extremes. Tasmanian-born author Rohan Wilson embraces the liberty of genre conventions in his latest book. Having thus far examined his home state's brutal colonial history in the novels *The Roving Party* and *To Name Those Lost*, he changes tack by leaping five decades into the future with *Daughter of Bad Times*, a layered novel that can be read as a doomed love story, a climate change warning and a searing commentary on Australian refugee policy.

Yamaan Ali Umair and Rin Braden are a young couple in love. Rin's mother is the CEO of Cabey-Yasuda Corrections, a company that exploits climate refugees by keeping them in servitude with the promise of an eventual visa. Yamaan is a Maldivian poet and house cleaner who, after a tumultuous romance with Rin and an island-ending tsunami, winds up in a Tasmanian CYC facility manufacturing

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Reviewer: Chris Flynn



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“Any book that addresses the Australian malaise directed towards refugees must be welcomed. *Daughter of Bad Times* is filled with such talking points, and it will be interesting to monitor the response to this excellent novel of ideas, which proves to be as thrilling as it is incendiary.”

-- Chris Flynn, *The Saturday Paper*.



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Figure 1: C. Flynn (2019) 'Rohan Wilson: Daughter of Bad Times', retrieved from <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/culture/books/2019/05/31/daughter-bad-times/15568920008069>

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CULTURE BOOKS REVIEW

## Rohan Wilson's audacious experiment with climate-change fiction

By Lucy Sussex  
June 27, 2019 – 12.27pm



### TODAY'S TOP STORIES

#### SHAREMARKET

Now Trump wants a tit-for-tat stoush with Europe. No wonder markets are fearful  
1 hour ago

#### TRAGEDY

Australian man at NZ university dead for three days before being found  
1 hour ago

#### INSOLVENCY

Millions owed after company collapse leaves Sydney school, NSW Health in lurch

#### INVESTING

'Heaven help us': Fears of further volatility after ASX pummelled again  
16 minutes ago

### Fiction

*Daughter of Bad Times* Rohan Wilson

Allen & Unwin, \$29.99

The list of permitted settings for the Australian novel is small — and it mostly has not included the future. Present and past are acceptable, but to stray into the unknown, to speculate, is for younger readers, or genre-writing. But that situation is changing, with climate-change activism throwing down the gauntlet for authors. All sorts of unlikely candidates are now venturing into the world of “what if?”.



Rohan Wilson is working on a broader, international stage.

“With an experiment of such audacity, the question is whether it ultimately works. The personal answer is: a qualified yes. The research creates credibility, the imagination soars, the characters are not puppets but people.”

-- Lucy Sussex, *The Sydney Morning Herald*.



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## Brutal vision of climate gulags

Bradley, James. *Weekend Australian*; Canberra, A.C.T. [Canberra, A.C.T.]01 June 2019: 20.

News Corp Australia

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Daughter of Bad Times By Rohan Wilson Allen & Unwin, 336pp, \$29.99

It would be reductive but not entirely incorrect to say that in many ways historical fiction and science fiction are two sides of the same coin. Both, after all, have their roots in traditions associated with popular romance and popular fiction – and therefore are often derided as less serious than other genres.

Both are also concerned with questions of worldbuilding, and the creation – or recreation – of richly detailed imaginary societies. But, more fundamentally, both are less about the worlds they depict than our own.

As Henry James – who famously dismissed historical fiction as “humbug” – understood, historical novels are inextricably creatures of their moment, reflecting our preoccupations and concerns back at us.

Likewise, science fiction’s fascination with imaginative futures is at least partly about those futures’ capacity to refract the present, allowing them to become a prism through which our own world is rendered strange enough for us to see it anew.

It’s a similarity that is written deep into the fabric of the new novel from multi-award-winning novelist Rohan Wilson, *Daughter of Bad Times*. For while Launceston-born Wilson’s first two novels, *The Roving Party* and *To Name Those Lost*, were set amid the violence of Tasmania’s frontier wars, and *Daughter of Bad Times* is set half a century from now in a climate-ravaged future, all are, in some deep sense, novels about our contested and unsettled present and, more particularly, the violence of dispossession and how government policy seeks to elide it.

The new novel centres on Yamaan Ali Umair and Rin Braden. Yamaan is Maldivian, one of the survivors of a tsunami that wiped the already half-flooded island nation off the face of the planet.

Rin is the Japanese-American adoptive daughter of Alessandra Braden, CEO of Cabey-Yasuda. A multinational with a background in private prisons, Cabey-Yasuda has monetised the climate crisis by offering governments refugee detention and processing facilities, or what might be better described as privately run labour camps. As Rin deadpans at one point: “We build McDungeons. We profit out of people’s misery.” As the novel begins, Yamaan is interned in Cabey-Yasuda’s facility at Eaglehawk in Tasmania, along with several thousand more survivors of the cataclysm that finally destroyed the Maldives. Lured there by the promise of visas and resettlements, Yamaan and his fellow internees have instead found themselves trapped in a nightmarish hi-tech workhouse, a place where they race to meet impossible quotas with no hope of escape.

“It is often said that one of the central challenges of climate change is imaginative, that the scale and complexity of the problem tend to overwhelm our ability to conceive of the altered world we are hurtling towards. Yet this bracing, brutal novel cogently and forensically shows us that is not the case, and that the future will be just like now, only much, much worse.”

-- James Bradley, *The Weekend Australian*.



Figure 1: Bradley, J. (2019, Jun 01). Brutal vision of climate gulags. *Weekend Australian*. Retrieved from <https://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2233825947?accountid=133>

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### The University of Queensland Fiction Book Award

#### Prize \$15,000

- *Bodies of Men* (Hachette) by Nigel Featherstone
- *Too Much Lip* (UQP) by Melissa Lucashenko
- *Shell* (Scribner) by Kristina Olsson
- *Exploded View* (Text) by Carrie Tiffany
- *Daughter of Bad Times* (Allen & Unwin) by Rohan Wilson

Read more



### The University of Queensland Non-Fiction Book Award

#### Prize \$15,000

“Rohan Wilson’s novel *Daughter of Bad Times* offers an immersive plot combined with a simmering undercurrent of subtext and a chilling message about our times. Set in 2075, the futuristic but realistic setting is a familiar extension of current issues such as climate change, refugees and offshore detention centres, with small moments of optimism captured amid the horror.”

-- Judges’ Report, Qld Premier’s Literary Awards.



Figure 1: Judges’ Report (2019) ‘The University of Queensland Fiction Book Award’, retrieved from <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/university-queensland-fiction-book-award>

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