64.1

New Writing from Western Australia
Fiction
Creative Non-Fiction
Poetry
Essays

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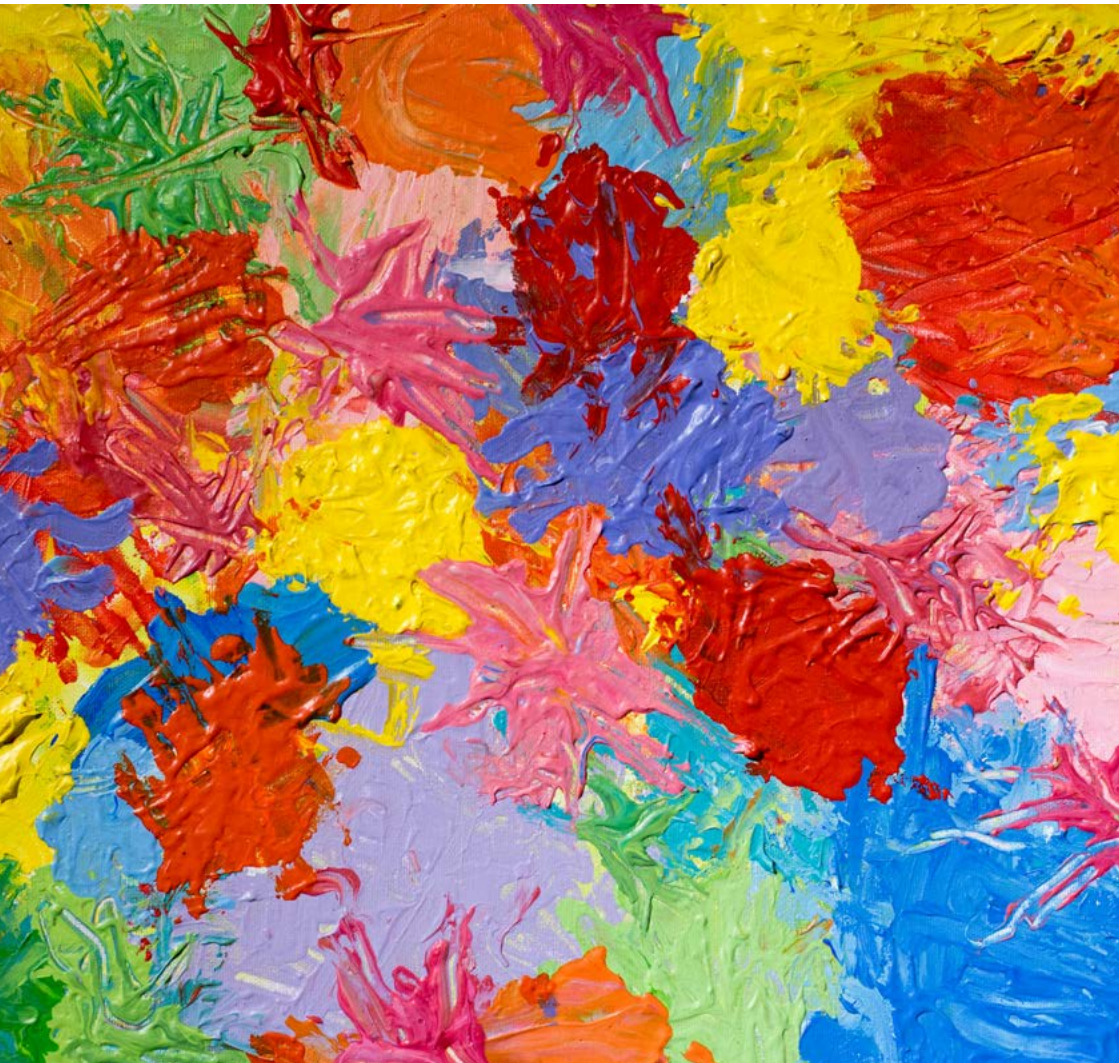
Westerly



'The Earth Will Outshine Us'
Kathryn Fry

And out from the flood plains of Lake Frome
(the white glare of its granules), a falcon
maps the valley and sweeps above the dots
of spinifex, your eyes primed for the swoop.

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Westerly's office, at the University of Western Australia, is located on Whadjak Noongar land. We recognise the Noongar people as the spiritual and cultural custodians of this land.

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From the Editors

There has been much conversation, in the last few months, around the question of what it means to be Australian. This is to be expected in an election cycle, and particularly in the context of contention over policies on various social and environmental issues. When connected to the larger container of 'nation', ideas of place become politically loaded. There is a responsibility, in this, for writers. With the power and privilege of voting comes the ethical demand that the publishing writer be conscious of what they are contributing to social discourse.

We both independently isolated 'place' as the theme around which many of the pieces selected for this issue coalesced, while also noting that this isn't unusual: 'place' is a key marker of identity and orientation in the world, so is often a writerly preoccupation. It is something we highlighted in the editorial for our last issue, as well—the lodging of self in geographical place, and the sense of *Westerly*'s locatedness on Whadjuk Noongar boodja. But there was something different in the representation of place that arrested us both as we prepared this issue; a sense of connectedness across and between diverse locations that plays with place and distance in fascinating ways. In Sarah Holland-Batt's 'Alaska', for instance, violence conflates a New York summer and a Perth winter, and swoops to Pasadena and Alaska, the poem's scope constantly opening, in feeling out its relation to family and 'tyrannical love'.

Editing in this space is inherently a conversation. Not only do we negotiate and consider myriad voices in submissions, but there are many discussions—some tangible, some intangible—that take place between us as we gather and respond to selected material. As in any good conversation, no position is stable or distinct. In much of the writing we have selected, clear boundaries and edges are rendered problematic: the feature 'Are You In or Are You Out?' 'draws attention to language as a potential bridge between body, place and culture'; and in Peter D. Mathews' essay 'Boochani Bound', ethics and empathy challenge assumptions of what lies inside, and what outside, a nation-state.

What we feel moving in this issue, as compared to the last, is a sense of place as a conversation on a broader political level. Rather than reading place exclusively through the individual, subtle sensations of permeability and uncertainty surround place when it is opened to the broader discourses of social being and belonging. Writing, and art more generally, is in this context a domain for social and cultural knowledge(s) to come into being. In an election year, then, we felt it pertinent to reflect editorially on the manner in which writing we have read within the issue's submissions shapes and responds to nation.

In many of the pieces in the issue, a concentration on the specificities of place juxtaposes place as a state that might carry us away from ourselves, embedding us in patterns that sweep and shift across hills and oceans: 'Storm over ocean moving / wind in my lungs / carry salt my blood-to' (Cassie Lynch, 'Five Haiku'). Throughout, it is the embodied awareness of what links us as humans that renders vast distances concertina-like. Paradoxically, it is the differences in place that bring these themes bubbling to the surface of attention.

All art, however, requires labour. Recognising this, we'd like to note our gratitude and respect to all the writers who submitted and trusted us with the consideration of work. We're also grateful to the many people who contributed in different ways to the three features in this issue: Western Australian work from Red Room Poetry's 'New Shoots' project, and new writing from our Writers' Development Program, as well as the work in 'Are You In or Are You Out?', as mentioned above. In the production of the issue, we're thankful as always for the super efforts of Keith Feltham (Lasertype) and Becky Chilcott (Chil3). We have a great team of people supporting the Magazine, but special mention this issue has to go to Asha Ryan, who has worked incredibly hard over her time with us, and is sadly now leaving to follow her career in Canada. Thank you, Asha, and all the very best; you will be much missed as a presence in the office! Finally, thanks also to Daniel Juckes, for stepping into Asha's role—we're looking forward to working with you from hereon in.

Catherine Noske and Josephine Taylor, June 2019.

PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing
the winner of the annual Patricia Hackett Prize
for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2018, to

DAVID CARLIN

For his creative non-fiction essay,
'*Love Lane (the work of writing)*'

Published in *Westerly* 63:1, 2018

Alaska

Sarah Holland-Batt

Sarah Holland-Batt's most recent book, *The Hazards*, won the 2016 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry. She is the editor of *The Best Australian Poems 2016* and *2017*.

It's late June in New York
the week of the Claremont triple homicide,
and our bodies lie tranquil as chalk
in the white noise of my air-conditioning.
Last night they found three men
on this block in a gold Mercedes:
shot straight through the neck,
still buckled to their seats. Miles away my father
is dying, but for once I'm happy
listening to you talk in the dark.
You're telling me about Pasadena, the year
you got your license. You were sixteen.
You spent the whole summer fishing
with your best friend. You'd take his dad's truck
to the canyon and drink, talk baseball,
see who could piss furthest in the river.
You hardly caught a thing, but that
wasn't the point. Buzzed on the drive back,
you'd almost clock a deer, swerve,
and watch it light off into redwoods.
Your voice is serious, you who have never
been serious about a single thing.
You're thinking about that place again
because this weekend your friend's father
drove that same truck to your fishing spot,
called 911 to tell them his wife's name
then shot himself in the parking lot:
no note, no nothing. The newspaper said
he was facing financial difficulties. *Facing*.

And in the huge distance we suddenly lie in
I think of Alaska, the late dog salmon
I saw struggling upstream in August, rotten red,
half-dead but still swimming.
The way they moved was like ice melting
and you could see everything in them was failing.
I turn to you to say I blame them, these fathers
who do not wait to see us grow up
or what we make of their tyrannical love
but you're silent, already sleeping,
and morning is coming on again, another morning.

Two Excerpts from *The Shouting in the Dark & other southern writing*

Elleke Boehmer

Elleke Boehmer was born in Durban and lives in Oxford. She is the author of five novels including *Screens against the Sky* (David Higham-shortlisted, 1990) and *Bloodlines* (Sanlam-shortlisted, 2000). *The Shouting in the Dark & other southern writing* has been published in 2019 (UWA Publishing). Elleke is the author and editor of over eighteen other books, including *Nelson Mandela* (2008) and *Indian Arrivals* (ESSE Prizewinner). *Sharmilla* (2010) was her first short-story collection.

From 'African Shield'

From the eastern edge of the garden is a clear view of the Indian Ocean. After work her father, still in his ink-stained bookkeeper's shirt and navy blue Lukes Lines tie, likes to stand here in the shadow of the casuarinas and follow through his binoculars the movements of the merchant ships and tankers from distant lands lying in the roadstead outside Port Natal harbour. He presses the binoculars right up against his black-rimmed glasses. Looking at the ships, trying to read their flags and signs, he feels freer and happier, Ella can tell. He's back in the days when he worked with ships in those same distant lands, so he says. And she, standing beside him, trying to make out with her naked eye the ships his binoculars are pointing at, feels freer also. The air around her father feels somehow lighter when he gets out his binoculars and looks at ships.

Her father has the same freed look on his wrinkled face when, on occasional Sundays, never often enough, he takes her down to the docks to see the ships at close quarters. Side by side they stand on wharves stained pearly with oil and watch the big square cranes silhouetted against the Bluff unloading their containers. They watch the tugs steaming out to dredge the sandbank and the trains rolling up to the very edge of the quays, the deckhands flinging ropes around the iron-ringed capstans as if lassoing them. He points out the different flags of the world flying from the ships, so she can learn them, the ones from the East especially, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Ceylon. His narrowed eyes behind his thick glasses trace the rows of containers stacked on the ships' decks, as if he were matching the loads against the figures in his blue-lined bookkeeping ledgers.

One day they see a group of stevedores shoulder a coffin made of packing-case slats down a gangplank. 'They'll be glad to get rid of that,' he shakes his head. 'Bad luck to have a stiff on board.'

On hot afternoons Ella sits in the shade of the gatepost with the mother's Ridgeback dog Rex. She has a boy's short haircut and freckles on her nose. She and Rex survey the goings-on in the street, the Zulu cleaners gossiping over their crochet work on the grass verge, the Afrikaner children kicking stones. Those children aren't of our standing, says Mam, so Ella isn't allowed to play with them. Listening hard, Ella tries to discover whether she can follow the cleaners' Zulu. When her father has visitors from the good old days in the East she also tries to follow the English that's mixed in with their Dutch. Zulu is as softly up and down as English, but English is more mumbling. Afrikaans is very mumbling, but the words are sometimes like Netherlands, so she gets it better than Zulu.

At home there are no opportunities to learn Zulu, only English from Dad. Because they are Dutch, that is, foreign and civilised, the mother and the father don't employ a black servant. Irene is fresh out of Holland, fresh off the boat, people say. She's all high colour, long arms, long gangly legs. In her few years in South Africa, the foreign hasn't yet rubbed off her. She says she wants it to stay that way. Charley doesn't count as a servant, in her opinion, because he works outdoors.

The mother likes Charley. Some mornings she drinks her coffee with him out in the kitchen yard. Early on, she asked him questions about the ins and outs of gardening in this hot, sticky strip of coastal South Africa. Charley mostly advised her to avoid overwatering the flowers, especially down here within the rain-belt of the African shield. More recently, they've moved on to talking about his family, his hopes for the future. He often mentions his many aunts, his mother's sisters, how all of them are teachers. He confides that someday he aims to become a teacher like his aunts. As Charley and Mam talk, Ella hangs about behind the windy-drier listening, dangling her skipping rope.

One morning the father catches the mother in the act, the misjudgement, stupidity, trespass, he doesn't quite know how to put it… With Charley standing by, shuffling, still holding his coffee mug, the father spells out to the mother in Dutch, right here in the yard, that whites in Africa don't consort with natives, no, not even when they're good workers like Charley and aged just eighteen.

'In this country it isn't for blacks to aim high. That's the country's strength. It's for the white to aim high. Blacks can't aim high, they don't

have the mental power. Charley is being plain *brutaal* drinking coffee with his Madam. Cheeky, Irene, *brutaal*, setting himself above his station. Don't encourage him.'

The mother puts her hands on her hips and puffs out her cheeks but makes no reply. Ella keeps out of sight behind the windy-drier.

At the end of the month, the father releases Charley from his employment. 'Self-respecting Europeans should avoid relying on black labour,' he says.

Ella pushes further into the hidden hydrangea passages in her garden. She finds a tiny den so deep inside the bushes not even the monkeys would be able to find it. Here she takes off the funny built-up shoe that's meant to correct her wonky left foot. Most of the time it doesn't bother her, but it gets sweaty in the heat. Though Charley's gone, she still wishes she had an older brother, tall and caring like he was, but she makes do chatting with Friend.

The next Christmas they move house. They go fifty miles inland from Durban to the dormitory town of Braemar. The father takes early retirement from Lukes Lines, the American shipping company he has worked for as a bookkeeper without promotion for all of his fifteen years in South Africa. He says he's had enough of the sea. He doesn't want to keep living in the past. He'll set up now as a freelance bookkeeper, take part-work from some solid land-based companies, nothing as binding or soul-destroying as before. Durban reminds him wherever he looks of the days of his youth, the happy years spent on the lip of the Indian Ocean. Ella thinks of his face when they're down at the docks and doesn't believe him. How he can be tired of Durban when saying *lip of the Indian Ocean* makes his straight-line mouth turn up at the sides?

The first time Ella and her mother see the neat streets of Braemar and their new house is the day they move in. The father settled for the town and then the house, a tidy bungalow on Ridge Road, after a single sighting during a Sunday drive on his own. He can't have stuck around long that first time, Ella thinks, or he might have noticed that, by way of waterways, Braemar has no more than a narrow ribbon of dry riverbed clotted with eucalyptus and poplars and, a few miles downstream, a shallow reservoir called Victory Dam.

But this is what I like, the father again assures them, the fact that Braemar with its well-tarred streets lies a world away from ships and wharves.

'The grind at Lukes Lines was a living hell,' he says in his loud voice, as if to convince them, 'whereas here, from this verandah open to the sky, you've a picture of perfect freedom. In Durban, remember, the verandah was the size of a porch, low-eaved, dark. Here the wide world itself spreads out at the verandah's edge. See how the terraced lawn goes down the river valley, how the green fields stretch to meet the misty-blue horizon. Here you can gaze like a king upon miles of rolling Zululand hills. I worked myself to pieces for that view,' he adds, slapping his knee. 'The best highlands farmhouses on the continent would envy it. It's a verandah for a westerner, an Englishman—and mind you say verandah and not *stoep* like a Boer.'

From 'Bonfire'

In the window of Big Dave's, the father sees a second-hand fibreglass motorboat on sale, R50 only. He buys it on the spot.

'Nothing like burning up some petrol,' he says to no-one in particular at dinner time. 'Nothing like being on a boat on a bit of water.'

The motorboat is a smart little vessel, white, lightweight and portable, with a single cross plank for its lone skipper and perhaps one passenger squeezed up beside him.

Big Dave takes the boat out to Victory Dam in his truck and leaves it in the free concrete area to the side of the marina 'for your convenience'. So Mr B can go and use his new boat whenever he feels like it.

The outboard motor for the motorboat however is extra. In fact, it costs ten times as much as the motorboat, and must be picked up at a later date from Big Dave's second cousin's husband's motor workshop. This is something which the *For Sale* sign in the window didn't enlarge on, but the father pretends to ignore the discrepancy. If he's been done out of a bargain, whether by Big Dave or anyone, he'd be the last man in the world to let on.

'Can't wait to have that swell and rock of the water under my feet,' he says the Sunday they drive out, the mother, the father, Ella and Bogey, to unite the motor with the motorboat.

It doesn't suit him to act cheerful, Ella thinks sourly in the backseat, Bogey panting wetly into her face. Pretending to be cheerful, the father only ever ends up sounding displeased. Why'd she come on this mad trip?—only because the mother begged. The boat's a mad idea, in her opinion. Sit up in it anything less than straight and it'll capsize. And the father these days doesn't sit up straight.

En route they fill the outboard motor at the BP station with one-and-a-half cans of lawnmower petrol. The sunlight smashes down on their bent backs. It's a hot winter's day. A searing wind is blowing off the hills.

'It'll be like burning hell out on the water,' says the mother. 'Don't kill yourself with this boat, Har. Please spare me that.'

Like the lawnmower, the outboard motor is started using a ripcord. But for over a year now the father hasn't been able to start the lawnmower on his own. He has relied on Phineas. Some able-bodied man at the marina, he'd hoped, buying the boat, might be able to lend a hand launching it. Till today however he hadn't bargained for the fact that the boat is in every way a solo affair. It comfortably seats only one person. And that means the motorboat's operator must be inside the boat sitting on the transverse plank to start it.

Ella offers to place the boat in the water at the jetty. Her sandals are already off. Isn't it fibreglass, light as a feather? The mother holding Bogey in her lap watches from the car, her hands occasionally raised in exclamation marks of exasperation. See, Ella points out, you hold it steady, Dad, and I get it going. Then I jump out into the water, hand it over to you.

But the father is unconvinced. He doesn't want her to go shooting off on her own across the dam like an *idioot*. It's not the risk of losing the boat but the danger to others out on the water. 'A boat like this, any boat in fact, it's for people with experience.' His shoes are still firmly on.

The following Saturday, the father and Ella take Phineas with them to the Victory Dam marina. The mother stays at home with Bogey. Phineas no sooner took off his school blazer this morning and laid it folded by the garage door than the invitation popped from the father's mouth. He hasn't looked this bemused in years.

On the way to the dam Phineas sits in the backseat of the car, in Ella's place. She's in the passenger seat. The whole way no-one says a word but every minute of the journey she can sense him there behind her, his height blocking the light of the back window, his bony knees digging into the back of her seat. At the BP station they stop and collect an extra can of petrol. The petrol they bought last weekend sloshes untouched in the outboard tank. Again no-one says a word. Again, the sun beats down. When they get back into the car it's very warm. Ella thinks she can feel the heat spreading out from Phineas's body.

'That's just our garden help,' the father thumbs over his shoulder at the entrance-gate to the dam. 'Come to help with a difficult engine.'

The uniformed black man at the boom throws a gloomy frown at Phineas, waves them through.

Phineas has probably never been to Victory Dam before, or any water-sports resort for that matter, Ella guesses. However, he embraces the experience as if he's never done anything in his life other than launch small unseaworthy boats in dams. They park at the free area beside the marina, he spots their motorboat straightaway, the small flat one. He points, looks at the father for confirmation, swings the outboard motor out of the boot.

'That's my boy.' The father emerges from the car at a ninety-degree angle, his fingers grasping his sides.

Phineas carries the boat into the water, his trousers rolled to the knee. He examines the steering stick, checks the starter mechanism. Ella stands at the water's edge shading her eyes, her bare toes in the mud. The snide thought comes from nowhere, taking her by surprise. How he manages it, she thinks, pretending he's in charge when he probably can't even swim.

She sees Phineas turn back to the shore, his hand resting on the motor. She waves, he doesn't. His eyes aren't looking for her. He finds the father standing on the jetty watching him, the water just wetting his shoes, the extra can of petrol in his hand. Phineas raises his arm, then leaves the boat dobbing by itself, strides through the water, bodily picks up the father, strides out again, plants him on the motorboat seat still holding the petrol can. There and back in an instant. Then, lightly, so lightly the boat hardly rocks, he vaults up, levers himself in behind him. He is sitting in the bottom of the boat, his head and shoulders just visible, the peaks of his knees.

To start the outboard motor, the ripcord must be pulled out to its fullest extent, again and again. The father could never have done it by himself. Phineas twists back, then leans far forwards like a rower, twice, three, four times. Finally, with a throaty cough, as if recovering itself, the boat shoots out across the dam, its comical round stern lifted out of the waves, pointed to the surrounding hills, the shirts of the two skippers billowing like spinnakers.

For an hour Ella watches the two of them, the father and Phineas, trace white circles on the glittery surface of Victory Dam, a few widening loops in one direction and then a figure of eight and a few loops in the other direction. Round and round they go as if it was the best lark in the world, as if there were two and not just one teenage boy in the boat acting silly. Once she sees them stop for Phineas to refill the outboard tank. The boat rocks crazily. The second time they stop it is dead close to the shore, the petrol's all used up.

She waits for the waves to push them far enough in, then wades out to drag them to the jetty. The father looks about as windswept and pleased with himself as Phineas. He's experiencing discomfort, she can tell, he's white about the eyes, but his lips aren't tightly pulled. As for Phineas, she glances at him only long enough to check that it's exactly as she thought—he has eyes only for her father.

At the jetty Ella leaves the two men to bring in the boat. She waits for them in the car. The whole way home she doesn't speak. The father talks to Phineas about outboard engines. As they draw up at the house

Phineas's knees dig deeper into her back. Does he lean forward, as if wanting her attention? She keeps her eyes fixed on her lap. She will show him, she tells herself. He has turned away, sided with her father. Well, let him find out what that's like, what a cosy place that is. She will be closed to him now, utterly closed. She will clam herself shut against him.

It is the father's first and the last excursion on the motorboat; Phineas's, too.

'The thing uses too much petrol,' the father says out of the blue a few days later. 'It's a waste of time and money. I'm selling it back to Big Dave. I can't be taking Phineas out to Victory Dam every time with an excuse about a difficult engine. The men on the gate will start to object.'

Five Haiku

Cassie Lynch

Cassie Lynch is a writer, researcher and consultant living in Perth. She is currently researching a creative PhD on the intersection of Aboriginal and scientific awareness of Deep Time. She is a descendant of the Noongar people and belongs to the beaches on the south coast of Western Australia. Cassie uses the Marribank orthography when writing Noongar language.

The weeping river / gathers salt from the earth / to embitter the sea

Waliny bilya / baal wedjan djalam boodj-ool / warn wardan nyorn ngibart-abiny

Crying river / it gather salt ground-from / make ocean sad poison-become

Did serpents make the lands of Britain? / do they wonder / where their people went?

Wagyl warn moonboorli-wardan-boodja unna? / baalap kaadatj / windji baalabang moort koorl?

Creator Serpents make beyond-ocean-country yeah? / them know / where their family go?

Storm moving over the ocean / the wind in my lungs / carries salt to my blood

Malka arn wardan koorliny / mar boora nganyang walyan / kangow djalam nganyang ngoop-ak

Storm over ocean moving / wind in my lungs / carry salt my blood-to

The river flows from the hills / through my cerebellum / then out to sea

Bilya baal koorl yal karda mord-ool / koorl boora nganyang nyit-noorakoort / ngoowal wardan-koorl

River it go from hills-out-of / go inside my little-brain / then sea-go-to

A shark has no bones but in the mouth / the body propels the jaws / the heart follows the teeth

Madjit baal barang kwetj djel bwora daa / baalang koonger bilang baalang daa-djoorla-k / baalang koort dalang baalang ngorlak

Shark it have bones only inside mouth / its body push its mouth-bone-for / its heart follow its teeth

Listening to the Stories Woven Around Us

Brooke Collins-Gearing

Brooke Collins-Gearing has Murri ancestry, as well as Irish, Scottish, Chinese and Indian. She grew up in Kamilaroi Country and now lives on Awabakal land where she teaches literature at the University of Newcastle.

I grew up in Kamilaroi country, the land of the goanna. I grew up bathing in and being sustained by the river system and artesian tracks. I grew up knowing of my Murri heritage, of the old people living in tin huts on the banks of the Mehi, but not of the deep knowledge embedded in land all around; for me, it took many years of different kinds of reading and listening to learn how to pay attention to this knowledge.

From an early age I read literature that was easily attainable—our collection of raggedy Little Golden Books at home, brightly coloured picture books at school, or books from access-to-all-areas at the local library. No-one filtered or checked my reading. And no-one ever discussed it with me. The first time I read *Jane Eyre*, I felt a sense of companionship with the protagonist who as a child escaped her day-to-day existence through books and explored the world around her. (I didn't pick up on the parallelism at the time; I simply felt like I understood the character.) As a child of nine or ten, I spent a lot of my time in England, that is, in the stories that came from England. I lived with war-torn families, adventurous bicycle-riding children, talking rabbits and cats, mystical mountains covered in snow and secret gardens filled with singing robins.

My imagination gave me the smell of the earth in these places, even though I didn't know the place or its flora and fauna, even though access to this faraway country was words on a page. I could feel the coldness, briskness, snow-whiteness and wintery wonderlandness of the stories. I could see the country. But it wasn't my country. Conversely, the land I was born in, the place I dwelled, the sites of my mixed heritage wove around me but at times remained inaccessible. As a teenager I walked the land every day, but I gradually stopped paying attention. I picked up small signs from my drover father, but I knew very little about how to read Kamilaroi country. Yet it fed me, its ancient waterways watered me. I inhaled it with every breath. Then when I was fourteen, I read Sally Morgan's *My Place.* And my ears opened up again.

Now, as an adult, I live with my two sons on Awabakal Country on the shores of Newcastle about five hundred kilometres south-east from Kamilaroi Country. I've taught my sons as much as I know of how to read the landscape for the knowledge that has existed there since it was created. We regularly trek between Awaba land and Kamilaroi and during these trips we can now read some of the knowledge, see some explicit signs, hear what the external layer reveals. The boys try to read for signs that tell them where they are, what season it is, where we've been (mountains, greenness) and where we're going (black soil and flat plains). I share bits and pieces of stories about Country, mythology, massacres, loss. Bits and pieces that I've gathered over the years since my childhood by reading and listening—to words written and spoken, stories around me, people around me, places in which I've lived. I respect what still I don't know but now I *see* every time Sun comes up and welcomes a new day.

The coast has always felt different on my skin but it's easy to be aware and respectful of it. Its ocean is impossible not to love regardless of where you come from. Its sounds, rhythms and energies come at you from a water packaged in beautiful hues of blues and greys and surrounded by tones sandy and orange. Electric waves roll and break, thundering at their loudest. Sitting on the beach, you can't *not* feel a part of the greater system of connections that emanate—tides, currents, winds, moon, energy and sounds. Snippets of imagery that may or may not be real, the yellow bottlebrush, glimpses of Bream, birdsongs and turkey calls. Surrounded by such sounds and stories it's easy to know that the country lies in a complex web of mobilised entities, knowledges, energies, patterns, and cycles, all breathing, living, feeling. After the death of my dad, long walks through the bush, sitting beneath glistening spotted gums, feeling the vibration of Kookaburra's song in my own body, sucking on the nectar of that Honey Dew blossom, kept me breathing. The sensations I feel present my reason and need to respectfully pay attention to Awabakal and its surrounding land, sky and waterscapes, to acknowledge the web of stories that live in and around, connecting, moving and stretching to the rhythms and patterns of the earth. I continue to listen and watch, and when I feel my skills are lacking, I turn to the stories shared by those who know Country best.

I teach literature at a university. Every now and then I get to teach a course on Indigenous literature, providing me with thirteen weeks of nourishment. My students sign up knowing what they are in for—that is, knowing they want to learn from Aboriginal voices—and I get to spend a semester re-learning the stories that come from this land (and not from

the canonical voices from foreign lands). I have built the course around the act of listening—a device that I have come to trust wholeheartedly. Rather than analyse, dismantle or deconstruct texts, the course is about actively listening to the stories Aboriginal storytellers share. One of these storytellers is Senior Lawman Bill Neidjie and I start and finish the course with his story, *Story About Feeling* (1989). His is a little book with big knowledge.

Story About Feeling emphasises the importance of feeling. It tells us that the place we live in is alive, it breathes and it moves. Each and every thing, human and non-human, is connected and each and every thing pulses with breath and energy. Empirical Western discourse, where the notion of objectivity is associated with validity, often removes the effect of feeling from 'scientific' knowledge, but Neidjie emphasises that everything has feeling and agency and that breath, story and feeling move through everything including humans, tree, rock, wind and animal. His story covers the act of listening, the relationship between the individual, their surroundings and associated energies, patterns and rhythms. He includes the Milky Way, the appropriate way to catch and eat food, the relationship between food and place, the rhizomatic links and connections of all things, the importance of caring for Country, the movement of Ancestors, the power of sacred places.

Those who possess a deep understanding of Neidjie's knowledge have already followed the story for thousands and thousands of years, for this story is a continuing moment, not an event that happened in the past. But for those without the knowledge, Neidjie only shares a 'surface' layer of knowledge about Country, using stories within the text to explain *why* only certain levels of knowledge can be shared. He also shows how stories are interlinked and interrelated. Neidjie's decision to share story was not made lightly but his telling was motivated by the impact of colonisation and the ongoing poisoning of land and people he'd witnessed during his lifetime, he recognised that the story of land has become increasingly overshadowed by the story of money and mining. Paradoxically, the land has become rich in 'both' worldviews—one trying to protect it, the other trying to extract from it.

Other voices and stories we pay attention to include Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina's story, *The Two-Hearted Numbat* (2008). As the title indicates, the protagonist Numbat has two hearts: one a feather and the other a stone. When Numbat wears his feather heart, he spends all his time looking after others; wearing his stone heart, Numbat is tough and refuses help from anyone. Numbat struggles with his two hearts and so he seeks the wisdom of Eldest numbat. On his journey he comes across an angry dingo and uses his stone heart to try and get past, but Dingo continually throws him to the ground. Changing to his feather heart, Numbat discovers a thorny vine tangled around Dingo's tail. He removes it and receives a lick from happy Dingo. When Numbat comes to a river, he offers the vine to Magpie in exchange for carriage across the big river. Magpie accepts the vine but flies off before fulfilling his end of the bargain. Sad and betrayed, Numbat draws on his stone heart so he has the strength to cross the river in one huge leap. When Numbat finally reaches Eldest Numbat and enquires which heart is true, he learns the answer.

> Don't you see? Without your heart of feather, you would never have seen that Dingo was not an enemy, but a friend who needed help. And without your heart of stone, you would never have known that you were strong enough to cross the river all by yourself. The true heart that you must choose is both of them. (Kwaymullina and Kwaymullina np)

Knowing that both the sun and shade, destruction and regeneration, life and death are the same parts of the same story makes perfect sense to me when I feel the cycle of the moon influencing my body, or the changing of the seasons reflected in my skin. Knowing when to act or when to be patient. When to move, when to wait. Same same.

From the many layers of this story, it is the strength that comes from being both soft/caring and strong/tough that I like to focus on. To me, the story speaks of the many Aboriginal knowledge holders and storytellers who have had to carry the burden of two hundred years of colonisation while, at the same time, opening their mouths and sharing knowledge with outsiders from their country. Navigating the Laws of the land with the laws of colonial invasion requires a strength that this nation has not always acknowledged or respected. Stories of gentleness and strength that have overcome and continue to overcome stories of loss and betrayal. In the words of one great story of this nation—from little things, big things grow.

My two sons and I once flew across this great southern land, from the east coast of New South Wales to the Northern Territory, to spend some time in a small community. I need to respectfully acknowledge those who taught us while at Nauiyu. During the flight the boys sketched and as we watched the landscape change beneath us from lush, green mountain ranges to sparse, red, flat plains, their pencil strokes changed to match the lines of the rivers or the circles of waterholes and rocks. We took a brand new soccer ball and a new football over with us as a gift for the community. My youngest son adored soccer, my older son played

League. The footy didn't really get much of a kick—the mob of boys that took my sons into their homes and hearts played AFL but when they saw that black and white soccer ball, the grins on their faces showed which ball they'd chosen to play with. That beloved soccer ball was in tatters by the end of our visit. The power of sport to bond children—in this case eight boys—across cultural, geographical and linguistic differences, was beyond amazing. That mob of boys kicked the shit out of that soccer ball and in the process my sons learnt lingo, built friendships and acquired knowledge of place that only being in that place could provide. We had to learn how to be present, pay attention and be mindful. The soccer ball became the connection for all the boys—it meant movement, laughter and determination.

During our visit it was shared with us that the women learnt how to weave baskets by following the web pattern of a particular spider. This has been the way since Creation. When you look at the web with the spider at its centre, it actually looks like a basket. Having already fallen in love with the soccer ball boys, the story of the weaving pattern gave me the image of the battered soccer ball nesting, safely, in a woven basket. It reminded me of planet earth, resting in space, gently held by some massive, invisible webbed cosmology. I've always understood that everything is connected, that everything is alive and interrelated—humans, animals, plants, rock, sun, moon, wind. I knew this but I haven't always felt it. Listening to the stories of the women, watching my sons and their new mates listen to each other, I experienced what it was like to be part of this greater web, connecting me to everything around. Feeling the place you're in, having an actual physical response to air, water, rock, tree and earth, is not only part of the interconnectivity of Aboriginal epistemology, it is also an acknowledged scientific fact. Being with the mob in the Northern Territory, hearing their knowledge of how to read landscape, provided us with a deeper, embodied, understanding of how everything is connected—how the Kapok tree tells you when to collect freshwater croc eggs, how the cycads and the spear grass tell you what seasonal activities need to be conducted, whether it's time to burn off or perform certain ceremonies. It's all alive, all connected and all interdependent. My sons and I learnt from that mob how to peel back the patches of patterns and see some of the core that lies beneath.

The little fellas in the Northern Territory community were able to show my sons lives woven and entangled with black and white notions of land, country and place. One Sunday during our visit we attended mass at the community Church. It is a beautiful church built by the local mob and attended by them. Artwork hanging from the walls inside display entanglements of Aboriginal and Western paint strokes—lines depicting a Christ-like figure on the cross with brush strokes that signify an Aboriginal perspective—they are obviously 'Aboriginal' paintings. The church, the artwork and the mass combined Catholic religious doctrines with Aboriginal knowledges and storylines. It was here that we were offered a tiny insight into the concept of *Dadirri* as spoken of by Aba Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann—the conscious act of stopping, listening, thinking about and feeling the place around you, where you are. All across this country, Aboriginal men and women of knowledge generously share their stories and understanding of their Country. The deep, contemplative listening they speak of links an ontological and physical awareness of place. In the church, my sons got to see, hear, and feel an intertwined experience of Christianity and Aboriginal ontology that to this day they carry with them in their hearts and minds into other saltwater or freshwater countries. Nowadays, back on the east coast or while returning to the dry plains of the flat country, we don't visit many churches but we still carry with us a deep, respectful, contemplative listening to the places in which we dwell and the country around us. Neidjie informs us that

> No good man e can't listen because he's no good,
> e's feeling something else ...even Aborigine.
> Man like you, like me, you feeling with this story.
> What I'm saying, you listen,
> You'll feel your string, you feel your body,
> You'll feel yourself.
> Might be morning, you feeling...
> 'Ahh, I want to understand that, I want to listen.'
> (102)

Sometimes I think my ability to privilege 'feeling' has been trained out of me. From the moment I began Western institutionalised education, and started to read those other stories, I was taught to privilege 'rationalised' thinking, yet there are other ways of knowing, ways more profound and subtle maybe. Aboriginal story sharers such as Neidjie, and Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina remind me of these other ways of knowing through their stories. *Crow and the Waterhole* (2007) is such an example. This story is about an unhappy crow who stares into a waterhole every day wishing she could be the crow staring back at her. She flies away to search for a way to become like Crow-in-the-Waterhole. On her travels, she comes across Little Gum, a small tree in the pathway of a bushfire. Although afraid of fire, Crow swoops down and carries Little Gum to a river

surrounded by other trees. She goes on to help Goanna and Paperbark Tree in similar ways but in spite of these courageous acts Crow is still sad, wishing to be like Crow-in-the-Waterhole. She soon comes across Kookaburra who tells her that Crow-in-the-Waterhole is her reflection.

> Crow stared at Kookaburra, and then at the puddle. She touched the water with her beak, and when Crow-in-the-puddle rippled and disappeared, she realised she had indeed been staring at her own image. Happy at last, Crow returned to her tree by the waterhole. But this time when she looked into the water she saw a crow that was brave, faithful, kind and wise, and she knew that the crow was her. In the years that followed, whenever Crow met someone seeking their destiny, she would show them their reflection in the waterhole, and say—'Your destiny lies within you. All you need to do is learn how to see it'. (Kwaymullina np)

For me, this story breathes as a reminder of an ancient yet still apparent understanding—that from within the ecological and cosmological woven basket that holds us, we are both creators and created. Throughout Crow's journeys her relationship with the world around her is one of connectivity and responsibility. She nurtures and is nurtured in return. Even in the midst of potential destruction and fear, as signified by the powerful force of fire to destroy and regenerate, Crow and everything around her have agency and responsibility. In the revelation that the desired reflection in the waterhole is actually Crow herself, Kookaburra reveals that the world is not 'outside' of Crow but within her. Crow learns to move past her own suffering by engaging with the landscape around her, and in contributing to the bigger picture, becomes more aware of her own patterns, energies and feelings. In *Crow and the Waterhole*, everything interacts. How you look at something influences what you will see. Watching, listening and seeing are sometimes all we can do. After the death of my beloved drover father in 2018, it is the land, the waterways and the sky that move me through the grief and back in to gratitude. I could not do this without the stories that weave around me and their manifestation in the earth and sky. The sweet nectar of that honey flower still nourishes me.

The kids from the mob we visited showed us how to grow with that understanding of Country. They go out bush, fishing, hunting, knowing that there are crocs around them, knowing that they need to keep an eye on the little ones, knowing to always listen for splashes or movements that signal a crocodile. When you are aware of your surroundings, aware that all around you other stories are being woven, whether inspiring or dangerous, your environment reveals how everything intersects and connects: dragonfly letting you know barramundi and other fish are ready to be caught; magnetic termite nests, beautiful and eerie, built facing east to west to moderate the temperature within so that yellow-spotted goanna can keep their eggs at a regulated temperature and humidity; the woolly bark tree with bark to protect it against fire, so in the proper days when mobs burned off, the woolly bark didn't burn. Nowadays, introduced plants clog our waterscapes because people are not always allowed to care for Country; foreign plant species burn at higher temperatures causing fires to burn off differently and with different heat and speed; the invasion of cane toads endangers yellow-spotted goanna and other fauna. The ability to read the land, to listen to its stories and act accordingly, is a skill that not only offers practical, nourishing outcomes, it gives a profound sense of feeling connected to the world around you and, therefore, to yourself.

When I begin to learn how to read one sign it leads to another and another. The place in which I dwell, the place in which you dwell, possesses knowledge, like the biggest library. Stories are all around—connections, to read and nurture and to prepare for new and emerging stories that as yet haven't revealed their full potential or despair. When we're aware of everything breathing around us, it's hard not to see, to hear, to feel. Nowhere did my boys and I feel this more than on a beach at the tip of the Northern Territory. Sitting together on the sand we noticed the colours around us of pinks, creams and purples. We stopped and remained still and silent (our embodiment of *Dadirri*) and then the beach came alive. Thousands upon thousands of tiny hermit crabs moving in their colourful shells, all on journeys, contributing their own stories to country and place.

I realise that built on top of these stories of place, are other stories about foreign people, plants, animals and uses of land. My own ancestry speaks to this, is an embodiment of it. The places I journey to around this nation, like all places in this country, are traditional homelands, woven together with light, air, earth, water and fire. But these places also carry stories of violence, destruction and loss. At times I have to work harder to see past the stories I live. I need to recognise that these stories are strands of protection, segregation, assimilation, self-determination; that they are stories of courage and strength as well as heartbreaking loss and sadness. Whether staring at a well-worn and tattered soccer ball, the web of a spider, or my sons' beautiful faces, the reflection I see looking back at me encompasses everything I see around me as well.

Recently I was camping up the north coast. The name of the area reveals a lot about the place. It's a place full or nectar and honey. I visit this spot every year, but this year the whales were travelling south in the biggest mobs I've ever seen. I was completely mesmerised by them. Squinting against the sunlight to see them as best I could. In an effort to watch them more closely, I hiked up to the headland. A place I hadn't been to before. The further I walked, the more dense and obstructive the bush became, the spiky matt rush tried its best to slow me down. A cramp in my left leg and even my thongs breaking didn't stop me though. I walked for a long time until I reached the tip of land but because a massive southerly had begun blowing, I climbed down the rocks facing the water to try and get some shelter to better see the journeying whales. The wind was so strong it felt like I could be blown away at any second and the whales had disappeared. As I sat wedged between some rocks I felt it: an uncomfortable, not-right, feeling. I stopped staring out at the ocean and paid more attention to what was happening around me. The wind was howling and the rocks were joining in. They were sort of metal rocks, like iron ore and magnetite. They boomed at me. And then I saw the cave, or rather, heard it first. And I realised I shouldn't be there. I hadn't been paying attention to where I walked and I'd walked right into a place my body was telling me I shouldn't be in. I could feel it. I didn't think I was meant to be in this masculine, metallic area and I knew I should leave. As I hurried back the way I came, I knew I had been disrespectful and not listened to my surroundings and the moment I had that thought, a tick landed in my ear. The moment I reached country that was familiar and felt different, the land opened up, the spiky matt rush let me through, the southerly died down and the whales reappeared. And I knew, with my entire body, mind and spirit, that I hadn't been listening.

We all have our own stories. Yet the one thing we all have in common is the land we live on. We wake up every day in a land that, since the beginning of time, has embodied all the knowledge that is needed to nourish and sustain every animate and inanimate being that rests on it. This knowledge has been kept, protected and nurtured by its custodians and some of it, the layer that is available to all, has been shared, is being shared. It only requires us to listen. Listen to those who know the stories and listen to all the different ways such knowledge can be shared with us—every time the wind blows, the birds sing, the rain falls or the surf breaks. We live in a system, an ecosystem, where we are all connected. Blackfellas have always seen it, lived it, felt it. Scientific paradigms are just starting to catch up to it. Today's industrial world is exploitative, depleting the planet's strength. My own everyday life and the way I find myself living it can become depleting if I am not paying attention. And when we deplete the earth's energy, we deplete our own. The stories that people so generously share with me, continually return me to this moment of knowing and this way of knowing.

The enormity of this overwhelms me. Neidjie broke the Law to give us the privilege of listening to, respecting, knowledge that has been apparent in the land for thousands and thousands of years. He broke the Law for us so that we could listen.

> Listen carefully, careful
> and this spirit e come in your feeling
> and you will feel it... my body same as you.
> I telling you this because the land for us,
> never change round, never change.
> Places for us, earth for us,
> star, moon, tree, animal,
> no-matter what sort of animal, bird, or snake...
> all that animal same like us. Our friend that.
> This story e coming through your body
> e go right down foot and head, fingernail and blood...
> through the heart.
> (Neidjie 18–19).

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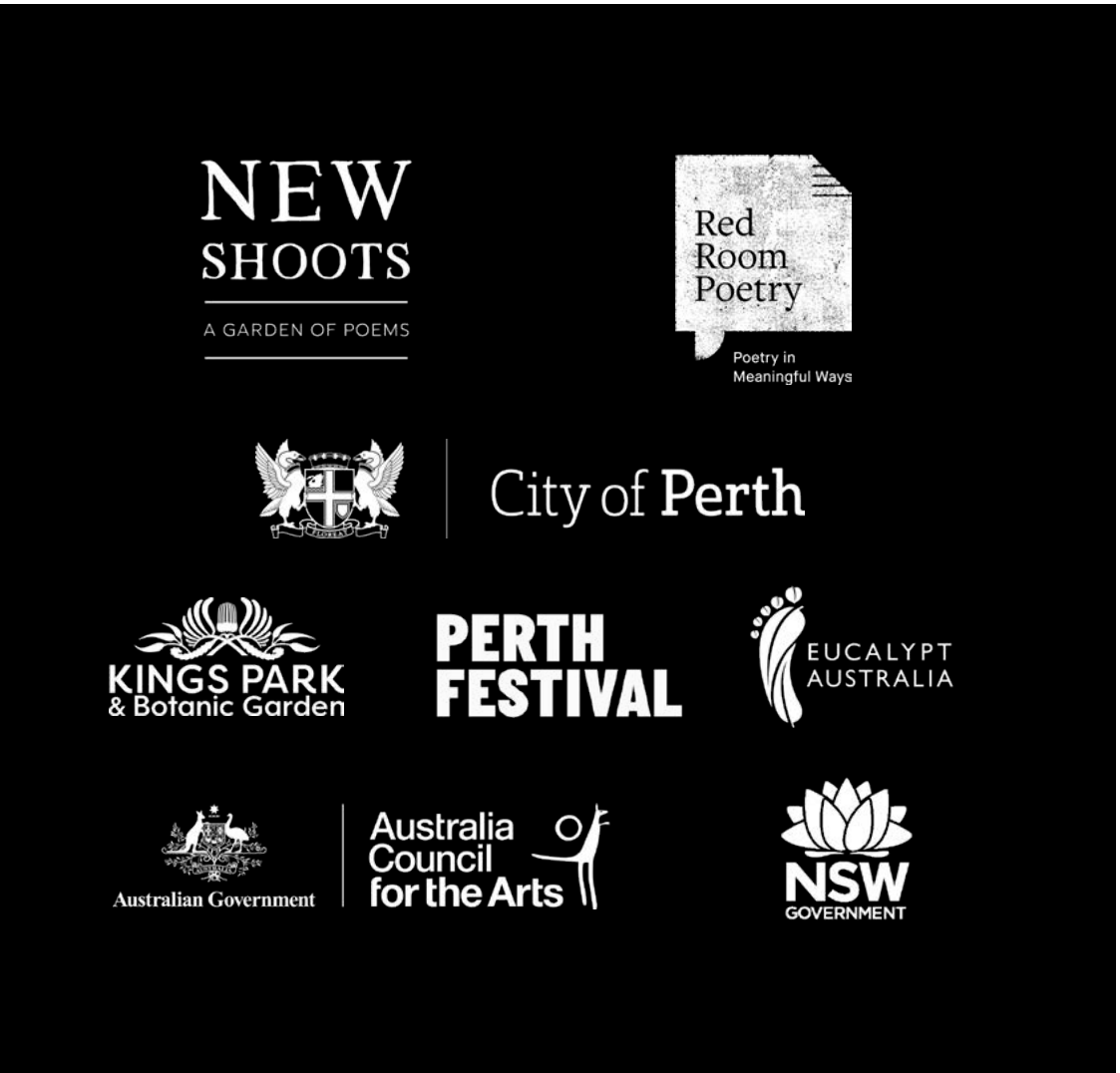
New Shoots WA (Red Room Poetry)



New Shoots WA, as part of a nation-wide poetic project curated by Red Room Poetry, explores creative and emotional connections between poetry and mallee ecosystems endemic to Western Australia's Noongar region. Five local poets—Nandi Chinna, Daniel Hansen, Luke Sweedman, Reneé Pettitt-Schipp, and Scott-Patrick Mitchell—were commissioned to create poems inspired by encounters and experiences with the diverse and varied species of eucalypt in and beyond Perth's Kings Park and Botanic Gardens.

The work collected here offers a gentle contemplation of the human within the ecological. This is a writing which is embodied: as Nandi Chinna notes: 'I like to get to know a plant by smell, touch, taste, sight and hearing.' But it is work which simultaneously, informed by the conservation work of Kings Park, demonstrates an interest in and awareness of scientific language and data. Luke Sweedman, for instance, plant collector for Kings Park, uses his poetry as a way to record his experience of negotiating both poetic and botanical conceptualisations of 'tree'; while Scott-Patrick Mitchell reads personal experience through the Latinate structure of botantic taxonomy. Reneé Pettitt-Schipp holds the mallee as a material and conceptual symbol of her move away from Perth to a new home in the Great Southern region. 'I needed to find a way into this shimmering new wild-scape, a shifting watery world between forest and sea.' The poetry Pettitt-Schipp has written is a response to this: 'I walked. I listened. I waited.'

As a group, these poets, emerging and established, write with curiosity. They express awe for the mallee's resilience and genetic immortality, feelings of grief for the lost and damaged ecosystems, and deep personal engagement with their subject. Nyoongar poet Daniel Hansen describes the connection he has to this land as informing his poetry: 'As an aboriginal man I have always held a special connection to the Boodjar and a lot does come to mind when thinking of different Mallee species.'

New Shoots as a whole is about the connections we make with our natural world, and showcases the manner in which a group project can nurture not only its participants, but likewise the community it represents in opening a communion with the environment in which we live.

New Shoots WA was supported by Eucalypt Australia and the City of Perth. More material and information can be found at https://redroomcompany.org/projects/new-shoots/. Each writer reflected on their process of connection and writing in short prose pieces, available online. The poets' poetry and reflections can be found at: https://redroomcompany.org/projects/new-shoots-wa/.

Anatomy of a Lignotuber

Nandi Chinna

Nandi Chinna is a research consultant and poet based in Perth, Western Australia. She was Writer in Residence at Kings Park and Botanical Gardens in 2016, and won the Tom Collins Poetry prize in 2014 and the Fremantle History Award in 2016. Nandi has published numerous poetry collections; her latest is *The Future Keepers* (Fremantle Press).

Stacked on the back of a truck,
delivered to suburban houses,
a lignotuber may be known as carbon,
energy stored, until tossed into the fire,
through shivering frosts, an all-night burner,
meristems dense and hard blown
on the ashes of the morning,
a curlicue of smoke arising.

Beneath the ground in living state;
woody swellings hold life in suspension,
a contorted arrangement of tissue,
swollen buds, a pulse of protection
against erasure, defoliation,
the flat horizon we call 'clearing'.

Yet even a phoenix can be extinguished
with ball and chain, bulldozer, disc plough, root rake.
Scraped into a pyre, lignotubers smoulder for days,
un-doing three billion years of evolution.

Eventually the hands of the returned soldier settlers
who wrestle mallee roots from the earth,
come to resemble the lignotuber;
scarred and blistered, ingrained
with ancient sand, scorched by seasons,
cracked open with ruined potential.

Note

Lignotubers were studied and named by Leslie Ruth Kerr in Melbourne, Australia in 1925. She died in 1927, aged twenty-seven. See Leslie Ruth Kerr, 'The Lignotubers of Eucalypts', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Vic.* 34 (1925) and 'A Note on the Symbiosis of *Loranthus and Eucalyptus*', *Proc. Roy. Soc. Vic.* 37 (1928).

Koolark—Home

Daniel Hansen

Daniel Hansen is a twenty-eight-year-old Nyoongar poet, writer, and father from Armadale, Perth. Drawing inspiration from the cultural influence of hip-hop, Daniel began writing poetry at the age of eleven. He has since continued to develop his craft, branching out into short stories, and incorporating his self-expression and belief in spirit and dreamtime into his writing.

From the woodlands to the Sclerophyll,
Of the Eucalypt forests I know,
Within the air I can certainly feel,
A benevolence which resembles that of Home.

'Nganyang Kwoorl Daniel Murray Hansen,
Ngany Yoorl Koorl Ballardong Boodjar
Koolarngwetta Wadjuk Boodjar.'

'My Name is Daniel Murray Hansen,
I come from Ballardong Country,
Born Wadjuk Country.'

'Ngany Kooditj Alimagan Ngany,
Dabakan Koorliny Kaada Boodjar.'
'I think as I,
Walk slowly across country.'

'Ngalak Katitdj Ngalang Maya,
Ngalak Katitdj Ngalang Boodjar.'
'We know our place,
We know our Land.'

The Kings Land.
The final resting place of the Waargul spirit,
Where the royalty of the Nyoongar people would hold their
Corroborees,
The most sacred of land.

Where cleanliness is next to Godliness.
And everything is kept spotless 24/7.
Which is why I guess my people have always given the Blessing of
cleanliness to the Boodjar we Respect,
Always leaving our camping spots cleaner than when we entered the area,
Everywhere we declared
'Nyanlang Koolark.'
'Our Home.'

Ravensthorpe
Luke Sweedman

Luke Sweedman was born in Sydney but moved west in 1988, and now resides in Fremantle, WA. A life-long poet, Luke's writing addresses themes encountered during his explorations of WA's remote natural landscapes while working as a seed collector, and has been displayed in the Western Australian Botanic Gardens as part of the Wildflower Festival.

Crucible of eucalypts
a woven thread
a spiritual tome
a million forms
a vast oration
a book of poems
a structure
a complexity
a symphony
mallee, mallet, moort and tree

Ravensthorpe was a bishop's parish
Ravensthorpe England a world away
but the settlers showed persistence
now a spiritual home for eucalyptus

Pluricaulis, calycogona, incrassata,
captiosa, corrugata and deflexa
species to describe the complexity

Capped, wood line, narrow-leaved
entities by names across the ranges
fine-leaved, nodding, cascading or lerp
gathered here, in country, on ancient earth

hybridising and mesmerising like lines
from an old song with a haunting chorus
They hold the landscape together
gripping its essence with a familiar tune

Glaucous clumps on crowded hillsides
weeping forms swaying in homage
to the prevailing southern winds
Clustered densely on coast and isles
inlet, granite inselberg or schist rock
kwongan sand and sharp valley
All distinguished by this name mallee

Botanical names and scientific jargon
broad lanceolate with red flowers
many with conspicuous colourful bark
If you stare closely at a leaf are they stomata
or is the leaf venation obscured due to oil glands?

Broad little lid in Latin or just a glorified stalk
broader shorter opercula or just botanical talk

Eucalyptus armillata, the flanged mallee is from
Armillatus in Latin, meaning ornamented with bracelet
this can hybridise with the glazed mallee or tenera
meaning delicate in reference to the slender parts
Erythronema is Greek in reference to red filaments
Arachnaeus from Latin, spiderlike appearance of buds

The language of the botanists
as they seek to understand
and the words of the poets
as they express their response

Jarrah (buying the block)

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp's work with asylum seekers in detention inspired her first collection of poetry, *The Sky Runs Right Through Us* (UWA Publishing). Her poetry has appeared in multiple exhibitions and publications, and has been recognised through literary awards. She is currently completing a creative non-fiction manuscript as part of her PhD at Curtin University.

Eucalyptus marginata

I am a shooter, the seller says
and neither of us meet his eye
earth, shade of a wound, up high
redtail splays her sudden colours

I know what is lost by what is left, fringe
of pimlea, lobelia, crowea, hovea, tassel flower
hakea, banksia, zamia, leopard orchid
catching the sun

each day has become an act of forgiveness—
like browning teeth, stumps of gums
thick-rooted molars rot in the wet
white tails leave, blue wrens return
mauve mist of wisteria, hibbertia's suns
century-old ring of grasstree won't let
me forget

by back door, the old jarrah's last surprise
its secret store swells beneath the stump
we dig, burn for days, deep into night
complicit in a way we can't confront, see now
a monument smouldering in broad daylight
tree blunts our saws, throws smoke in our eyes

we know what is lost by what is left, lignotuber
gripping the earth's bloody hue
find ourselves quiet, whispering to roots, sleep
uneasy, his gun-safe bolted hard in our room.

Red Flowering Gum

Scott-Patrick Mitchell

Scott-Patrick Mitchell has been described 'as one of the most diverse and original emerging poets working in Western Australia today'. His most recent work appears in *Stories of Perth*, *Going Postal*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, and his 2018 chapbook 'This Is How We Heal The Hurt'.

Home is a syllable in your heart. In order to speak it whole, you must clap it out: with glee; in ovation; as sarcastically as the Venus de Milo. Here, you build new monuments from stone, adorn altars with flowers the likes of which you have never known. But the Latin names are familiar, because back where you came from, somebody thought it'd be a good idea to teach a dead language to a blossoming mind. You now know 14 ways of saying you are bored in a tongue that nobody but biologists can understand. But you are not bored, not once you venture outside, feel sun sing skin and discover Corymbia ficifolia. Firework fixed in plume. Firmament confetti bloom. Red flowering gum. You've only seen a tree bestowed with such beauty when bearing fruit. Or weighed down with the ornament of other seasons, consumed. But here, these trees spark strange light into barking sight, cacophony of extravagance, brilliant in being unobtainable. That is until at school, when asking a fellow Year 6ixer what they are, they climb trunk and limb, begin showering red flowers down on your skin. And you, in the innocence of wonder, of being a stranger learning how to spell this new home on your tongue, you begin clapping.

Meditation on the Pointlessness of Poetry[1]

Ouyang Yu

Ouyang Yu is a Chinese-Australian author, translator and academic. He has published novels, and books of non-fiction and poetry.

What is poetry? I no longer ask such questions. Instead, every time I begin a new term with new classes on writing in English, sometimes creative writing, I tell myself and them: Forget what poetry is. Instead, write down your first poem on a blank piece of paper, in English, a language you have spent years learning.

These are students in their late teens who haven't been taught poetry, let alone write it, in English, categorised as a 'foreign language' in China. But their first attempts at it are as fresh and youthful as their own persons, full of vigour, and mistakes. One example, among many, suffices, by Kang Junjie:

> I laid in bed.
> I will lie in bed the whole day if I can.
> I work and play in my bed.
> Just because bed is too cosy.
> Just because people like me are too lazy.
> Some say,
> People who live in ease will die of ease.
> But who cares?
> I just want to die in bed.

• • •

'Don't ever send me any news about the publication of another poetry book,' said Adrian, an Australian friend of mine, over the email.

His explanation left me bewildered for some time before the point sank in. Ever since his school days, Adrian was disgusted with the way poetry was taught because it was always presented as something difficult, perfect and impossible, so much so that as soon as he left school Adrian decided never to have anything to do with poetry. A life without poetry would have been much easier and smoother and it was, for him at least.

On the other hand, a total stranger, one in his eighties, who happened to be in my audience at one of those perennial Melbourne poetry readings, came up to me to offer an anecdote, in which he reveals that, a non-reader of poetry, he nevertheless bumps into a collection of mine in a local library titled *Moon over Melbourne and Other Poems*, and as soon as he opens the first page, he finds himself slowly sitting down and reading the book from cover to cover.

One may spend one's life without bothering about poetry only because one hasn't come across the kind of poetry that is after one's own heart; one is lucky who has finally found it. And there is also the fact that poetry, like love, needs the yuan (roughly serendipity) to achieve that chemistry with its audience, or that single reader one may spend the rest of one's life looking for and still manage to miss.

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Or is poetry deserting us at a time when we—who are 'we' anyway?—are deserting it? Why is it that, for some, poetry stays like a shadow, a second life that hovers around one's physical being? Indeed, why is there an outpouring of it in times of distress; for example, in disastrous events like 9/11? Nothing seems to match poetry for its intensity, brevity and expressiveness in giving vent to one's emotions. Who are these people who, all of a sudden, seem to realise the importance of something so useless before it all happens?

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In an age of self-media (*zi meiti*, in Chinese), when each and every one of us is a source of varied or shared information from elsewhere, we seem to have become the centre of things infinitely more trivial, more insignificant, more trashable, more forgettable and pointless than poetry without us realising that they are. Depression sets in as more and more attention is paid to trivia, instantly acquirable, shareable and deletable. What if productivity is so big that one only needs to work a day per week, with the rest of the week devoted entirely to the idea of entertainment and having endless fun? What is more pointless than doing absolutely nothing or having nothing to do, not even to read?

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The moment of truth came five years into my teaching in China when I asked once again the simple question that I had asked students in numerous classes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, how many books they read per year. The answer from three postgraduate students

recently is far from encouraging. Their record is zero; one of them managed to get halfway through *Pride and Prejudice* before she gave up.

I was struck speechless once again and reminded of Zhang Tiesheng, hailed as the 'Blank Paper Hero' during the Cultural Revolution for handing in a blank piece of examination paper after failing to answer the questions. It is during that time that a doggerel kind of slogan ran supreme that goes, in Chinese, '我是中国人，何必学外语，不学ABC，照样干革命'[2], which means, in English, 'It's not necessary for me to learn a foreign language/because I am Chinese/the same way one does revolution/without having to learn the ABC', fitting well in with the popular theory of 'No point reading books'.

With the 'New Pointlessness in Reading Books' theory (新读书无用论), the old idea of pointlessness is revived in the second half of the second decade of the 21st century, in which, assisted and obsessed with the new technology, the young swim with the stream by giving the books a miss. They do have a reason. One student I taught translation to in Melbourne a year or so ago said in answer to my question whether she reads or not, 'I associate reading with examinations. Whenever my teachers mention the need to read they intend or threaten to examine me on what I read. I just hate reading.'

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What role does poetry, the most pointless of all, play in this pursuit of money, the most elementary, designed to lead a life the way animals do, eating, drinking, sleeping, breeding, getting old and dying, without the eyes ever in danger of being ever hurt by the words in books? I think of what Emile Cioran is described as: 'the philosopher of failure' (Bradatan), and I identify with him in what he says about poetry: 'I loved it at the expense of my health; I anticipated succumbing to my worship of it'; it is a 'vision of [...] nullity' (quoted in Kimball).

Failure, what people fear most, stands at the centre of things. Like death, it claims our attention by our refusal to acknowledge its existence, by our constant hunger to achieve its opposite, success, failing along the way, and by our efforts at filling our mental and spiritual vacuum with material acquisitions. And yet, failure is always there, staring at us with its cold eyes, like Gallipoli, bodies of failure strewing its hallowed ground.

• • •

But this age of narcissism leaves no room for failure, the crow kind that Aesop warns against, as all, or almost all, have now become self-flatterers, realising perhaps the fact that when one flatters oneself, the worst one expects is that one's cheese falls into the mouth of one's own shadow, flattering one from underneath the tree.

Instances galore come to mind. One novelist claims, in my presence, that he can't believe he has written a novel so wonderful it takes him by surprise. A poet releases his poems on WeChat Moments, claiming that these are his best eighty-odd poems of the year. Another poet does something similar by proudly announcing that he's got a couple of poems published that he's most satisfied with.

This self-flattery is also conducted on a national scale, as reflected in China's assessment of itself in the documentary *Lihaile, wo de guo*, or *Amazing China*. But a netizen's criticism hits the nail on the head when he says that such documentaries, which he 'detests', are not 'fake' but 'empty', as they are made to 'eulogize the achievements', making what happens at the top sound as if it also represented what happens at the bottom rung of the social ladder[3].

• • •

But what has poetry got to do with all that? What is poetry, really? A remark from Alex, an old friend, comes to mind. We were having a walk in a park not far from where he lives in Castlemaine, talking about a book that he was writing—something that sounded like a cross between fiction and nonfiction, to my mind—when he wondered aloud, 'What does it matter whether it's fiction or nonfiction? You can call it poetry if you like. In fact, you can call it anything.'

In fact, that sounds like Kenneth Goldsmith when he read a poem that mixes Walt Whitman, Hart Crane and a radio traffic report on the Brooklyn Bridge (Goldsmith). You may question it by saying, 'Is that poetry?' and he may answer by saying, 'But does it matter?'

For me, anything that is not poetry in the traditional sense of the word is poetry. I recall saying to Man Chen, a poet based in Songjiang, Shanghai, that poets of the past could not write a poem without referring to such tropes or trophies as flowers, leaves, the moon, the water, the rain, the dew, everything that is Nature related, surrounded and bound. But how can a poet living in a city apartment or flat ignore what he is surrounded with, a fridge, a desk, a sofa, a TV set, a kitchen table and a kitchen knife, all things domestic and domesticated, and not write them into poetry?

• • •

Perhaps it is precisely because poetry is pointless that a poet does it, for no other reason than the fact that it is an act of breathing. One doesn't need anyone else's approval to breathe, nor does one need to pay for the air he or she breathes, in and out, in and out, and in and out. It is no coincidence that the Vietnamese word 'tho' means both 'breathing' and 'poetry', almost as if the two were one and the same; for some, in fact, they *are* the same.

Over the last five years I have spent teaching in China, I have written about 1300 poems a year, not counting the English ones, not counting the ones I wrote in Australia, on my holidays back there. People think I am crazy. But if they compare what they consume daily in terms of food and drink per year with what they manage to produce in say poetry annually, wouldn't they find something terribly missing from their lives? Why is it not pointless to live like a human animal but pointless to pursue poetry that is considered pointless?

Some years back, I wrote a poem as part of my meditation on the idea of failure that goes,

The Measurement

The measurement of one's life
Is not failure
It is not how his name is advertised
To monopolize the night

If one struggles and gets nowhere
Think of the sky that remains hollow and empty
Perhaps because it still hasn't begun charging a fee
To the passing planes

One fails, as one should
The way a cigarette does
Enjoying itself to the buttmost
And doing the right thing by binned

• • •

Perhaps what distinguishes a human being from an animal lies in the fact that human beings are capable of creativity and innovation, and poetry enacts exactly that, perhaps more so than any other of the arts, like painting, because it is pointless and attracts little financial incentive. Prompted by this idea, a poet began carrying out his acts of sedition against technology, social media (or unsocial media) and the ease with which anything can be machine-made and machine-polished by finding writeable surfaces for his poetry. He writes poetry on bubble wraps, on carton boards, on living leaves on the roadside trees, on cigarette-butts, on the blank sides of the cigarette packs, and on his own body, such as his open left palm, all seeming more pointless than pointless.

But that very pointlessness is the point, the point about creativity that is not commercialised, not commercialisable or commercialisably collectible; the point about life lived to the tilt, the poetic tilt, that is not meant to be shared in the social or unsocial media to attract a ceaseless number of 'Likes'; and the point about living a life on the quiet, contemplatively, the way a pointless poem lives. And that's the whole point, nothing more, nothing less.

• • •

Perhaps all it ever manages to show is a resistance to the ironing out of differences—the irony of differences? No—that attempt to homogenise, to universalise, to turn 'them' into 'us', or, as the poet says, to 'they' they, or to 'they' them.

And, ultimately, it is a mouth, a poetic mouth, that keeps saying no, the way that painting by Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie shows (*Tattoo-2*), to anything that smells of money, to the boredom of capitalist pursuits, to the nullification of the meaning of existence with the heartlessness of existence, and to the surrender to a mere animalistic survival of the fittest and the unfittest, entertained to death.

Strangely, it is this pointlessness that gives one hope, whatever that word means. And it is this pointlessness that moves one closer to the essence of things, to above things and below things. While it shows everything is a failure—flowers open only to fade and wither, clean springs flow to join the sewage of the cities, and fame fights hard to keep itself remembered—poetry has this power of renewal and regeneration, like all things do, regardless of whether it is pointless or not. And perhaps that is its point, too.

• • •

Meditation, said quickly, sounds like medication. To dwell on something. To be lost in thought. To find a way out of the darkness. It all sounds like taking a medication to move one out of a condition, one that resembles meditation.

• • •

And, of course, that pointlessness is the wish to be silent, the wish not to say anything about anything, the wish to say nothing about nothing that is anything, because 'in the silence, you meet yourself', as Erling Kagge says (quoted in Kurutz). And, in the silence, you achieve the completeness within yourself that is not torn apart by the social or unsocial media, the completeness of a bird who sings just for the sake of singing, the completeness of flowers that open for the simple joy of opening, and the completeness of a sky that is content with being a sky and nothing else.

• • •

Teaching English and creative writing for the last five years in China, I live with mistakes, such a forest of mistakes that my poetry becomes populated with them. One example suffices.

Melange[4]

'I started to search for things that didn't worth much money'

'A family of five was cruelly killed by gun'

'His nerve became more nervous'

'I promiss I will get normal'

'What I want is to have ability to give you dreamt life. Like this sofa,'

'His body was turning to be stiffer and stiffer'

'With wild of joy, He bought their former house again'

'while someone should be murded'

'We had a report that your house just went through a theft.'

'Nicole was examined brain cancer'

'John was holding a knif'

'Two hours passed, doctored came out of the room and told him, "Your wife is dead"... The second time he heard the news, he fainted and lost recognition'

'I looked at Nicole. Simile disappeared from her face'

'I was totally shocked and standed as the world was still'

'As a normal humanbeing, I got panic at first'

'When tom was admitted to the university, they couldn't afforded him'

'So I took my own personal stuffs away the house with two policemen's accompany'

...

Over lunch in the staff canteen, Lin said to me that he had just organized a truckload of marked examination papers over the last four years to go to a wastepaper funeral home, possibly to be burnt or pulped

I said: Think of all the exam papers from hundreds of universities in this country

Is this some sort of language exercise for constant correction? No. It is what I call 'creative mistakes', mistakes that lead to creative sparks that light a prairie fire across poetry such as one has never seen.

• • •

And the pointlessness of poetry lies in the fact that it is where freedom can be found and it is where the mind can be at its freest if it ceases to bother about things not worth bothering about. Indeed, in this age dominated by the Self, and the Self Media, a poet creates his or her own thing, puts it out there in Moments on WeChat, for example, and goes on living, regardless of how it is received, it being so pointless that therein lies the point: poetry is living, is breathing. Nothing more, nothing less.

• • •

After all, why worry about poetry's pointlessness if life itself, as Cioran puts it, can never have meaning? Let me finish this piece with a quote from him,

> For animals, life is all there is; for man, life is a question mark. An irreversible question mark, for man has never found, nor will ever find, any answers. Life not only has no meaning; it can *never* have one. (107)

• • •

No, not yet. I won't be finishing without giving you this piece of information regarding how poetry is done today in China: Book after book of poetry has now been published without a book number, giving poetry a near-total freedom never seen before in a country where such things would have been regarded as illegal publications twenty years ago. Pointless? No, because poets doing this are selling them for cash.

Notes

1 This is a paper presented at the Meditation Conference, held at the Australian Catholic University on 21 July 2018.
2 Quotation drawn from https://baike.baidu.com/item/新读书无用论.
3 Quotation drawn from the article《如何评价央视纪录片〈零零后〉？》(https://www.zhihu.com/question/64328140/answer/224316022).
4 The poem was begun 9.55am, Wednesday 27 December 2017, in Room 308, hbl, Shanghai University of Business and Economics, and finished at 11.57am, same day, same place. The quoted lines in the poem are randomly selected from the student exam papers just marked for a course in English writing.

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Night Shifting

Simone Lazaroo

Dr Simone Lazaroo is a multi-award-winning author of five novels. Her short stories have been published nationally and internationally and translated into Spanish. She is currently writing her sixth novel, from which this story is taken, and a series of short stories. She teaches creative writing at Murdoch University, Perth.

Her hand is warm in mine. My mother has always seemed eternal. But in the silence after she's turned to face the darkness and given her longest sigh and her eyes stay open but do not blink, I'm surprised by the low howl of some lost creature rising from me.

Past, present and future tenses collapse. She was my mother? She is my mother?

The nurse comes in, she must've heard me. She checks for my mother's pulse, looks at the time. 4.05am.

'She's gone, luv.' The nurse touches me on my shoulder; retreats to the doorway with her observation file. Keeping a respectful distance.

My mother's hand cools only slightly as the moments pass. I don't let go of it. Then I notice her chest rising and falling.

'She's still... breathing!' On the threshold of hope once more.

The nurse glances at her, checks her pale wrist again, shakes her head sympathetically. 'It's not uncommon for those left behind to imagine that. She's definitely gone. Sorry.' She pats my shoulder, retreats through the door towards the ward desk. Clears away a couple of small empty bottles from last night's Happy Hour.

My mother's foundations were never strong, but she kept a roof over our heads. Now her place in time's collapsing, nothing but a house of unlucky cards; nothing beyond but darkness and a place we've never seen. Now it seems only this cold fall will last forever. Shivering, I'm glad I changed her into her winter nightdress and socks before the ward lights were dimmed all those hours ago.

Her eyes gazing towards the dark sky look paler and even larger than they were before, but what's almost unbearable is their expression of resolve and fear, like that of some small nocturnal animal searching for scarce food in an immense night wilderness. Faith was always such a struggle for her; faith in any god, in other people, but most of all, in herself.

She had her reasons for this, reasons that were too traumatic to reveal to anyone else. Except me, in her final years, when some memories weighed too heavily on her. Too much for an old woman to carry alone. I helped carry them, am carrying them still.

It was dark. That was how she'd begun telling those memories. But near the end, sometimes blood came from her mouth instead of words. Blood is thicker than water, but are some memories thicker than blood? The stain on her pillow like a rose pressed too hard.

The nurse returns with another nurse and clears her throat. 'Do you have a funeral director in mind?'

'No.' Not ready. Will never be. I wanted her to live forever.

'We'll need to contact one soon. There's nowhere to… store her here. We'll phone one for you. Any preferences?'

'She wanted cremation.'

'Sure. An all-woman team? Eco friendly?'

'She'd like both. But not the ones who wear the silly hats. She'd want it simple and inexpensive.'

'Sure. Why don't you go and have a cup of tea while we wash her?' the nurse suggests. It sounds almost like our past week's morning schedule here. But it's clear the bigger plan for my mother was wrong all along. The doctors told us her disease would progress quite slowly, at least until the end, but it's gone too fast all the way. Death's been approaching for not long enough, has taken her months sooner than they'd predicted.

Even so, it almost seems it's yet to happen as I walk down the palliative ward corridor. In the rooms either side, those alive are still sleeping under white cotton blankets, cocooned against the worst. Outside the visitors' room window, the first birds are calling too early before the first light and the first rain of autumn is falling too soon and it seems I will never feel so alone again. The tea smells like old vase water, the room looks desolate, despite so many flowers. All those bouquets given and abandoned by the loved ones of the dead.

The nurse calls me back. They've changed my mother into her thin white summer nightdress and laid her on her back with her arms by her sides and firmly rolled a towel under her chin. To keep her in place? Yet now she's been prepared for the funeral directors, I barely recognise her. Her position and face fixed, her skin paler; how cold she must feel. Cover her shoulders with the faded red silk shawl from Singapore's Little India all those decades ago when my father loved her, take her hand. As if this will help us both hold onto the scarce warmth that remains.

The nurse pauses at the door again, offers me some grey plastic bags.

'Take whatever of hers you wish to keep. We'll… dispose of the rest.'

Time to go. The nurse leaves me to do the leaving by myself. Hospitals' hospitality only stretches so far; another hard lesson we've learned since she was first diagnosed. They always need more beds, especially here.

Pack into my mother's small shabby case her blue slippers, blue dressing gown and messages from all the people who loved her but couldn't make it across vast distances or misunderstandings to visit. Lift the silk shawl from her shoulders. Because she's worn it most winters since we migrated across the Indian Ocean to this cooler climate and the thought of it turning to ashes with her is unbearable. Because nothing, especially not cremation, can stop the cold now. And because I still can't let go of her completely, though I've been rehearsing for years. Hold her hand and kiss her forehead beneath her wispy silver hair one last time, her belongings too light in my other hand.

It was like this on my first day of school: case in one hand, my other hand refusing to let hers go when the bell rang. Only a few weeks before that, she'd tried to leave home; weeping, lugging a suitcase into the early evening. I'd followed at a distance until she reached the corner of a street I'd never seen before.

'Mummy! Isn't that too heavy for you to carry? I'll help if you come back,' I'd shouted.

'*Ssshh!*' She'd seemed surprised. 'Okay. Let's go home,' she murmured.

'My legs are aching. How long will it take?'

'Not far to go.' What she always said on our journeys. Mother, how many times we coaxed each other back across the frightening distance of our sadness.

But not this time. I hope she saw more than darkness in her final moments. Now the pale sun rises between clouds dimmed by drizzle; the river carries the first glimmers of a new day to the Indian Ocean. Eternity. I wish she could've seen that view as she waited for death.

Her nightdress's *Bon Nuit* label is just visible at her thin neck. The kitchen staff downstairs start clanging kettles and saucepans, making breakfast for the ones still alive. The nurses are handing over. The night shift is ending.

Now to begin the longest shift of all. My feet step through the palliative ward doorways towards the hospital exit, timing the beginning of life without her; yet the thresholds between past, present and future have vanished altogether. Only a glimpse of the ocean carrying the night away over the horizon. She was, she is, she will always be my mother; and how far I would go to bring her back.

The Space Inside His Fist

(after a glasswork by Neil Roberts / Luna Ryan 1995/2017, lead crystal, cast from terracotta original, edition of 20, 9.8 × 3.4 × 3.4 (irreg))

Melinda Smith

Melinda Smith is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *Goodbye, Cruel* (Pitt St Poetry, 2017). She won the 2014 Prime Minister's Literary Award for *Drag down to unlock or place an emergency call* and her work has been widely anthologised and translated into multiple languages. She is based in the ACT and is a former poetry editor of *The Canberra Times*.

i.

A play-doh hand-grab,
saved and made solid;
a Nude, a more-than-Nude:
a palpable x-ray of flesh-wrapped space

Skinnier at one end,
where the thumb wraps;
ribbed; softly faceted
at the inner knuckle-folds

The callouses showing
like little craters:
it is a small sausage
pitted with work

It lies, on its bare plinth,
a heavy handful of nothing,
puny, vulnerable, a petrified
snail, shelled helpless

ii.

Not one noun, but many—as many as there are fists
to close This is what the rope knows of the sailor,
what the oar knows of the sculler what the caught fly

knows, one time in a hundred, what the middy knows
of the drinker what the door-handle knows of the one
who enters what the long hair of the victim knows

what her arms and shoulders know also what the barrel
of the shottie knows, and the edge of the dragged
blanket what the shovel knows of the digger of holes,

what the steering-wheel knows,
ten and two.

Gwen Harwood's *Nightfall*

Christopher Konrad

Christopher is a Western Australian writer and has had poems and short stories published in many journals and online. He has received many awards including the Glen Phillips Poetry Prize 2015 and Tom Collins Poetry Award 2009 and 2018. His latest book is *Argot* (2016, Pomonal Publishing).

From 18 Pine Street, West Hobart she has seen him walking
in the sand she has seen my grief, joys my peccadillos
so to speak, and swirled these in her red wine as the southern lights
brit the crepuscule sky He turns and strolls along the water unknowingly
as she closes the window against Kunanyi's chilling breeze
its jutted ridge attesting this southern nightfall

I kick at sprawled kelp glistening in the rising moonlight
follow the leather of her aged hand the estuary tides and lips
mussels click click with sucking water
plovers screech in dark air above the man who is now lost
in self-reverie She realises my intensity as we walk together
she, I, them gulls, sedge, oysters
an ancient fabric, the weight of it all around us shawled

Kunanyi—Mt Wellington

Boochani Bound: A Promethean Meditation on Refugee Detention Centres

Peter D. Mathews

Peter D. Mathews is a Professor of English Literature at Hanyang University in Seoul, South Korea.

Inside and Outside

In 2016, the Indigenous author Melissa Lucashenko delivered the Barry Andrews Memorial Lecture, a speech that was published the following year in *JASAL* as 'I Pity the Poor Immigrant'. This remarkable text bears the following epigraph: '*Dedicated to all refugees currently imprisoned by the Australian State*' (1, original italics). The obvious context for Lucashenko's statement is the ongoing political discussion about the Australian government's treatment of asylum seekers, centred around the draconian practice of imprisoning refugees in off-shore processing centres such as Nauru and Manus Island. Australian literary authors have been particularly vocal in their criticism of the injustice of these policies: in 2015, for instance, Tim Winton published 'Start the Soul-Searching Australia', a Palm Sunday editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which he pleaded for a change of heart based on a mixture of Australian and religious values; in 2017, Felicity Castagna published the novel *No More Boats*, set during the 2001 Tampa crisis when a Norwegian cargo ship carrying 438 refugees was refused entry into Australia, an incident that shaped that year's federal election and the policy that later became known as the Pacific Solution; while in 2018, Michelle de Kretser used her speech accepting the Miles Franklin Award for *The Life to Come* to excoriate Australia's politicians for the use of detention centres on Nauru and Manus. The literary moment of greatest impact, however, has been the publication in July 2018 of Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, a blend of memoir and poetry written in Farsi that Boochani wrote in prison, then secretly transmitted to his translator, Omid Tofighian, via text messages.

Shortly after it was published, the *Australian Book Review* hailed *No Friend But the Mountains* as a landmark in Australian literature. Felicity Plunkett's review in that publication places Boochani, as a witness and

scribe to terrible historical events, alongside Holocaust-inspired works such as Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (1947) and Victor E. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946). In his foreword, Richard Flanagan provides a further point of comparison:

> *No Friend but the Mountains* is a book that can rightly take its place on the shelf of world prison literature, alongside such diverse works as Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Ray Parkin's *Into The Smother*, Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died*, and Martin Luther King Jr's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. (Flanagan in Boochani xi)

Apart from his literary fame, Flanagan was clearly chosen for this task because of his Booker Prize-winning novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013), which depicts the cruelty of the Japanese toward the Australian POWs working on the Burma Railway during World War II, a cruelty that is mirrored in the detention camps that Boochani describes in his book. 'During my lifetime no act of the Australian state has been as terrible as the abandonment, the virtual indefinite imprisonment, of 2000 innocent and desperate refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island,' writes Robert Manne in his review for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'Most have already been marooned for five years or even longer' (Manne np). Boochani's book has thus been caught up in a swell of political protest that, on January 31, 2019, saw *No Friend But the Mountains* awarded both the Victorian Premier's Prize for Literature and Non-Fiction, with a special exception being made for the fact that he is neither an Australian citizen nor a resident. It has since garnered further recognition by taking out the NSW Premier's Award for Non-Fiction (April 2019) and the General Fiction Book of the Year at the Australian Book Industry Awards (May 2019).

While my own views align with the criticism of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, it is important to recognise that Boochani's text explores something greater than just this particular political moment. *No Friend But the Mountains* will inevitably be framed by its controversial political context, but readers should not overlook its literary qualities. Boochani's book is an extraordinary hybrid text that brings together fictional and non-fictional prose, peppered with bursts of lyrical poetry, literary techniques that allow him to explore beyond the limits of conventional political discourse. Boochani thus plays with contradictions, hallucinations, jumps in time, and other literary strategies that are more characteristic of a modern novel than a historical report. The narrator's perspective on his circumstances is filtered through the sophisticated cultural context of Boochani's upbringing: consider, for example, characters like Golshifteh, the fierce Iranian woman who rallies the exhausted refugees in the face of disaster (named in honour of Golshifteh Farahani, an actress and revolutionary artist whom Boochani admires), or Mani With The Bowed Leg, a self-conscious nod to the ancient founder of Manichaeism. Indeed, it is Boochani's brilliant use of symbolic nicknames throughout the text that does the most to blur reality into fiction, animating figures like The Cadaver and The Blue Eyed Boy, as though life itself has become a walking, breathing allegory. Boochani mixes together these references with a modern sensibility taken mainly from Western existentialist fiction, including Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1925), Albert Camus's *The Stranger* (1942), and Samuel Beckett's trilogy, all key texts that, according to his translator, he was reading during the book's composition. With its masterful blend of influences and styles, *No Friend But the Mountains* is a work that deserves, in addition to its political context, to be read as a serious and important work of literature.

Boochani's book is also guided by an intellectual framework that draws on a sophisticated theoretical critique of power and the modern state. In the 'Translator's Reflections' that follow the book's main text, Omid Tofighian explains that *No Friend But the Mountains* is 'only the beginning of a more in-depth and multifaceted project that we refer to as the *Manus Prison Theory*' (Boochani 362), the main task of which is to critique the way that nation-states police their borders. Boochani's book thus articulates a purpose that extends beyond publicity and consciousness-raising.

> In contrast to the thriving 'refugee industry' that promotes stories to provide exposure and information and attempts to create empathy (if that is at all possible), Behrouz recounts stories in order to produce new knowledge and to construct a philosophy that unpacks and exposes systematic torture and the border-industrial complex. His intention has always been to hold a mirror up to the system, dismantle it, and produce a historical record to honour those who have been killed and everyone who is still suffering. Behrouz's book also functions as an edifying message to future generations. (373)

This stated ambition makes the book more than a sophisticated eyewitness account of the detention camps by suggesting that, alongside Boochani's narrative, there exists a project of theorising both their meaning and, in an echo of Frankl, what that meaning reveals more broadly about the state of our humanity.

It is from this perspective that I want to return for a moment to Lucashenko's epigraph, which announces her solidarity with '*all refugees imprisoned by the Australian State*' (1, original italics). The horrendous conditions and institutional brutality that Boochani describes in the prison on Manus Island pushes the ethical claims of the asylum seekers to the front of our minds. At the same time, there is an ingenious double meaning to Lucashenko's statement that emerges in the course of her text. For while the obvious referent of her sentence is the refugees on Nauru and Manus who are being kept *outside* of Australia, the content of her text extends this referent to all those refugees who are already *inside* the Australian State. The Bob Dylan-inspired allusion in her title makes it clear that the term 'immigrant', for Lucashenko, refers to all non-Indigenous people living in Australia, while also subtly defining the 'Australian State' as an equally foreign entity that has forcibly imposed itself on what will always remain Indigenous land. With this single sentence, Lucashenko brilliantly unpicks the reductive morality of inside and outside. Allowing asylum seekers to enter Australia may be the morally right and compassionate thing to do, but no-one who arrives on these shores can escape becoming embroiled in the colonial apparatus of the Australian State.

While Boochani's descriptions of the desperate plight of asylum seekers, the dangerous conditions they endure in their attempt to reach a place of safety, and the terrible conditions in the prison camps on Manus Island are powerful in their sheer, visceral awfulness, the most powerful moments are those in which he explores the inescapability of human power structures. Sometimes this condition refers to the modern state that sets its dominion over every part of the planet, leaving the 'stateless' Boochani to negotiate his way through the cracks in this apparatus. Most often, though, Boochani reflects on how the institutional hierarchy of a prison seeps into the identity of the inmates, making them unwilling collaborators with their own oppression. 'The weak always consider themselves powerful when they see others suffering,' he observes. 'But the collapse of others appeals to the oppressor in all of us. The collapse of others becomes a cause to celebrate our own state' (54). This crumbling of the division between inside and outside, victim and oppressor, is echoed in Tofighian's brilliant meditation on two contrasting islands:

> There is an island isolated in a silent ocean where people are held prisoner. The people cannot experience the world beyond the island. They cannot see the immediate society outside the prison and they certainly do not learn about what takes place in other parts of the world. They only see each other and hear the stories they tell one another. This is their reality; they are frustrated by their isolation and incarceration, but they have also been taught to accept their predicament. News somehow enters the prison about another island where the mind is free to know and create. The prisoners are given a sense of what life is like on the other island but they do not have the capacity or experience to understand fully. (359)

As with Lucashenko's cleverly-constructed epigraph, this description initially leads the reader to expect that the first island, with its incarceration and isolation, must be Manus, while the second is Australia. 'The first island is the settler-colonial state called Australia, and the prisoners are the settlers', reveals Tofighian, in a startling reversal. 'The second island contains Manus Prison, and knowledge resides there with the incarcerated refugees' (360). The physical prison may be located on Manus Island, but for both Lucashenko and Tofighian, the true source of oppression and incarceration is the Australian State.

The Promethean Gesture

The logic of the nation-state is inherently totalitarian, forbidding as it does any idea of an 'outside', with the result that the whole world has been integrated into this system. The word 'stateless' might seem, at first, to designate a position that is outside the state, but in reality it simply means that one is still within the state, but stripped of any legal status or power. To be stateless is simply to be at the mercy of the absolute authority of the state, not to be free of it. As a Kurd, Boochani comes from an ethnic group that has already existed in a stateless limbo for many years, a context he alludes to in various subtle ways. In Chapter 12 of *No Friend But the Mountains*, for instance, he describes a prisoner revolt on Manus during which the generator shuts off, plunging the prison into a chaotic darkness in which one prisoner cries out in Kurdish: '*dālega*!' (347). This word means 'mother', a term specific to the Feyli Kurds who live near the border of Iraq and Iran, stateless because neither country will acknowledge its Kurdish inhabitants as citizens even though they have lived there for thousands of years. The same is true of the Stateless Rohingya Boy in Boochani's text, who has fled a similar situation in Myanmar. Many of the asylum seekers have come from similar circumstances where the absolute power of the state is felt most harshly by those who are 'outside' its official limits.

The division between speech and authority long precedes the advent of the modern nation-state, however, with the examination of the limits of absolute power in literature stretching back to ancient times. Tofighian points out that the literary framework for *No Friend But the Mountains*, for instance, is provided by 'Kurdish folklore and resistance, Persian literature, sacred narrative traditions, local histories and nature symbols, ritual and ceremony' (387), while early on in the book Boochani refers to his journey to Australia on more than one occasion as an 'odyssey' (57). This reference has an ironic ring to it, given that Boochani, unlike Odysseus, is fleeing in search of a new home rather than returning to reclaim a familiar one. Instead of Homer, though, the classical text that kept turning over in my mind while reading *No Friend But the Mountains*, as reflected in the title of this essay, was Aeschylus's tragedy *Prometheus Bound*. In that play, the titan Prometheus, who stole fire from Olympus to give to humanity, is condemned by Zeus, the all-powerful king of the gods, to be chained to a rock and have his liver pecked out by an eagle (symbol of Zeus) in a cycle of never-ending torture. Particularly striking is an early speech by the god Hephaestus, who is charged with binding Prometheus to the rock:

> Son of sagacious Themis, god of mountainous thoughts,
> With heart as sore as yours I now shall fasten you
> In bands of bronze immovable to this desolate peak,
> Where you will hear no voice, nor see a human form;
> But scorched with the sun's flaming rays your skin will lose
> Its bloom of freshness. Glad you will be to see the night
> Cloaking the day with her dark spangled robe; and glad
> Again when the sun's warmth scatters the frost at dawn.
> Each changing hour will bring successive pain to rack
> Your body; and no man yet born shall set you free.
> Your kindness to the human race has earned you this. (21)

Hephaestus's words are delivered with a mixture of pity and sorrow at having to treat his fellow god in this way, a sentiment that echoes the mood of Prometheus's interlocutors, who try unsuccessfully to persuade the arrogant captive that he should bow to Zeus's authority. Aeschylus's play makes his audience contemplate how, although Prometheus's compassion for humanity and critique of Zeus's tyranny are faultless in their logic, his words are useless in the context of the latter's supreme power. Zeus's might flies in the face of reason, so that Prometheus's 'mountainous thoughts', like Boochani's, cannot, in and of themselves, release him from the rock of his suffering.

Other authors that repeatedly came to mind while reading *No Friend But the Mountains* were Kafka—particularly works like *The Trial* and 'In the Penal Colony' (1919), which both deal with systems of legal retribution that have perversely turned against their own principles of justice—and the Marquis de Sade, a writer that Flanagan leaves off his list of classic prison literature. It is not hard to see why, since Flanagan's selection of works is obviously constructed with a particular agenda in mind. Consider the authors he selects, the least well-known of which is the Australian author Ray Parkin, whose *Into the Smother* (1963) describes the terrible conditions on the Thai-Burma Railway in a way that influenced Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the North*. The other authors on Flanagan's list are all writers whose names, despite the injustices inflicted on them, carry the moral weight of being on the right side of history: Oscar Wilde, Antonio Gramsci, Wole Soyinka, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are all strategically chosen because they resonate heroically with a spirit of resistance and moral clarity in the face of prejudice and tyranny. They are the Prometheans who spoke truth to power, the moral authority of their words ultimately triumphing over the unjust might of the state that oppressed them.

Without wishing to diminish the legacy of the aforementioned authors in any way, I think it is important to recognise and overcome the naïveté of believing that the state can be shamed into correcting its inherent brutality by words and ethical reasoning. To do so is to assume, wrongly, that the state possesses a single, centralised conscience that can be persuaded, rather than existing as a structure of power that constantly displaces the responsibility for its own authority elsewhere. Kafka's insights into this decentralised structure echo throughout *The Trial*, in which the protagonist, Joseph K., is placed arbitrarily under arrest, with the narrative following the twists and turns of his labyrinthine attempt to clear his name. As Kafka observes in the parable 'Before the Law', the gatekeepers of authority are arranged in an infinite hierarchy that cannot be transcended. Boochani and his fellow prisoners find themselves operating under an eerily similar set of conditions, in which any attempt to appeal to the gatekeeper/prison guard wielding authority over them leads to an endless displacement of power:

> Whenever a stubborn prisoner makes inquiries and finds The Boss of that individual who has said 'The Boss has given orders' and then confronts that person, that person also responds with 'The Boss has given orders.' It is just a pointless effort. All the rules, all the regulations, and all the questions about those rules and regulations are all referred

> back to one person: The Boss. It is astonishing how The Boss also responds with 'The Boss has given orders.' A long chain ascending through the hierarchy. The bureaucratic ranks are determined by relationships of power. Every boss is subordinate to another boss. And the superior boss is also subordinate to another boss. If one investigated this chain it would possibly lead to thousands of other bosses. All of them repeating the one thing: 'The Boss has given orders.' (Boochani 211–212)

This endless displacement of power is characteristic of the authority of the modern state—Slavoj Žižek notes the same phenomenon under Stalin's rule, for example, in which lower officials solved the dilemma of being caught between responsibility and power by always devolving power onto those above, a step repeated until the highest levels of the Party who, despite having 'total power in their hands, [...] were not even able to issue explicit orders about what was to be done' (Žižek 107). This infinite deferment means that the Promethean writer's desire to speak truth to power is thwarted by a lack of direct altercation with the source of oppression—even in Aeschylus's play, Prometheus never actually gets to confront Zeus, only his intermediaries.

Parodies of Power

The most important literary precedent that frames my reading of Boochani is the Marquis de Sade, even though he is not referenced directly in *No Friend But the Mountains*, because he shares so many of the same concerns and circumstances as Boochani. The turbulent history of the French revolutionary period required Sade, who spent some thirty-two years of his life incarcerated in various institutions, to wrestle with issues of power and authority, which he explores through the unusual medium of pornographic novels like *Justine* (1791) and *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795). Sade is particularly interested in what he regards as the spurious foundations of human authority, leaving his characters to negotiate a brutally amoral universe in which legal or religious codes have no genuine meaning, a condition that Boochani, similarly, experiences on the boat to Australia. 'For some moments I exert everything to reach something far down inside the deepest existential places of myself,' he writes. 'To find something divine. To grab at it... maybe. But I uncover nothing but myself and a sense of enormous absurdity and futility' (Boochani 29). In these circumstances, the nakedness of the struggle to survive seems to affirm the law of the jungle as the true principle of power:

> There was no justice, none at all, no egalitarian solution, no morally just outcome in the partitioning of that small haul of goods. Yet, according to the law of the jungle it was a quintessential instance of justice. The stronger ended up with the greater share. (Boochani 47)

One of the most common ways of misreading Sade is to assume that his philosophy ends here, with this nihilistic, brutally realist vision of human behaviour. More sophisticated interpretations of his work, however, understand that there is a textual gap that separates an author from his characters, so that we should not confuse the opinions of the libertines with those of Sade himself. Applying these lessons to *No Friend But the Mountains* teaches us, similarly, to understand that although Boochani is writing an experimental memoir, his use of fictional techniques requires a qualitative separation between the actual author and the narrator who appears on the page.

The repeated assertion of the libertines in the Sadian text is that there is no legitimate human power, that Nature represents the only genuine authority, so anything that is possible—including rape and murder—must therefore be 'natural'. Yet as Gilles Deleuze observes in his famous study *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), the perspective of the libertine is radically subverted '*because it is essentially that of a victim*. Only the victim can describe torture' (Deleuze 17, original italics). Deleuze is building here on the groundbreaking analysis of Sade put forward by Georges Bataille in *Eroticism* (1957):

> As a general rule the torturer does not use the language of the violence exerted by him in the name of an established authority; he uses the language of the authority; [...] Sade's attitude is diametrically opposed to that of the torturer. When Sade writes he refuses to cheat, but he attributes his own attitude to people who in real life could only have been silent and uses them to make self-contradictory statements to other people. (Bataille 187–188)

This more subtle mode of reading Sade reveals his writings to be an ironic *performance* of libertinage rather than a genuine advocacy of its principles, opening up a whole new way of understanding his work as an act of resistance. Instead of simply championing the brutality of the amoral universe, in both Sade's and Bouchani's fiction the victim of such cruelty aims instead to place themselves in the position of the oppressor in a double gesture of understanding and caricature.

It is this darkly humorous aspect of Boochani's work, this biting irony that, like Sade, permits him to discern the twisted logic of what, using a term borrowed from feminist theory, he calls the 'Kyriarchal System' (Boochani 124). The source of this Sadian humour emerges from a melancholy contradiction in human psychology, which sees the victim as torn between a rational hatred of the oppressor and a perverse identification with the latter's will to power. The literary outcome of this internal struggle is a grim form of parody that not only holds up a mirror to an abusive system, but also to the writer's perverse mental collaboration in its workings. Boochani observes this struggle in himself, for instance, while on the boat to Australia:

> On one occasion during this trip I was so dazed with hunger that I got up and began threatening other passengers randomly. I recall the exact phrase I blurted: 'Look here, I'm hungry and it's completely natural for me to raid anyone with food… I'm about to do it!' A logical statement. Perhaps even philosophical. But uttered at a time when starvation and the fear of death had impaired my equilibrium. Thinking back, the essence of this performance was a parody of power. Just imagine my behaviour, imagine my gestures, imagine me making that pronouncement. Imagine me, whose ribs are protruding from his body. Imagine me, a man whose ribs are so visible you could count them. Imagine me in this state, trying to assert myself in this way. What a ridiculous scene. (Boochani 51)

This early scene from *No Friend But the Mountains*, which occurs before Boochani arrives on Manus Island, is an important presage of the twisted configurations of state power that form in the prison. The literary qualities of Boochani's writing allow him to explore this ambiguity, to construct a narrative that simultaneously provides insight into the minds of both guards and prisoners. In the political battles over asylum seekers it is easy to lose sight of this dark and ambiguous sense of humour, which emerges when facing the reality of humanity's moral compromises, an irony that blurs the psychological lines between inside and outside, oppressor and victim. Political causes rarely permit such gray areas of ambivalence, but in so doing they omit a vital part of the truth that Boochani uncovers in the course of his narrative.

The significance of this sense of humour only increases as the story of *No Friend But the Mountains* unfolds. Building on Boochani's initial 'parody of power', the advent of the Kyriarchal System gives rise to a whole cast of comic characters that reflect the absurdities of prison rule: figures of subversive fun like the Comedian and the Joker; the Prophet, whose religious authority rallies the prisoners until he is beaten up by the prison guards; the Prime Minister, who tries awkwardly to preserve his dignity in the face of ridicule; The Cow, who greedily monopolises food and cigarettes, even though he does not even smoke; and Maysam the Whore. Maysam the Whore is the most important of these characters, as he uses his charismatic brand of satire to mock the authority of the prison system.

> There is no secret underlying his popularity other than an accumulation of suffering endured by all the prisoners, which shines through his rhythmic movements. Like a mirror, the prisoners see themselves reflected in him. Someone who is so brave and so creative; he flexes these attributes through his muscles, muscles he uses to challenge The Kyriarchal System of the prison. He employs a beautiful form of rebellion that has enormous appeal for the prisoners. A man with boyish features who uses them to peddle poetry and to satirise all the serious aspects of the forlorn prison. The spirit of Maysam the Whore contrasts with the desert of solitude and horror of the prison. (137–138)

For all the grimness of his narrative, this humorous style of literary writing represents the true spirit of Boochani's book, a comic mode that, far from excluding tragedy, feeds on the absurd cruelty of the prison system in order to perform its parody of power. Such a perspective is made possible by the Sadian insight that discourses of justice are complicated by the victim's own will to power, a moral compromise that Boochani shows repeatedly by demonstrating that the Kyriarchal System relies on the prisoners collaborating in their own oppression. The necessity of power to human existence, even when it is a power that is drawn masochistically from the prisoners' own self-debasement, means that one can never truly be outside the struggle for power and the possibility of injustice that entails.

Conclusion

The political struggle in Australia over the treatment of refugees will continue, whether in the arena of party politics, in the media, or in the intellectual domain of books and literature. There is already a small group of recently published texts dedicated to this topic, headed by works of investigative journalism such as Jane McAdam and Fiona Chong's *Refugees: Why Seeking Asylum in Australia is Legal and Australia's Policies*

are Not (2014), Madeline Gleeson's *Offshore: Behind the Wire at Manus and Nauru* (2016), and Mark Isaacs' *The Undesirables: Inside Nauru* (2017), as well as a collection of first-hand accounts, including a chapter from Boochani, in *They Cannot Take the Sky: Stories from Detention* (2017). While these political gestures are important, the genius of *No Friend But the Mountains* ultimately lies in the way that Boochani is able to use the literary form to place himself simultaneously inside and outside the system of power he describes, to know from experience what it is like to be a victim while using fiction to understand the psychology of power that drives the oppressor. The creation of this liminal space makes it possible for him to address the immediate injustices of detaining refugees, while at the same time giving the reader the tools to recognise and dismantle the system that produced this injustice in the first place. This insight shows how a literary view of ethics can positively supplement the moral pragmatism of conventional politics: the latter's greater short-term effectiveness should be accompanied by a genuine reformation of the psychology of oppression that underlies the system. Until that changes and we learn to hear the wisdom revealed by the literary voice that Boochani enacts so brilliantly in *No Friend But the Mountains*, the two islands, Australia and Manus, will continue to be a mirror image of each other's failures.

Note

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Trees

Heather Taylor-Johnson

Heather Taylor-Johnson's latest books are the novel *Jean Harley was Here* and the poetry collection *Meanwhile, the Oak*, as well as *Shaping the Fractured Self: Poetry of Chronic Illness and Pain*, which she edited. She is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the J M Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice.

Inland, and hours removed from the sea, a white tree
bathes in day, stores saliva and grows from a hardened floor.

We follow it through the morning's glare on the glass window
until it passes, the radio tied to the city's wires linking music to sky

long since crackled and given up. We drive on to the hidden creek
rest under a hundred-year-old gumtree I believe still believes.

Proud earth laps at my shoe so that later, at the antique shop
where I find an enormous teal pot, I leave a mud print on the rug.

Then, evening, city-bound and radio back, the DJ's playing Gurrumul.
I don't know Yolngu but I think the song's about sunset through the branches.

Lost Wax

Shey Marque

Shey's poetry appears in *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Southerly* and *Westerly*. *Keeper of the Ritual* (UWA Publishing, 2019) was shortlisted for the Noel Rowe Award in 2017. She won the Emerging Older Poet Award at the QLD Poetry Festival 2018, and is a feature poet at the Perth Poetry Festival 2019.

I'm gluing together a tiny violin; its edges melting with the touch of a lit match. I've traced and excised all the parts with painstaking precision. Each panel aligns and the join sets quickly as the wax cools. The liquid spreads, grows over the cuts like new skin. A thin stream of vapour rises as if a candle snuffed only a moment ago, and the scent of the hot throw makes me sleepy. I want to climb the staircase at West Hall, with this replica instrument on my outstretched palm, my other hand touching the banister to keep upright in the dark. At the top of the stairs your door might be open and I could walk right in, leave this model on your pillow for casting in the way of Theophilus and his bells. And if by chance the lost wax should infiltrate your skin, I could section you on my microtome with its tempered blade, fix you to a glass slide (lace-thin so as to let the light in); maybe see a reflection of myself through the little window.

On the Death of Astronaut John Young

Brett Dionysius

B. R. Dionysius was born 1969 in Dalby, Queensland. He has since lived in Melbourne, Brisbane and now lives in Ipswich, where he is an English teacher, was founding Director of the Queensland Poetry Festival and in his spare time watches birds.

My family didn't own a colour TV set until two years
after you'd flown the first shuttle mission; & then
only because mum remarried a sorghum farmer who
kept his little Hitachi set on top of the fridge beaming
like a lustreware vase or a magnetised beer opener.
So that's why I was over at Thruppy's grand place;
the first two-storied house I'd ever entered, huge
as a launchpad, walls as white as a spacecraft's tiles.
Vertigo sucked me down as I passed the threshold.
The terrible awkwardness of our fringe friendship
set aside so I could watch my first launch in colour.
Millions of pounds of thrust that would shame day.
Flames in real orange. An original blue televised sky.
NASA was one giant acronym to a boy who'd spent
half of his life without a launch. Nothing in six years
since *Apollo-Soyuz*, the Americans investing in reusable
ships, powerless gliders that would touch down like any
Airforce fighter running on empty. Video cams zoomed
in on the giant black cathedral bell thrusters that vented
gas; booster pheromones attracting a televised audience
in the millions. Too many things were going on at once,
so computers muttered machine language to *Columbia*.
These powerful artefacts that I'd never get to touch for
another decade. I thought 'software' a new moniker for
underwear. Prayers & butterflies; all the clichés needed
to advise me of how dangerous it was. I didn't even ask
if Thruppy was into *space*, or notice if he sat beside me
on his vinyl couch, (more luxury than I was accustomed
to) or was outside on his BMX doing jumps. Trying to
get some air himself. *Every time's the first time if you've been
there or not. God speed John & Cripp* his new set rattled off.
Emotionless countdowns hid fear of failure; *what ifs?*
threatened America's main engine start after Vietnam's
aborted mission. In the wide shot of the shuttle, with
twenty seconds to go, the Stars & Stripes appeared
faded as old graffiti on a bathroom wall. At t-minus
four seconds, the inverted magma spurt of rocket
fuel ignited Thruppy's screen, followed by a titan's
death rattle that gurgled from Cape Canaveral, shaking
the tinny internal speakers on their plastic mounts. I knew
that noise was the loudest we'd ever made as a species.
Talking back to god. Then, over the cumulus smokescreen
a voice, a son of Morrison urging, *Come on baby! Go honey go!
Fly like an eagle! American thunder in the skies*! You ascended
emptying a swimming pool of fuel per second John Young,
until some minutes later, *Columbia* morphed into the small
bright flare of a television set suddenly switched off.

Trousers

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

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Two mildly pressed tubes have been constructed of closewoven fabric, coalescing upward into a wide pouch, with an opening down its front. On or in this pouch there are pockets, flat bags into which miscellaneous objects (coins included) can be tucked away and from which retrieved, later. The whole oddly-shapen contraption is held together by several sequences of machined cotton thread. It can even enjoy cuffs. Oddly, this resultant single object is known by its plural noun, one of several such in our culture. As the tailored opening can be fastened when necessary, this crafty assemblage serves human modesty. And also our warmth, above all in the winter months. But then we have white shorts, which are another kettle of fish altogether.

The True Tail™

Donna Mazza

Donna Mazza writes fiction and poetry and lives in the South West. She lectures at Edith Cowan University and is author of *The Albanian* (Fremantle Press), a TAG Hungerford Award winner. Her new novel is forthcoming in 2020 from Allen & Unwin.

'May I take some photographs of your coccyx? Then we can look at some designs to see what suits you.' Scarlett felt herself flush. 'Everything okay? You don't have to go ahead with it, this is just to play with a few styles.'

'I know,' slowly smoothing the creases in her lap. 'I'm just a bit anxious, that's all.'

'Perfectly normal. But there's no need to take it too seriously, it's just a bit of fun,' he arched the tail behind him. 'Fun and beautiful,' and he led her to the examination room. 'Naked from the waist down please, Scarlett. I'll be back in a moment.'

On the sill of the small window a large, grey moth had died. Pale and broken, marked with a large fake eye on each wing. Its camouflage in plain sight. Made still. In a frenzy it had sought out the light of the sun, bashing its fragile self against the glass over and over, shattering antennae and thorax and wing for something quite impossible. Her fingertip in the dust of its self-destruction, she stood semi-naked in silence. Why was she doing this? He had asked a perfectly reasonable question but she couldn't answer. The urge to tears needled inside.

'Are you ready?' Before Scarlett responded he shifted the curtain and sat in a chair facing her naked pubic area. Smiled faintly, 'I see you are.'

'Shall I turn around?' Shy at his unashamed stare, she quickly turned to the window, pushing harder now at the lump in her throat.

Cody Bird placed a hand either side of her hips and pressed his thumb into her sacrum, working his way down her lower spine and into her coccyx. The touch of a lover, not a surgeon. He was not a doctor and didn't have the detachment they normally learned at university.

'Perfect.' He placed his finger on the third last vertebrae. 'Your options—I can attach a pseudo-tail here. It won't move but I can make a good-looking tail and it's not as costly.' He traced his finger down a little further, intimate. Scarlett peered over her shoulder. He held her gaze.

'Trust me. I've had my hands on plenty of bottoms.' They both smiled and she turned back to the moth.

'We could start to build one out of here. This is where a True Tail™ can be grown. It takes a bit longer and will cost more. It's also more painful but you will be able to move it and express yourself.' And he raised his plume from the chair as he spoke to demonstrate. It flicked, the hair languid and golden, trailing the air. The breeze on her face.

'Seductive isn't it? I can do feather implants or grow hair from either style. It depends what you want to grow and how committed you are, Scarlett. One thing I do guarantee is that it will change your life.'

She had to change. Her skin just didn't seem to fit right since the split with Kyle.

Actually it was before they split. He was such a perfectionist and it was hard to make herself into the type of perfect that he wanted. The first few weeks were bliss. Then it broke without warning and he magnified her smallest imperfections. She was too fat. Her hair was a bit ratty on the ends. He denied her cake and insisted on walking everywhere. In his clinic, late one night, he took to her face with a fine needle and carefully filled each visible capillary with saline. He had done this annually to himself since he first noticed the crackled lines on his cheeks. He examined her and knew so much detail of her flesh, she felt he must also know her. He would only want to do this if he loved her, she thought.

Weeks after the split, she met him in the street outside the nail boutique. He said he missed her, it cut him deep, and he held her hand. Her nerve endings burned and she hissed, 'You did it to yourself.' Shaking inside, the urge to spew rose in her throat. His hand dampened and she pulled away from him. Too hot standing in the sun.

She watched him leave the mall with a muscly legged woman in exercise clothes. She had a long and elegant tail flicking back and forth. A contented cat.

She buried herself in reading but at her heart was a sharp point of sadness and disappointment in herself. She curled in shame. She would change, be better. And find a better man.

Cody took some photographs. She dressed and returned to his desk as he pulled them up on his computer. He was silent and concentrating, shifting the images, closing in on the crack of her bottom in disturbing detail. There were obvious veins and gruesome stretch marks across the screen, although to the naked eye her flesh was clear. Scarlett felt the need to draw attention from the shimmering lines across her skin with small-talk.

'So, did you meet Galvani when you were studying in Italy?' She smiled uneasily at him.

Focussed on the images. 'I studied under him. Very few people have the privilege, Scarlett.'

'Did you like southern Italy?' He clicked at pixels and dragged images.

'Hmm... it was a fascinating place.' Handed her a folder. 'Just take a look at this while I finish your designs.'

The process was not something Scarlett had spent a lot of time thinking about. She had read about it online. Before and after images were interspersed with several in between: a wire implanted into the lower coccyx, as the first nub appeared, the sprouting of hair from implanted follicles. Cody's tails had been featured globally in fashion and art where he had henna tattooed winding vines up the spine of a young woman. They spiralled down an outrageously long fair tail which finished in a spray of blond hair. The following page involved another wire and the application of electrodes, a bioreactor dome attached to the lower back. Some photographs from Italy of a dark-skinned woman with a white-haired tail draped over her arm; Cody with an aging Galvani on the remnant staircase of a castle by the sea. The images were bloodless, lacking any detail of the process—the breaking of flesh and genes.

'How painful is this going to be?' Cody turned from the computer.

'It will hurt. But all those Mums and Dads with their tattoos would have suffered for them too. No pain, no gain so they say.' For a moment, she felt the urge to leave but he turned the computer screen towards her.

'I'll give you these so you can take them home and have a think about it.' His smile was luminous and she had to return it.

'What will happen from here?' She crossed her legs, a glimpse of pale thigh.

'We'll need to take some tissue samples and do some blood tests, so I'll give you a referral. After it's done it'll be sore as it starts to grow but I'll get you some pain relief and you can pack a bit of ice around it to bring down any swelling.' Confident.

He clicked through images of her with a white, feathered tail fanned up to her shoulders like a dove, a long, white-haired tail like the woman in Italy, a bare flopping tail adorned with tattoos—this one is a pseudo tail just to see how it looks, he told her—and finally a tail with golden brown hair floating to her knees.

'I like this last one for you. It's more natural. But you need to decide for yourself.' Ran a hand through his thick hair. 'After the first few weeks

it'll be part of you and you'll forget what life was like before you were enhanced.'

He smiled in a way that was both self-satisfied and charming and stood from the chair.

In the sprawled city on the coast, water was precious and vegetation sparse. The heat on the coastal plain could burn your skin on even the mildest of days. There was no longer a winter, everyone had given up on its arrival. Reptiles thrived. Sparse clothing was necessary so the business of baring your flesh was culturally normal. But it was a double edged normal because bare flesh in the sun could quickly redden and peel. Skin cancer patchworks of scars and grafts led the cautious and the children to adopt wide-brimmed hats and long sleeves, despite the searing air. Those less self-preserving wore shorts and strappy sleeves, bared midriffs so the skin and the shape of a person was rarely obscured. Body fashions told everyone about your life. Like many women her age, her mother had Scarlett's name and birthday tattooed on her left forearm, her brother on the right. A constant mark in her consciousness, as though she might be able to forget her own children. Like them, a tail would last a lifetime.

The pathology lab was on a blistering street raging with traffic so that the door shut hard in the rushing air of cars. It tore from her grasp. Scarlett's referral made it plain to the staff that she was not urgent so the wait was lengthy and the clinic not as enticing as Cody's. She read a real-life story of failed attempts to re-seed the Great Barrier Reef. The images of dead coral and beleaguered fish were sad so she played a game on her phone until she was thoroughly bored. Finally, a nurse led her to the bleeding room, strapped her arm with a tourniquet and stuck her with a needle. Siphoned off several vials of blood until she felt a little giddy. Needles always took her back to Kyle. The nurse gave her water and came back a few moments later.

'Mr Bird has requested a tissue sample from your lower spine. It might hurt a bit. I have to use a sharp instrument to punch a hole in your skin.' Her bright lips firm with purpose.

'That's fine,' Scarlett lied. The nurse led her to a trolley and asked her to lay on her stomach and pull down her pants.

'Now hold still. This will hurt a bit.' The start of pain. Latex gloves held her flesh tight and instruments poked around, scraping here and there. Then a sharp punch in the lower back and Scarlett nearly jumped from the trolley. She buried a cry. Bit her arm. Warm blood juiced into the crack of her bottom and the nurse pat it away half-heartedly.

'Are you okay?'

'Not really. It hurts.' Scarlett sighed sharply. The nurse placed a pad on the wound and held it firm to stop the bleeding.

'It'll be more painful than that you know.' She worked away dressing the wound. 'You never see a nurse or a doctor with a tail because we see what happens when you get infections or you want to have it taken off.' The tight lips of the nurse, the righteousness. It dug into her.

'I didn't come here for a sermon. It's my business what I do with my body.' Hissing again. It was easy to fire off a bit of venom at the nurse.

Despite the grief which comes with change she signed the contract for a True Tail™ and knew she would never be the same. It was hot, as it was always hot here in the suburbs hemmed in by a sprawl of city and too many people. She smelled a little of sweat as she shed her clothes and adopted the backless hospital gown adorned with Galvani's logo, a splayed frog in the shape of the Vitruvian man. An assistant in white injected her with tranquiliser.

The focal point of the surgery was what appeared to be an inverted dental chair which raised her bare bum under a great, bright light. Her gut tensed and she shivered, blaming the chilled air of the surgery, the visible veins. Another injection, this time close to the site.

Scarlett didn't wish to know the detail of the procedure but Cody Bird and his assistant narrated over her bottom, spread wide apart by a bespoke contraption. Their words seemed to rest in the cold air and wait for long moments to fasten in her mind.

'Scrape off more of the skin cells. Yes, take out that tissue I marked.' Her teeth clenched tight. Despite the injections, it hurt. Every cell like fire.

'Deeper. Avoid that vein.' The clack of metal against metal.

'More. We need a bigger area without skin.' Their feet tapped and shifted under the chair. Tension in the bare ankles of the assistant. Her feet like a map.

'Drill please, Shanti.'

'No, a bigger drill bit.' At first the burrowing drill didn't hurt but soon it penetrated deep into her bone. The blood drained to her head and she shifted, bile rising. Ragged up her spine. She squirmed, shifting away from the pain.

Cody put his hand firm in the middle of her back. 'Stay still please Scarlett, this is vital work now attaching the armature to your coccyx.'

'I need a bucket.' He kicked a bedpan across the floor and she caught a glimpse of his pointed pliers holding a clear-coated thick wire. Bile dripped into the pan.

‘Stay still now love, this might hurt.’ She gripped the slick vinyl of the chair, clamped her teeth as a basal agony rose through her spine. Cody yanked the wire and it drew up her back like a tether which jarred her to the base of her skull. In that pain she was invisible.

All of her was spine.

A deep pulse in her ears.

The moment stretched.

Through a fog of pulse, ‘I’ll have the progenitor cells now—yep, that one. And a pipette. Thanks.’ The nurse leaned over, handing her a mask.

‘Want some nitrous?’ Upside down smile. She drew deep, her heart slowing. Held her breath. Her chest growled as she exhaled. The vinyl floor, bedpan of milky drips. A large moth clung to the cool glass of the window. She traced its design with her eyes following the whirls of its camouflage and imagined the dust of its wings on her fingertips, her lips. Eating all it knew about light. To die in the sun. Baked into dust.

‘He’s all attached now, um—Scarlett.’ Cody cleared his throat and she jolted back into herself. He crouched to speak; looked at her eyes. ‘Are you feeling a bit giddy?’ Handed her water with a straw.

‘To get the growth started we are not covering the wound but stitching on a silicon dome which creates a kind of hothouse situation and in a couple of weeks we can take it off.’ He flashed a clear tube in front of her. ‘It’s a bioreactor. It’ll be sutured onto your bottom to fix it in place and its soft so you can sit but only for short periods and not on hard chairs.’

The anaesthetic was wearing off and she felt each stitch as it pierced her skin and he tugged it tight. The delicate places stung most acutely and her eyes and nose dripped into the bedpan.

Then it was done.

‘When you feel better you can press the buzzer and Shanti will come and help you. I’ll have my office send you an appointment.’ He touched her shoulder, ‘Well done, Scarlett.’ The latex gloves flicked loudly as he took them off.

It stung. An open wound, raw flesh. Itched and itched and itched and she could not scratch because of the bioreactor dome.

Her entire awareness was held by the base of her spine. Her coccyx. She was her coccyx—the itch, the shuddering sensation vibrating up her back. Pain relievers, ice, more pills, ice. And after two weeks the raw pain eased and she guessed the skin had formed around the wire armature of the tail.

She lay face down on the bed and felt it growing; becoming part of her. It seemed to send a charge into her brain. Link itself into her neural pathways. This was change like nothing she had imagined.

She sprawled on the couch and read through some old books her mother had found in her childhood bedroom.

On a garden bench in the sun she lay, examining the dry remains of caterpillars and thinking of her life and what she might do with it with a tail in the hot suburb. She lined up the caterpillars end to end, making a chain. It could stretch around her waist. Knit together to form a veil. All the while, trapped inside plastic it grew. Warm and fertile. It grew faster in the sun. The heat sent surges of energy through the tail into her pelvis.

The appointment to have the bioreactor dome removed came and went because she could not pay another bill. When the follow up arrived again, still she could not pay.

The flesh of the thing was touching the plastic dome and seemed to tap against it as if it were desperate for air. Its will battling against her own each time she moved from the garden bench towards her bed. It seemed to keep growing and growing. Wanted the sun.

The dome pulled against her skin, causing pain so she called her mother, whose touch and admonishments were gentle above all others. Confessed all her foolishness, cried like a small child.

She arrived with a sewing basket, a first-aid kit and some biscuits. Grim, but determined to help, her square fingers used to stitching and craft. They drank tea together and Scarlett, kneeling on a kitchen chair, wept as she told her of the ordeal in the clinic.

‘Your tattoos seem really sensible compared to this, Mum.’

Nodding, ‘No need to tell me, love.’ She ate another biscuit, as if to silence herself.

Without the special chair, Scarlett lay across her bed, dress hoiked up and her arse exposed while her mother set out tweezers and a fine hooked scalpel, a warm bowl of disinfectant. She was business-like, but the question she did not ask hung around her like a spider web as she clipped the blue polypropylene threads and extracted each with care. Tenderly bathing her daughter’s wounds, the stitch marks all slightly overdrawn. The dome lifted away easily and a soft coil of flesh unfurled, pale and thin as a finger. It moved, rose up and shuddered like a wet dog.

Her mother retracted a little and stepped back. ‘Did you do that?’

‘Is it okay Mum?’ A little panicked.

'It's not infected, if that's what you mean.' Her mother cleaned the shiny skin around the base with sterilised cotton balls, but carefully avoided touching the tail.

Scarlett stood and turned to see the long pale thing reach up almost to her shoulder. 'Oh, my god. It's very long. Feels so weird, like it's not part of me.' Touching it for the first time sent a shiver through her body. 'It has feeling in it.' Surprised.

'It's not really part of you though darling,' face slack and sad. 'Not the real you.'

'It is Mum, it's a True Tail™.' Her mother shook her head, sorted and tidied the equipment, told her to call if she's needed for anything at all. She'd bring some food. And then she left quickly in her little car to avoid saying things she might regret. There was nothing to be done but comfort.

Eyelash-hair gathered on Scarlett's dresser. Day after day she stared at her own image, curling the brush around the fragile hairs, clamping them into a false arc. Each day a few loosened and fell, while her spangled eyes grew more sparse until eventually each precious lash lay heaped in the dust at the base of her mirror. She was depleted. Always tired.

The tail kept growing and thickened at the rump. Scarlett's mother stitched windows in the back of all her clothes for the tail to peep through, like her other limbs, and soon she returned to work, albeit a little distracted and unwell.

It continued to grow, especially in the sun. In her brain, it seemed to have brought to life a cortex of neurons that drove it and had a will. She could order it to move, but equally it could order her to satisfy its need for warmth and attention; its appetite. It was fed from her brain through her spine, reordering her circulation and its hot, flickering energy pumped back into her pelvis like lust.

People remarked on the length and elegance of it, the pale, bald delicacy of her True Tail™. It rose behind her on the train, rested on her right shoulder and curled around her neck, twitching at the warm glass. It really was extraordinary and she touched and stroked it, smiling like a glutton. Kissing her own extremity.

When she saw Kyle at the shop and he told her he was sick and needed radiation treatment, she stroked the tail over her shoulder and looked across him several times, unable to make eye contact. He was shrunken and pale, filled with remorse. Wanting to touch. But she felt only coldness towards him.

Afterwards, in the dry heat of her tiny garden she hurled all the remnant plants and empty pots into the wheelie bin and swept up the dead caterpillars. The dream of the chrysalis. The moths all gone. Kyle's hollow face kept returning and each time her feelings plunged in sadness, the tail energy filled her pelvis. It was radiant hot in the courtyard, with the sun-baked bricks. It burned in her lungs and she dripped and worked despite it. But the tail wanted heat. It whipped around in the sun while she worked. It grew red and rigid. After several hours she trembled with exhaustion, her pelvis ached.

The sun set, leaving the tail flaccid and spent. Red with sunburn.

In the air-conditioned bedroom she wept at her behaviour and lack of empathy for Kyle. There was little comeback from such regret and making up for this would seem contrived and awkward. She had changed, but not as she would have liked. She was not mythical and elegant. She was a beast. Driven by instinct and hate. This was the answer.

She bit the tail. Hard, until she tasted its blood. It seemed to wrench out her weakness for now, relieve the loathing she felt for herself and for it. Its skin was hot and blistering, the arc of the bite seeping into dark jewels.

Subdued by darkness and air-conditioning it lay on the sheets. Her good scissors might make quick work of an amputation. A meat cleaver would be rid of the thing. She could be courageous if she needed to, and quick.

The dark, airless bedroom held her tight and sleepless that night. She rolled, and the tail thrashed until dawn rose.

Finally she drifted into exhausted sleep. A shaft of sunlight angled through onto the bed.

The True Tail™ rested across her throat. It twitched. Stretched its blistered form across her neck. And tightened.

We are

Lola McDowell nee Kickett

Lola McDowell nee Kickett is a Balladong, Wadjuk yok with Irish ancestry. The third youngest of fifteen, she was born and raised in the central wheatbelt. Lola wrote poems as a teenager to help her through a dark period in her life, a time when she felt invisible to all. Many years later she believed she'd lost her creativity and needed to start at the beginning, she joined a CANWA poetry workshop and now her poems flow again.

We are the past with our ancestors
We are the present with our people
We are the future with our children
We are who we are because of them
Yesterday, today and tomorrow
Yes, always was. Always will be
Here on this our sacred land.
Ignoring Australia's true history
Will not change it nor erase it.
Accepting it, forgiving your kin
Moving forward together as one
Celebrating our diversity today
Celebrating our future equally:
Then true healing, true living
Together as a Nation
Together with one story
Giving equality, fairly
To our first nation people
In work, in play, in this—

This our land of bounty.

Balginjirr, 'A Special Place on our Home River Country'!

Anne Poelina

Dr Anne Poelina is a doctoral health science scholar and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow with the Nulungu Research Institute, University of Notre Dame, Broome.

I came home to our river country, our place… our space… today.
I stood at your gravesite and recall the first night when I came back to my mother's land, and now I ask you… Do you know what is coming our way?

I heard your many lived stories… those who had stood before, through the collective wisdom as elders, now see some of their children's children start to sway.

Is country for sale, is country for keeps, who will work with country to watch over the people who sleep.

Some dream, dreams of money and some talk of gold, lead, mineral sands, intensive agriculture, pastoralism, harvesting water into licences and allocation flows.

The nightmare for people like me, is to be buried alive from the constant demands on a sacred river and kinship system, not found anywhere else on the planet, but to us known, inter-generationally as the River of Life.

Can we learn from the Murray Darling… hey, what about the oldest river in the world… the Finke… let these rivers share with us what the humans have done! We need to know this to let the Mardoowarra, Martuwarra… Fitzroy River run.

Do we cover it with intensive cotton, coal mine, scar up the country… drawing from aquifers, seismic lines… fracking hydro-geology… or do we take a breath and keep the living waters living free?

Can we listen to the ancient songlines, singing the creation stories of geo-heritage, astronomy… astrology and ancient boab trees?

Our bloodlines singing our songline roamed this country wise and free.

Five times ten years plus five since I first walked with this big spirit country, who still knows and will forever hold me.

Country knows you, country watches you and country is alive… waiting for you to see.

What is coming will change our world forever, if we don't stand with one mind and one voice, in solidarity.

Our fellow Australians are learning of this river country, they too recognise the Mardoowarra, Martuwarra, Fitzroy River is National Heritage Listed and to be shared by you and me.

Do we call them our friends, do we call them our foe, do we work together to understand what must be done to give all of us fair go?

2019 can it really be, that Indigenous Australians, the original First Peoples still stand…

Do we call on earth justice? Earth centred governance? First law of this land! We must all work together… lead and govern for our common good for this wide brown land, country.

We have seen how the Crown Law has taken and we ask what will be left? We cannot forget that this land we come from and still hold on to… was taken by theft.

We have a new dream, a dream for oneness, values, ethics… need not confess, but unless we stand together, with collective wisdom, it will be nothing we dreamed the dreams from, it will quickly turn to nightmares, poison and sweat.

We all want the same things for our children and their children's children before we are laid to rest.

In good faith, free informed consent, science, industry with traditional owners, it's time to build collaboration and welcome all projects to the table in good spirit to understand the cumulative impact test.

Can the government keep its pre-election promises and demonstrate good governance for citizens of this state, whilst in power… now they are GST blessed?

Climate Change, Climate Chaos, quickly spiralling out of control, but despite 90 IPCC Scientists 'Warning… Warning quickly approaching 2.5 degrees,' some number from Paris in which the world agreed, No More Coal, our Federal Minster for the Environment does not believe what she has been told.

If this truly was about shifting from the old economies—fossil fools, sorry, fuels transitioning to an abundance of renewable, wind, wave, solar in abundance, which we can globally lead.

Tell the companies, renewables are gold. They can make forever profits if they transform from the old.

Come on country men, fellow Australians, global citizens, one mind, one voice, one river country. Let's make a River peace park before there's nothing left. Let's hold to humanity, one planet, Mother Earth, she's the best!

I know we can do this, and we must if we are to stay blessed. I know our ancestors are watching and waiting to make sure we past this test. Past, Present, Future held in this moment of time, lets hold to the dreaming and hold our blood and songlines.

Sleep well my family along this river time, and I am sure we will keep talking as you watch over us in this modern Dreamtime. Circular storytelling, we know time moves in circles and not in a straight line.

Run free forever, Mardoowarra, Martuwarra, Fitzroy River… ask the humans to be kind, they think they are the top of the tree but if they are not careful, we will all be left behind.

River, bird, animals, fed by living waters shallow and deep, cradled in the coolness of country once surrounded by sheep. Years of pastoralism, agriculture and now plans for grid lines, licenses, permits, ask the humans to consider more than themselves, think of the bio-diversity, water quality, and creative ways to maintain their keep.

I close my eyes, but not my head and heart as my *liyan*, my moral compass keeps my watch… tick… tick… ticking… my brain shrieks… no more alarm clocks… just the sharing of this river country, for the Friends of the Mardoowarra, Martuwarra, Fitzroy River Country…

Hello, hello, do you hear me? Don't desert or leave me, can we stand together for all time as the River of Life with the Right to Life, is someone listening, is someone standing for all of us, what about the

Crown, what about the Queen, before she passes on, should we go to her and ask her only one time, now time, let the people and the river country be finally set free?

An ancient river with the right to life, this is the First Law which we know, Law of the Land, not Law of Man, values, ethics, civil society, social cohesion, words of consensus, not conflict, multiple world views, trans-discipline knowledges and practice post-development, postcolonisation, post-oppression, not just for the blackfellows but all who have made this land their home.

Come to know us, know country and redefine who we are, it's a new time can we seize it can we hold this wide brown land, we can advance Australia fair, fair go, for its citizens not corporate welfare in the millions.

Rather a fair go for the Aussie black, white, brown and green and some other multi-colours and multiple world views, let's be a lot more open, others can teach us some of their unspoken... with this Coalition of Hope... we can Advance Australia Lucky Country and give the Mardoowarra River Country and People a Fair Go!

A recorded version of this piece is available on *Westerly*'s website: https://westerlymag.com.au/balginjirr-a-special-place-on-our-home-river-country/

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Are You In or Are You Out?

Quairading 1960
Robyn Ferrell

Things remain scarce. Stimulation. Diversity. Creativity. Sensibility. About all that seems available in over-abundance for the struggling imagination is sky. Space. Solitude. Time. It hangs heavy, this deprivation.

The essays in 'Are You In or Are You Out?' evolved from a collaboration by the three writers as they experimented with writing at a periphery, going to the margins of certainty, of light and dark, the borders of personal or ecological viability, the planet's periphery. Though they have very different trajectories, at the extreme edge they locate the difficulty and the fun of writing. They also locate trauma, depression and dispossession, sometimes personal, sometimes historical.

The questions follow: where is that periphery located? How will a reader know it? Will writing keep sense? In different ways, each essay proceeds by placing materials side-by-side or at an angle rather than in linear sequence, so each part refracts realities which then light a further unexpected pathway towards the edge.

Such forms of agency draw attention to language as the bridge between the body, place and culture in all three essays. The writing in 'Are You in or Are You Out?' uses, as Rutherford puts it, a 'conceptual armoury that only 'breaks the surface of a text like a shark's fin' bringing bodily presence, language and culture together as 'the lived body is [...] at once enculturated and emplaced *and* enculturating and emplacing—while being massively sentient all the while' (Casey 34). This is not always comfortable. All three pieces engage, as Ferrell describes it, with writing on the dark edge. And as Holloway recognises, our living bodies face likewise an uncertain future, wrought by transformations of climate and place. To bring the world into writing in our current state, this moment of refiguring the relationship between subject and the material, is also to recognise the agency of the non-human, the non-living. In Bruno Latour's terms there is

> a zone of common exchange between human and nonhuman. [E]xistence and signification are synonyms. As long as they are acting, agents signify. This is why their signification can be followed, pursued, captured, translated, formulated in language. (Latour 70)

This is the mysterious junction of language, culture and place that all these essays explore.

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Writing on the Wind, Looking at the Local[1]

Barbara Holloway

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There's a building called the Tower of Winds in the ancient marketplace in Athens. Each of its eight sides is dedicated to the wind from a different direction; Skiron, Boreas and so forth. Once it had a wind-vane on top; it was an early weather station. The winds are universal but as the Tower suggests, they manifest uniquely and intimately as part of place. And then there's the human culture wind calls up across languages and societies. The Greek word for wind is *aerides*, the basis of both 'air' and 'to breathe'. Wind is a symbol for the spirit, the soul, but also it's historically inseparable from sailing and thus trade, cultural exchange, colonisation. That only accounts for the direction, the velocity, perhaps the ferocity. The rushing air also gathers up multiple large, small and microscopic lives, it transposes and recomposes dust and fumes and moisture. Sparking hope and fear, symbolising change, the wind is specific to localities and seasons. Then it's personalised, given names such as the mistral, Perth Doctor, Southerly Buster.

The Winds of Goulburn ought to be included in all of the above. Mention Goulburn anywhere and people say straight back to you 'Oh Goulburn! I've never been so cold in my life as I was on Goulburn Railway Station, I've never known wind like it.' Or they tell you how the hot wind blew grit in their face, ruining their picnic in Lady Belmore Park, as they were passing through at the end of the summer holidays.

Why are these winds so potent? Some orology might show the land logic, the hill system, that makes patterns of air repeat across the district, funnelling air at speed down valleys and between ranges from the Snowy Mountains, the Southern Ocean. And from the west, too, across the Great Australian Bight, down through Blayney and Crookwell, along the Cookbundoon Range across the Goulburn Plains.

The relentless winds have vied with sheep to write Goulburn since the 1820s. Since 1984, the place has been recognised for the fortress-like Big

Merino, a giant ram standing in unmissable fibreglass strength on the hill between the highway and town, testifying to the millions of sheep born and raised, bought and sold, shorn and eaten in the region.

You can only say what a place lets you. Things get into the wind, that's my theory, and they can't get out. Wind howls and wind drops, freezing cold, frying hot. It blows across the slopes, along the streets, railway yards and bridges where water meets water, where the Wollondilly River meets Mulwarree Ponds.

Right from the first verse of the very first European–Goulburn poem, 'Elegy on Winter in Argyleshire' (the official English name before Goulburn), it's clear the winds of the district are beyond the reasonable (Tompson 48). The elegy even starts:

> Howling tempests play
> With cheerless gloom and storm-portending clouds
> Rude Winter brushes from Antarctic wilds
> The front of Heav'n, in murky vapours shrouds,
> Then bursts his sounding freightage...

A little naiad in the river tells the poet to stop whingeing, 'spring will come'—but her very voice is silenced—'on the bleak gale her accents died away'.

Publishing in 1824, the poet gave 'Wollondilly Forest' as his address. The forest and the river-junction of the Wollondilly and Mulwarree had names, Aboriginal names lost when fatal illnesses rode through the air ahead of the Europeans. The Gundungurra people, the traditional owners, caught influenza and smallpox as violent disruption, dispossession and doubtless murders also took both lives and land.

Gundungurra language is classified as extinct but one word that survives is '*bunima*', meaning 'to blow, as in wind', and '*burrai*' is 'quick'. We can't even know their word for wind but it's '*girrar*' to the neighbours, the Wiradjuri. In the settler-society that is Australia, subtleties of speaking and writing the country are absent, mutated, distorted, where languages and culture that make and have been made by place over millennia are ignored or lost[2].

Can the wind, can life and being, signify as completely in the introduced language and literature? We are beginning to understand again that the natural world's health is our health but it's many generations since the English language was so integrated that phenomena, culture, bodily and place senses were expressed in it. 'Culture' itself first referred to cultivation, to ploughing the earth. Remember all I use is English in these accounts of the environment, and it developed in agrarian societies, in northern Europe, over centuries of intimate engagement with different winds, climate, environment, food-growing practices and cultures of place.

We kids grew up in the winds in Tarlo, a locality with a Gundungurra name not far from Goulburn. There, we knew in midwinter how all colour drains out of the country in some quite striking fashion, as if everything's dead, so not only does the grass look grey, but the trees, rich in eucalyptus oil, look greasy black and the wind flings up the birds and throws them away like dirty rags. Westerlies, southerlies, first generate fantastic energy—even the oldest horses show they feel it—but the winds go on for days and days. For people, the wind begins to finger between bone and flesh behind your ears, loosening the pegs so the cold air seethes in, fraying tempers and brewing despair. Desperate air. In town and out of town the wind has lifted soil from the ground, sucked the life out, heaved rain forward. It picks up speed. Things die. The ones that survive are thick-coated, muscly and pungent.

Then by August every year, the wind streams and glitters from the south-west, through rain, sleet and cold sun, into September and October. The glittering is the hurling about of spring copper-and-green shoots on top of the stringy-barks, the angophoras and peppermint gums on the hills. Glassy light flashes off the snappy gum leaves and orange-red twigs as the wind pulls them out spinning and spinning in the air.

Women and men grew up like the trees, stocky, kind of obstinate, when Europeans came. They were flogged by authority, put in the stocks, at the same time as they built roads, felled stringy-bark forests, burned understorey, sowed grain, minded animals. Convicts, ex-convicts and ex-soldiers, free settlers and all their combining children and grandchildren—Irish / English / Aboriginal, Catholic / Anglican, righteous or resisting—all more mixed than you might think in a district sometimes called Little Jerusalem on account of the size of its Jewish community.

In Tarlo the winds grew us up. Zephyrs, easterly breezes, small breaths of moist air come earlier some years, some later, and things grow, sprout, flock and fruit. Beetles edge along the tightropes of stems to chew the new growth at the tip, lay eggs on a rough old leaf. In good farming times, where the soil was not exhausted, there were small subsistence lots, the human population having a passion not to be subject to the whims and avarice of landlords. Names became adopted by communities for local

species—gum trees, willy-wagtails, Christmas beetles. The locals now planted wheat, orchards, potatoes, vegetable gardens, grew sheep, pigs, dairy cows and horses, always horses. The animals quickly worked out the contours of hills and slopes, where remaining trees stood, how to graze into the wind or bunch together to blunt its force.

The State Governor, the Earl of Belmore, accompanied by the Countess Lady Belmore, opened the railway station in 1869. His Excellency referred to the 'cool and salubrious climate of this neighbourhood' which he hoped 'might be [now there were trains] the means of inducing many of the residents of Sydney to a temporary sojourn amongst you'. Perhaps because of the winds, no remarkable numbers of people from Sydney made a sojourn. Industries came, there were boot manufacturers, tanneries, jam factories, railway workshops and a flour mill.

The poet Christopher Brennan, recently graduated and recently become a convinced and outspoken atheist, caught the train to Goulburn to teach at St Patrick's, the Catholic boys' school run, of course, by clergy. He was soon writing like Ovid in exile to his many city friends. '*Quam terribile est locus iste. Et hic est locus sanctus, et hic est abominatio desolationis*', he wrote to one, referring to his colleagues as much as to the winds (Clark 44). Some people seek out dire climates, which they then denounce[3]. After teaching each day, if an atheist lay-teacher was permitted into the school tower, he looked out to the west, at the blazing and raging sunsets that flare over the ranges with howling winter winds. He returned to Sydney.

Saint Pat's had a full brass band with many wind instruments, as with many town bands: the Oddfellows Band, Skating Rink Band, Australian Light Horse Band, 'Young Australian' Band, and of course, the Goulburn City Band, all played rousing music on festive occasions.

Clearing forest for farming land and space for the city and hamlets allowed the wind to gather speed and strength. We grew up in wind which has its own verbs for its touch on things. Dry, shrivel, loosen, knock, overturn. It shifts a little, settles in the south-west and blows. The summer beetles cling to the underside of leaves while hawk moths and spiders hide under the bark, snakes and lizards stay under the rocks. Wind still finds instruments to play, sucking the window panes back and forth and rattling the doors all through the days and nights. A day or two is exciting but then by the 1890s, when hot dry winds blew on and on long after they should have ended, when autumns were expected to—but didn't—turn into clouds and rain, farmers sold up or walked off, moved to town. Small communities like Tarlo shrank to a locality and a few farms. A decade went by and other winds blew young men, sons and brothers, away to fight. The winds blew fewer home again. The bands played so sadly the very dogs wept in the street.

The War Memorial is a stone tower built in the 1920s on an Aboriginal corroboree site, though the land was donated by Bartlett the very successful brewer. Its opening inspired an ode of climate-poetry written with a nationalistic flourish. It ends:

> A rocky eminence, memorial crowned,
> Keeps faithful watch o'er stream and street and cot,
> And 'minds the thoughtful citizens of those
> Who faced death gladly for their country's weal.
> Goulburn, arise! What though the captious few
> Revile thy winter cold and forceful winds!
> It was in such a climate that the best
> Of Britons climbed to vigour and success.
> (McNicoll 5)

On good summer afternoons in Tarlo, the light wind from the east brings a tang of the coast. It crosses the Cow Paddock, moves softly across your skin, blows a dog's barking back from the hills. Later the breeze lines up rolls of damp grey cloud along the stony ranges overnight. At dawn the rolls turn pink and dissolve.

We grew up in the winds. Our farm grew sheep and oats. Joliffe the violently humorous cartoonist of the bush returned over and over to jokes about his character Saltbush Bill flailing helplessly as the spiralling wind called a willy-willy picked him up and spun him higher above his farm, along with the dog, chooks, tin cans, draught horses, panels of fencing, pigs and travelling salesmen. As locals we knew more about those erratic summer air-funnels, gyrating across the ground loaded with dry grass and dust, than about being the best of Britons.

February, March were willy-willy months, dog-days of fire-fear, the months of dry grass and fanfares from trumpets of wind and hot air. Anxiety hung over the house, got into everything, was eaten at meals, slept with, had spin-offs: accused, accusing, accuser. A column of smoke rising into the blue was a kind of relief. Where the wind was blowing from, how strongly it blew, said how much it was our business, how fast Joseph the farmer was to act, how many days and nights he would be gone, fighting the wind with its load of ashes, burning branches, smoke and heat.

Late one summer a spark blew into the dry grass from a drilling rig in his neighbour's paddock and the wind hurled the fire across his land, up into the hills, along the through-valleys and out to Marulan where it

died down days later. Hundreds of sheep, their grass and most of Joseph's fences had been burnt.

That was long ago. Goulburn is now a Tidy Town, a One Nation town, National Trust town full of newcomers. Why is it a One Nation town? I can't answer that, we mostly talk about the weather.

People queue up to offer their land for wind farming. Mrs Dorothy McCorran has fifteen wind turbines leased to Erarang Energy on her property to the west of Goulburn. There's a wind farm at Blayney and another at Crookwell. Fifteen megawatts between them. NSW has twenty-two government wind-monitoring stations as possible sites for wind farms but making a living from the wind is unpredictable. It's called the intermittance factor. They budget for it in the US (Bopp). Other people queue up to say the turbines make them ill.

In the climate of the 21st century, winds strengthen, they bring less rain, they damage more trees, blow away more soil. The patterns change, but winds themselves don't speak. I get that. Tarlo itself is subdivided into small lots whose owners live elsewhere. Farms are cut into blocks, travel is easy, and urban populations spread out like grazing sheep from major cities.

We now know the world is a living unit, an 'active, local, sensitive, fragile, easily irritated envelope', as Bruno Latour puts it (65). The well-being of the planet depends on the well-being of the local beings of nature everywhere, however small. What's needed is intimate relationship with the lives and components of the local environment. Ecologists and agricultural scientists like Peat Leith, Charles Massey and Christine Jones argue action to increase or maintain the current health will make place resilient to increasing pressures of change, and is worth doing on a thousand square hectares, a thousand metres or a thousand centimetres of earth or water. In this way as writers we are experimenting with what Kathleen C. Stewart calls not just a poetics but a 'micropoetics of density, texture, and force of everyday modes of discourse and sociality' (137). Its attention and respect might be called the microbial micropoetics[4].

Notes

1 Thanks to Jennifer Rutherford and Robyn Ferrell for discussion on the topic and their comments on this essay, some parts of which appeared in earlier work.

2 This mutual exclusiveness is becoming less: for example, Bruce Pascoe's influential *Dark Emu* collects together accounts of Aboriginal food-practices in English, while Louise Bromhead's *Landscape and Culture—Cross-linguistic Perspectives* compares vocabulary relating to place across languages.

3 'How terrible this place is. It is both a holy place and a desolate abomination.'

4 I want to include language and image moved to the digital world. Mez Breeze—whose name fits uncannily well with my theme—is a (digital) writer and artist living just out of Goulburn. Her works challenge the division between the online environment and the real world, experimenting with forms that are equal parts poetic, narrative and cryptographic. See: http://mezbreezedesign.com.

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Quairading 1960

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Quairading is a signifier, as is every birthplace. It is recorded in the passport that testifies to my citizenship in the global order. *Place of birth/ place de naissance:* QUAIRADING

In the 21st century, your place of birth is not meant to define you. And yet. Geopolitics is ruthless even in the age of connectivity. Cultural imperialism is accentuated by the speed and dispatch with which culture is disseminated from the NEW YORK LONDON PARIS TOKYO complex. On the ground, Quairading is a place no-one's heard of, a tiny town in the West Australian wheatbelt.

On Google, Quairading is processed as are all other places into realestate.com, and the images are all of undistinguished houses for sale (except for the news image of the heritage school burnt down by an arsonist). You can see the wheatbelt from space—the 'clearing line' marking the European intervention in the landscape is visible on the satellite map (Hughes-d'Aeth 1). But Google has no local knowledge; it doesn't know that 'wheatbelt' is one word.

Globalisation makes every birth an 'accident of birth'. It was accidental that I was born in the West Australian wheatbelt. My grandfather was born in Devon, my great-grandfather in Jersey. Quairading is not my country, despite my being born there. I haven't even driven through Quairading for thirty years. I know nothing of Quairading, and can report on it only as an internal malaise.

Driving up a gravel road toward the town, there was smoke in the air from a fire on the scarp, and the sun gilded the gums and fields of shorn stubble that stretched toward a horizon of flat blue. The light of a late afternoon in autumn rendered the town like the old black & white photographs I've seen of it, or the family slides in frozen ektachrome.

An unfamiliar origin. It is a fact that I was born in the hospital there at 11pm on 23rd July 1960. But nothing about the town today sparks recognition. Although the yellowing field and westering trees are my earliest images, I see nothing familiar that late afternoon in the town.

The only thing new about the hospital building is the encrusted bunting of public health bureaucracy, signs flagging 'Ambulance Bay' and 'D Block' in a san-serif kindergarten font. The punctured steel panels of disabled access ramps obscure the view of the original entrance, but there is still the prominent flight of stairs up to the main doors. Under this skin, the 1927 form of deep porches and slamming French doors remains intact. I see a shadow memory of my mother sitting on that porch in her dressing gown after the birth of my sister. The same roses grow around the perimeter of the drive.

This Quairading begets melancholy, and is where depression was born. The night in July it was pouring rain, and Bob Lyle went ahead of my parents' car in the tractor through the flooding to get them to the hospital. Did I hear the rain fall, feel my mother's anxiety (am I going to have this baby on the side of the road?), sense the bare paddocks and marginal life surrounding us?

The houses opposite the school have fallen on hard times since when, in 1960, they had been reserved for married staff and for the Principal. There is nothing new about the weatherboard house we lived in, although someone has added a garage and shrouded the wooden verandah in shade cloth. Another shadow memory—or is it of a photograph?—I am sitting in a swing on the verandah, the sunshine seeming airy and yellow. The yard is still couch grass and black sand, covered in the detritus of kids' toys. Memory of another photograph; a little girl in a party dress watering the gravel with a watering can.

Despite the occasional emollient of Tourist Town funding and membership of a newly-devised 'Golden Outback' heritage, the town is shabby, a place in the middle of nowhere leaning on the railway line which bisects it. There is no town square lined with municipal pride. The railway line dominates, underlining its role as a transit place on the way to somewhere else. An existential vacuum left in the wake of a passing train. On the main road, there is new cladding on the co-op which is now an IGA, but the railway line no longer functions to pump blood through the veins of the

district and the siding is gone. The first train came through Quairading in 1908. The line was closed in October 2013, despite protest from the Wheatbelt Rail Retention Alliance.

In 2006, the town had a population of only 596, 18.1% of whom were Indigenous. The population is now smaller than at any time in the 20th century. The country is marginal. The rainfall is marginal. The clearing of the land was hard going, and ruined many lives of returned servicemen and their families trying their hand at farming. And then the clearing ruined the country, too—more than 70% of the land is now compromised by salinity from the rising water table after the loss of the deep-rooted trees.

Bob Lyle was a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. Bob and Audrey Lyle were minding the farm for his aunt, who lived in Perth and drove a Jaguar, my father said. I remember a nice man. I remember Audrey Lyle had an apron on. I remember the Lyles' farm and the yellow light on the yard where the pepper tree dragged in the dirt. (Don't touch the berries! Did she put any in her mouth?) Old tyres and rusted machinery and an old laundry trough for a vegetable garden. The Lyles were farmers, church-goers, friends of my parents, good to them as they were starting a family.

My mother had to go back to work because she was 'bonded' to the Department. I'm told there was a young Aboriginal girl who lived in, Emma June Rodney. She wrote her name on everything, my father remembers. *Emma June Rodney.* My mother remembers suspecting her once of taking a silver fountain pen. But Emma June Rodney said scornfully, 'I have plenty of pens,' and produced a fistful of them in all shapes and designs. *Emma June Rodney.* For an Aboriginal girl in the West Australian wheatbelt of the '60s to write her name was a self-assertion that no-one welcomed.

Elegy of shorn fields in winter. Not a person in sight. Going back to Quairading is disturbing. The spectral trees along lonely roads that lead to the place, the town itself, seem to give a reality to the image of 'the back of nowhere'. This marginality, this superfluity being nowhere, is too resonant with my own sense of losing self-solidity. I have always felt like this about this landscape. Loneliness, isolation, demoralisation, depression—these are the affects associated with these bush places since I was conscious of myself and places. As though I was born with a cosmopolitan sense that was out of place.

The wheatbelt remains a hard place to live. The country town is still a place of narrowed minds and curbed expectations, despite the storied community feeling; no appetite for change, even though things could hardly be less compelling the way they are. There is no beach, no university, no sushi, no cocktail bar, no medical specialist, no newspaper, no theatre, concert hall, café scene nor organic growers market, no five-star hotel, no parliament and hardly any rain.

Things remain scarce. Stimulation. Diversity. Creativity. Sensibility. About all that seems available in over-abundance for the struggling imagination is sky. Space. Solitude. Time. It hangs heavy, this deprivation. Quairading remains a place of cultural poverty, without opportunity and under an anti-intellectual curse.

This always-elsewhere is like a structural inferiority complex. Despite how far away I have gone from it and how much time and distance I have put between it and me, I am still beset by the depression it engendered in me before I could speak. In the three short years between my birth and when we moved on, I imbibed its abnegation.

That scrappy town, huddled on the railway without grace. The thing about coming from nothing is that it returns you to it. Quairading is an empty signifier. A place that sowed the seeds of misery, a place that, even before globalisation, was about people being left behind.

'*A life that is unlivable, heavy with daily sorrows, tears held back or shed, total despair, scorching at times, then wan and empty.*' (Kristeva 4)

What part of depression is your own responsibility and what belongs to the place you are in? Kristeva in *Black Sun* writes of depression eloquently, she writes of it as a psychical landscape. *Black Sun* draws a complex portrait of depression and the person it afflicts. Although potentially lethal, it is also fundamentally expressive of human psychical architecture. When I am struck down by it, by the black mood, I experience it somatically and at the same time as an idea—the familiar 'psychomotor retardation' that slows life to a crawl.

It is depression that makes me write at all, according to Kristeva's analysis. *Emma June Rodney*. Creativity is the psychical action taken to repair the lesion on the soul that depression marks. First despair, then writing. Kristeva talks of writing as a counter-depressant. The therapeutic role of creativity in the psyche's self-protective strategies is illustrated in countless biographies of writers.

Black Sun. It is about light and the sight of the bush. Photophobia is a neurological disorder which can be associated with depression. Over everything the crippling glare, the pitiless heat, day after day projecting me back into an abject past. I almost can't believe, when I come to, the delirium of abnegation that this light brings down on my head. Childhood

repeating on me, in the face of that glare that screams *hopeless! what's the point?* A savage incantation in my head, in the face of the heaviness of time spent labouring under this pain.

What causes it? What would the cure even look like? A collapse of belief, a loss of faith, like something that wants me dead. It feels like it comes from 'outside', a destruction that isn't of me although it is in me. A mother overwhelmed by the task of care. An infant who found the light of the world too bright. A desire that went out to meet a world and found there was nothing there.

Dying country, the disappearing wheatbelt. Quairading is Brigadoon, lost in the smoke from fires far away in the scarp, stranded in a past time of farming prosperity that isn't coming back, surrounded by post-harvest paddocks. Quairading is disappearing before our eyes. Like many West Australian wheatbelt towns, it is losing its vitality as the global socio-economic order magnetises the city and simultaneously mandates mechanised agriculture combining properties into agribusiness mega-holdings. Family farms can no longer compete. 'The District' is being drained of life.

The population of Quairading reached its peak in 1961—it hit 1400, to which my birth inadvertently contributed. In the '60s, the wheatbelt towns—places like Merredin, Meckering, Wickepin, Cunderdin—were thriving and prosperous, briefly proud of their initiative in having cleared the largest area of indigenous scrub for cropping that the postcolonial settler world had witnessed.

My parents put on the musical *Brigadoon* as one of many ventures of the Methodist Music Group. Brigadoon is the fictional town famous for disappearing, and the eponymous setting for the popular '50s musical by Lerner & Loewe. The plot: while hunting grouse, a modern New Yorker is smitten by love for a Highland woman he meets in her picturesque village. But the town, subjected to a 'miracle' by its pastor when under threat in the 17th century, only returns from the mist for one day in every hundred years. The New Yorker must decide whether to stay in the town with his sweetheart and disappear with her into the one hundred years' gloaming.

No-one seemed properly disturbed by this premise. But the anguished choice made by this hero seemed like a kind of death wish, to sacrifice his life for love and consent to enter Hades with her. It was as though the price of love was death, and the wisdom of the elder of the town—who dressed up the choice as one made only by someone 'who truly loved'—seemed as wrongheaded and dangerous as the original pastor (a Mr Forsyth!) who had initiated what the town called 'the blessing'. Indeed, it was more like a curse.

This story appears to have its origins in a German tale, which explains its strange ambivalence—an origin that Lerner nevertheless described as 'unconscious' because he had, he said, drafted the play before becoming aware of the tale. On another level, this could only be profound. It's hard to know whether the moral of Brigadoon is that 'the truth of love is death' or that 'romance is folly'.

In the same realm as the doom of *Tristan and Isolde*—what Nietzsche declared 'the voluptuousness of hell'—*Brigadoon* all the same disavowed its gothic mien with cheerful musical numbers like 'Down on MacConnachy Square'. 'It's almost like being in love', sings the hero as, in an inversion of Persephone, he enslaves himself of his own free will, and accepts the lethal price of the enchantment.

In the way of unconscious imaginings, this story is laden with reversals; love becomes death, blessing becomes curse, modernity turns its back on enlightenment and prefers the dark ages, the evil wrongdoer has the right of it. Even wisdom becomes self-serving from the father-figures in the play—the enchantment was resorted to so as to protect the town from 'an evil band of witches', the fable heavily laden with Oedipal struggles around the perplexing figures of woman.

The play embodied a perverse illogic in suggesting the terror confronting the world-weary modernity of Manhattan was the spectre of the woman who had moved out of the home into the munitions factory and was now reluctant to leave. In reality, the threat was surely that of the technology that, in its rapacious colonising of land and people, had culminated (two years before the play debuted) in the blinding pain of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Brigadoon remained oblivious to its contradictions. Like many a culture industry adaptation of myth, it presented an incoherent and unresonant re-telling. It says something about the lack of seriousness of the time that it was celebrated on Broadway as 'the best play of the year' for its 'thoughtful' script. And, laden with revenants of the American cultural revolution, the movie version of 1954 proved that showbiz could sugar-coat anything that Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse could dance to.

'*Where does this black sun come from? Out of what eerie galaxy do its invisible rays reach me, pinning me down to the ground, to my bed, compelling me to silence, to renunciation?*' (Kristeva 3)

Depression is in love with death, Kristeva writes. Does this make depression a spiritual or a clinical condition?

Her analysis proposes a moment before the object where *something* is missed. This is not trauma rupturing something, but an originary fading obscurity, a weakness or lack already there. The object of love cannot be grasped with heartfelt ardour—in the moment of binding, the object slips through the fingers because of the earlier shadow that fell over the scene.

This eclipse is the black sun of the title, the light that is both bright and black. The thing which is the forerunner to the object and sets the scene for it—not quite that yet, it is the not-quite that is the source of despair. Caught in the moment before love, the thing becomes a habitual disturbance that makes love, especially self-love, always at issue. The moment calls forth inventiveness, creativity, to bridge the gap, and to relieve the grief at real loss.

It becomes a temperament—artistic, philosophical—but also a continuing source of pain that can be hard to relieve. Historically, depression has not always been pathologised. Some philosophical sources, such as Aristotle, considered it a naturally-occurring variant on the human temper. Pause for thought. Hesitation. Scepticism. A wavering, as though sensibility that already discerns that loss is implicit in any love. But in Christianity, despair becomes a sin; there can be no doubting no loss of faith, no wavering of love for the Christ/God complex (the Holy Ghost not visible to the naked eye). Given the imaginary character of the religious icon, the depressive is 'a sullen atheist', Kristeva writes. The depressive is not religious, but mystic.

The counter-depressant of culture is contrasted with the anti-depressant, with its pharmacological action. Two routes to the same end of relief, they nevertheless make no sense of each other. 'To talk or take a pill?'

Today, depression is widespread; it seems it is our modern malaise. Cases of depression have ballooned almost 20% in a decade, WHO reports, making it 'the leading cause of disability worldwide'. The number of people globally living with depression, according to a revised definition, had reached 322 million in 2015, up 18.4% since 2005 (World Health Organisation).

The treatment for it is bogged down in the dead-end of cognitive behaviour therapy, that is merely an elaborate charade in place of admitting ignorance. Cognitive behaviour therapy is worse than useless for depression. Its 'third person' discourse usurps the place of the 'second person' of psychotherapy, which at least respects the dignity of interior life and treats thought with fellow-feeling, as from one thinker to another. Instead, cognitive behaviour therapy disavows that it thinks, or that its own thinking has anything to do with the thought of self-destruction. It strikes a patronising clinical-scientific pose which is really just a way of washing one's hands of thinking. The hopelessness intensifies in the face of the clinician who says: 'I know nothing of your pain. Your pain is not reasonable. Cheer up, observe how others do it. *Fake it until you make it*.'

Like *Brigadoon*, Quairading is full of reversals. The great settler miracle become ecological disaster; the prosperity of wheat for export versus the perpetuity of salt in the soil. The wheatbelt was destroyed by its settlement, and in particular by the clearing of its land for settlement. None of the misguided pioneers of the region foresaw that removing the vegetation would poison the soil with a salinity that is irreversible. More than one million hectares of broadacre farmland in West Australia is severely affected by salt. The bush-bashing back-breaking labour of clearing has turned out to be one of the world's contemporary environmental disasters and one for which there appears to be no clear remedy.

And now, because of it, you can see the wheatbelt from space. In his wonderful study of the literary history of the region, Tony Hughes-d'Aeth draws a rich portrait of the ambivalence this left the settlers themselves with, those that responded to the land in poetry and writing. Even in the '50s and '60s, which was the heyday of the enterprise, those who looked hard at the region saw that it was not necessarily an unalloyed good that the natural vegetation had been so denuded. There was the stirring of unease, first emerging from the despair of lives ruined by the back-breaking of labour only to see the wheat price fall in the Great Depression.

The natural world fought hard against its destruction, taking a promethean labour of axe and fire between the wars to get it going and even then, the return on a crop was unreliable. Until the advent of the bulldozer, clearing the land—which the WA Government had Faust-like made a condition of owning it—was a kind of everyman heroism.

Women writers first, like Dorothy Hewett, Barbara Main York, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Elizabeth Jolley, gave to the wheatbelt its existential measure. Hughes-d'Aeth argues that while for Prichard, the labour was fruitless and the country daunting, it was Hewett who invested it with a tragic dimension and Jolley who made it gothic (Hughes-d'Aeth 324, 466).

In 1989, a new dormitory suburb on the fringe of Perth's urban sprawl was named 'Brigadoon'. The land was originally a property owned by Eileen Bond, the wife of fraudster Alan Bond of 'WA Inc' fame. In a further unconscious inversion, the suburb lies in the hills just on the fringe of the scarp that further east becomes the wheatbelt plain, adjoining the district of Gidgegannup. Brigadoon now had its own postcode (6069) as

the towns to its east were disappearing from their own kind of curse, the downstream consequences of settler agricultural practice.

A serious ecological disaster went uncomprehended, covered over by the *shtick* of development. The appearance of a suburban sub-division without memory of the country it has supplanted, with no known cultural ties to the archaic landscape now destroyed for it, and named for a fantasy of cultural chauvinism that may yet prove fatal, is truly uncanny.

The sense of melancholy that hangs over Quairading may belong to this metaphysicality. It may be more than a psychological condition afflicting the poetic among those condemned to live with it. When is depression a realistic reflection in one's interior landscape of the landscape outside—the barrenness under harsh light stretching to an unnatural horizon become internalised in the psyche itself?

Elegy or lament? If this is the spiritual challenge of the time, it will be because of the despair rightly engendered by an instrumentalism that is itself a toxin; the earth poisoned, the environment in chronic pain and on a path of self-destruction.

Who today would not be grieving when you can see the scars from space?

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Homeward Flight

Jennifer Rutherford

Jennifer Rutherford is Professor and Director of the J. M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice. Her creative writing had been published in journals such as *Best Australian Essays*, *Meanjin*, *HEAT Magazine* and *Westerly*. She is currently writing a memoir, *The Encyclopedia of Lost Things*.

Jeanne Bryner (11) | 'Against a blackboard of winter trees, bodies take the shape of letters, a lonely, crazy alphabet a language only the homeless know.'

Don Juan Matus (28) | 'Inside, Outside, it doesn't really matter'

Last year, I fell out of a bathtub. Naked on the floor of a hotel bathroom in a cold foreign city calling for help that did not come, I came a little too close to death.

When help finally did arrive, ambulance-men carried me through snow-drifts and crowded streets, naked except for the hotel sheet they had wrapped me in, and a hat topped off with a large purple flower. I would like to say I'm making up the detail of the hat, but I'm not. I don't like to go out without a hat, it makes me feel naked, so I had called for it as they were carrying me out of the room and someone, obligingly, had stuck it on my head with the flower at full-mast so that it looked like one of those old-fashioned flowerpot chimneys. But I was at least on route to hospital and alive—that is until I arrived at the hospital where a nurse, main-lining a drug to relieve the pain, flipped me back into the death I had just escaped.

Anaphylaxis. No white light—just a black curtain coming down—as a voice on the far side of that black cloth called 'stay with me… stay with me'—and somehow, I managed to.

But later that day, after the convulsions had stopped, after the x-rays, and the MRI, and the bandaging and trussing, and still naked except for the hotel sheet and flowerpot, a Doctor came to my bed and after rattling

off the list of broken bones said: 'and we've found a tumour in your lung.' I remember thinking: Make up your bloody mind. Am I in or am I out?

• • •

That question hung around for months as if a door had been opened too far once too often, and all the spirits of the past had been let in. Sitting in our garden, day after day, through long months of healing, I seemed to be washing in and out of myself along a bruise line from blackened finger to purple toe; memories like broken bones casting up like driftwood.

I had Chateaubriand's *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*, for company. It seemed appropriate, but if I was looking for respite from memory's flood—I didn't find it. There is no clearing to be found in Chateaubriand's *Memoirs*, rather a way of dwelling in flux, in loss, in the chassis of time's rush. Chateaubriand doesn't suffer from a back-wash of memory but, as Naomi Shor suggests, from the failure to forestall memory's loss through writing (Shor 8–9). In an age that blasts time apart, he imagines he can hold onto all he has lost—family, position, culture, privilege, the entire *ancien régime*—but discovers no matter how he writes it, death can't be foreclosed. His ghosts stay dead.

The *Memoirs* has an extraordinary kinaesthesis to it, as if the body of the narrator is dancing through the text, his steps choreographed by each new crisis. Written over many decades it unfolds in a place that is always elsewhere from the place of writing, inscribing memories of a past that flows into the present, and overflows into a future whose loss he has already written. Sentences can do that. Like memories, they trace and retrace us, recollecting ourselves to all our befores and afters.

Chateaubriand's 'I' is already dead; speaking from the grave. His ambition was to publish the memoir only after he was long dead, but financial imperative caught up with him and it was published hot on the wake of his funeral. As he writes:

> My cradle has something of the grave, my grave something of the cradle; my sufferings become pleasures, my pleasures pains, so that I no longer know, having just finished reading over these *Memoirs*, whether they are the product of a brown-haired youth or a head grey with age. (3–4)

I was sitting in the garden reading these lines when a golden whistler, building its nest on the far-side of the garden, punctuated my thoughts with its song.

The garden is always filled with the chatter of parrots, cockatoos and lorikeets, the chittering of fairy-wrens, the warbling and whistling of pardalotes and thrushes, the carolling of currawongs and magpies and the coin of water-birds, but this song fell clear out of the sky as if no other bird was singing so that for an instant, the bush really did seem as silent and as empty as the first colonials liked to imagine it. But then, as if cutting a hole in time, the bird whip-lashed back to its starting note and the bird chatter began again.

One of Australia's most musical song-birds, the golden whistler is famous for its endless variations and I had never heard this particular song before. As I sat there wondering at the serendipity of its timing, another bird answered its call. The same three notes marking time, and then the long hesitation before the final note. Was the second bird a mate calling from afar or the same bird echoing its own call? Why had death visited me three times in one day? And why now, sitting in the garden listening to a bird's call, was I brought back again and again to memories uncalled for return?

Writing on Freud's illumination of the repetition at the heart of catastrophe, Cathy Caruth suggests that in trauma, beyond the injury and its repetition, a voice cries out to us through the wound, enabling us to hear the enigma of a truth we can never fully know:

> what is at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (4)

Normally I would have reached for a pen to try and narrativise the memories that were troubling me, but even the movement of a pen was beyond reach. Nerves damaged in the fall twitched out of control. My hand could not translate a line of thought. It jerked; erratically, spastically, sending letters curving out of control skidding across the page in wayward loops that lost all semblance of meaning. Not even I could tell what I had written, or attempted to write, in that mess of scribble. My mind was playing tricks on me too. Inventing a hand restored to its integrity, I would imagine it busy at work doing the small chores, adjusting my hat, flicking away a bee, only to discover that it was still where I had last left it, which was usually clutching at my body forlornly as if searching for the way back into the lost home of itself.

Memory though was quick, flickering in the light, in a shadow, in a gesture, in between the notes of a bird's song, lodging in the throat before I remembered what it was, I was remembering; in that sick back of the throat where a body catches the whiff of the past. In the absence of a hand how could I find a path through what it was I needed to write about as memory flickered, flitted, and flew past?

Perhaps, I pondered, it was time I finally faced up to writing the story of the madness of my hometown and all the ways the self is a mirror of that madness, writ small. A town proud of its radical past, its solidarity, its grit, but blind to the gritty truth of what the town's boys did to the town's girls, and the town's men did to the town's boys—and girls. Did. Done. No agency to be slotted home in the great unsaid of the past where those that were done to—did. But perhaps I was already evading something closer to home? Perhaps, I needed to write about how madness derailed my family long before they arrived 'in town'. Or, perhaps what I needed to write about was how I lost the ones I loved most but could any act of writing fill the distance between what was and what became? And wouldn't those stories only lead to other darker stories and how could one find a narrative path through that dark wood? In the garden of lost things remembered there is only peripeteia; each new digression the touchstone of a before and an after.

•••

Perhaps that is why my writing, even at its most academic, has always been *slant*. I have never much believed in the verisimilitude of a line of thought that treads relentlessly forward, laying down its stepping stones as it goes. I've tried instead to write in ways that show how acts of thinking and acts that 'think us', don't accord with the linear, logical, narrative structure that is traditionally given to academic thought. In lieu of buttressing the authority of the academic self, I've tried to sink conceptual armoury so that that it only breaks the surface of a text like a shark's fin. And I've developed a digressive style, or a thinking *in segue* you might say, so that bringing a thought into focus and forming it into a sentence entails dislodging it, so that the thought being lodged ends up somewhere else, somewhere unexpected, and this new unexpected place is itself already somewhere else; somewhere that opens a view to that first place. The problem for me then, has not been how to get from A to B, but how to get from A to F to W to B in order to arrive at Z as a way of apprehending A. This narrative form seems to me to correspond more closely to the jagged edge of lived experience as opposed to the phantasmatic straight line of academic reasoning. It makes the abyss between acts of thinking and the thought processes that enact us, the fantasies we have about our thinking selves, and the way fantasy hooks us and drives us on—at least partially visible.

My voice has been just one amongst many over the last decades, trying to track a path for a new kind of writing in the university, trying as Jane Tompkins has written, to create sentences of '[…] fluidity, flexibility, versatility. Moving from one thing to another without embarrassment' (174). I have found trying to perform this mobility of thought in writing far more challenging and engrossing than reiterating and reworking its epistemological defence. Of course, this kind of glissade, to borrow Tompkins' word, has never travelled easily within the linear set-plan of the university and, at times, has lent itself to mishap, which has meant some quick side-steps. I haven't been too bothered by this because I've been busy moving across the institutional uprights of the humanities and social sciences, from scholarly to literary forms, from abstraction to empiricism, and from university to university, until the segue has become as integral as a signature, those letters one scribbles with a flick of the wrist, the mind on other matters as one letter slips into the next.

But sitting in the garden besieged by memory troubles, as my lost hand roamed, clutched, and twitched at will, the fear began to take root that I might have just been sliding to no purpose, slipping from one idea to another, one object to another, one discipline to another, one theory to another, one place to another, without arriving anywhere at all. Was I, in fact, no less stranded than Mr Ramsay stuck on the letter Q?

> It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. (Woolf 39)

Perhaps, in attempting to avoid the plod from A to Q, had I, no less than Mr Ramsay, completely lost sight of H? Despite all his attempts to take the step between Q and R, Mr Ramsay nevertheless finds himself, along with all his family and all his world, hurled down the corridor of H, of time passing; its volition far stronger and more determining that any clumsy thoughts he might conjure. A century after Chateaubriand recorded the smashing of the ordered cyclical repetitions of pre-modern time, Woolf crafts the small bridge of *time passing* that unites the two uprights of space in order to make the H of home, the H of history, the H that binds all that

once was with all that is gone. A bridge of time that melts as it smelts the uprights of home. Perhaps Mr Ramsay was right to plod. Maybe slowing the step was the best he could do to hold off the loss that awaited him, of Mrs Ramsay, of Prue, of his home, and all the homes of that lost world.

Home. When I try to write the word, the O spirals out of control making a giant hole in me.

• • •

By the time I was nine I had lived in nine houses. At twenty-nine, I had moved house twenty-nine times. At thirty-nine, I had packed up my life and its chattels thirty-nine times. I'm not talking about an occasional vacation in a hotel, a trip up-country, a travelling bug. I'm talking about the whole domestic shebang. Books shelved, rugs rolled, furniture bought and sold to fit the square, and all the variations, configurations, and re-figurations of casting aside and moving on. By forty, my dreams were over-crowded with deep cupboards, of things nestling into recesses gathering dust, of houses in which rooms opened onto rooms, which I would explore unaware of the circle I was stepping until the rooms became familiar and I was back where I had begun.

Still, the recursive eluded.

Between thirty-nine and forty-five I managed to fit in a move interstate from Canberra to Manly, then a move to Balmain, followed by a quick step to Lilyfield, then back to Balmain before heading up the northern highway and across the Hawkesbury River to Dangar Island. This last was tricky, with all my furniture floated cross-river on an open raft along with the kids' toys, and a mile of books piled high, and then back again a few months later, this time in hurling rain, things flung into boxes, or left strewn in the mud on the side of the road, but back at last to Balmain for a series of quick pivots. Balmain to Lilyfield; Balmain to Leichardt; Balmain to Rozelle. But by then I was getting restless so with my daughters in tow and a new job secured we moved south to Melbourne where, after a few months living out of suitcases in Parkville we moved up the road to Brunswick.

It was around then that I met my husband.

Things went well. He got a job in another state and there was much coming and going which settled me, but then he persuaded me to move further south and, obliging in that state of the newly wed, I found myself another job, sold up again, and moved to South Australia.

We bought a garden in the Adelaide Hills, three acres over-looking a large dam. Native fish, long-necked turtles, yabbies, ducks, cormorants, egrets, shag, ibis. The bull-frogs in the mating season kept us up at night bellowing across the water. Koalas on the ran-tan, possums on the roof, kangaroos looping over the fence to reach water in the late dry summer. Kookaburras and kingfishers, raven, blackbirds, blue wrens, thrushes, finches, honey-eaters hovering in the camellias. On the far side of the water, acacia, grevillea, and the pinks and creams and luminescent greens of eucalypts after rain, the water-rats diving and fossicking in the early evening, the shriek of small creatures at night, bandicoots, marsupial rats and ringtails caught by the quolls, boobooks and foxes, and our two dogs fossicking out the rabbits in the early hours of the morning.

That man of mine wouldn't budge.

'But the ceiling is low,' I said. 'The kitchen is fifty years old. There's damp in the cellar. There's a job in Perth, a glorious old house for sale down in the city, a Chinese garden just up the road.' I almost had him there, born in China he always hankers for home, but he'd settled in, wanted to chop wood, write books, sit quietly, and be in the world that was around us for the time that is left us. I missed my deadline. Fifty-nine came and went.

I pause on that thought and what it implies. Here in this garden, I have outlived, outlasted, out dwelt my childhood home.

Maria Tumarkin writes of people:

> who live their lives on highways where they are repeatedly hit by passing trucks. As they are bandaging their wounds, cleaning them out with rainwater, putting bones back into sockets, another truck's oncoming [...] Most people have a truck going over them at some period in their life. But on a high-way you don't get one or two. You get a convoy. They don't stop. That's the point. The recurrence is the point. The point's the repetition. (1235)

I always have half a mind on the truck bowling down the road at us, but the drive is a relentless mover and it's hard enough for me to just sit still. I am still here, sitting in the garden watching the water rise and fall, the winter creeks fill and empty, although these last years there has been less and less water, the summers longer and fiercer, the fire-season extending into spring and Autumn, and now in November when the storms come—the trees crash and fall. But still I sit, watching and waiting for the bittern to visit, the turtles to return. And they do return—thus far. And we've survived each fire-season—thus far. But 'the hills will burn' they say—and our bags are packed.

• • •

Perhaps if I wrote the story of that flight through the air the day my Dad exploded, and I left home...

The day I pick myself up and and walk—although in memory it's an endless glide—*along the mossy path that leads to the laundry door and through the laundry into the loungeroom and from there to my bedroom where I pull my blue bed-spread from my bed pile all the books I own into the middle of it tie it to the cissy bars of my bicycle hoist my one and only pot-plant onto the front handle-bars and ride off with Jack Kerouac's* On the Road *held open in my left hand while my right hand manages the impossible task of steering the impossible bike it is English and made from lead February and hot I clutch the book stand into the climb and as the bike waivers over the road one hand struggling to steer against its uneven load the pot-plant clanging from side to side I recite over and over again the Kerouac mantra 'Winnie-the-Pooh is God Winnie-the-Pooh is God' and shout the words as the bike sails down the hill lumbering from side to side cars beeping men wolf-whistling as my breasts in My 'Sisterhood is Powerful' T-shirt clang as freely as the pot-plant that is wobbling and wavering me all over the road.*

But the strange thing is that here my thought snags. Not where you'd expect it. It's not at the rockery where I landed that I stall but on that long glide. As I walk through the laundry, my head keeps swivelling sideways like that dance move when you turn your head in the direction you're going to turn, before you make the move, so that it looks as if you're already there before you have arrived. An elegant turn, deft and swift, creating the illusion of arrival. But it's not deft, this swivelling that interrupts the story and the way I would tell it, each time I re-make that walk—

from the rockery where my I landed through the laundry to the books in my bedroom and the bedspread and the bicycle and all the moves that followed 45 in all until I am stalled here in this garden where each day I turn my head to the new direction but the body fails to follow so I have little choice now but to look into the corner of the laundry where my thought stalls and I see the shoe-box where every night I would be sent to clean my shoes and one night alone in the laundry I pick up my black school shoes and a small hairy hand reaches over to mine and touches me and I look down and see my laces are standing up and waving their long fingers at me and I feel again that small hairy hand touch mine and then I see what is touching me and my shoes are flying through the air and smashing into the corner and I am running screaming into the loungeroom but my shoe-laces are chasing after me running across the floor and I don't know how it gets under the laundry-door but it is in the lounge-room with its mandibles up and when my brother comes running down the stairs with my mother's spray-gun in his hand and he sprays it I see it is true what they say it can jump as high as me and it is jumping and striking while we run around the lounge-room screaming my brother pushing the chairs in front of us as it leaps mandibles striking the air until my brother who later went mad and wasn't there any more to help when I needed him catches it mid-flight in a saucepan and smashes it to smithereens so that its hand, those hands that reached out and touched me are all broken and lying in pieces on the floor.

• • •

Memory is quick but memory-trouble lasts a long time; it comes to us out of nature where it adheres and waits for us to find it and take us home. But as I'm thinking this, my daughter texts me with that strange connection of mothers and daughters: 'Mama did you know I lived in 25 houses by the time I was 27?'—and I am thrown out of myself again and am naked with the pain of it and not even my hat pulled low can stifle the sound of the golden-whistler answering its mate, and I wonder what I can possibly say to her except that I am here in the garden, in the eye of the storm, the vast wilderness of psychic time raging all around, and that the life that is still here in this garden, the wild-life, is giving me some small purchase on the present, a land-fall, a foot space, a clearing so that perhaps, just perhaps, I might have stopped running away from my shoes. But before I can text any of this to her, I realise I don't know where my hand has got to, and when I think to go looking for it, I find it hiding in full view, tucked into one of the discreet places a body provides; between breasts, under arms, around necks, between legs. There are so many places to hide a hand in. But I figure that now that I have finally found it, I might perhaps be able to draw it back into the light, to write it back into my possession, make it truly me again. But then it hits me that I keep forgetting about the truck that is coming that I've been reading about in the garden, the truck that bowled down Chateaubriand and all his world, and Virginia Woolf and all her world, is coming at us with *our* hands on the wheel and it's a relentless driver. Here and now in this garden the future has run out on us, me, my husband, my daughters and I, this garden, its wild-life and any story I might write is already a memoir from beyond the grave.

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Singing the Land

Brenda Saunders

Brenda is a Wiradjuri writer living in Sydney. She has written three collections of poetry and her work appears in major anthologies and journals, including *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Quadrant*, *Overland*, *Southerly* and *Best Australian Poems 2013* and *2015* (Black Inc). Brenda is a mentor at *Black Cockatoo*, the Indigenous Poetry site at Verity La. She reviews for *Westerly*, *Mascara* and *VerityLa*.

They beat ground with pointed sticks
feel the thunder below
look for 'right way' tree
for Ceremony
A Yidaki man taps a stringybark
hollowed by termites
listens for the low hum
the thrum inside
draws in a sacred Yonglu song

Barton plays new music, holds
his didjeridu with pride, calls up
his *Kakadungu* story
I hear thudding horses
broken lines of continuous sound
the clash of cultures
on cymbals and drum

Low notes resonate, each breath
vibrates with anger and loss
carries sound patterns of the Yonglu
through concert halls across the world

Along the quay, painted Kooris
play the didge, add clapsticks
chant to sell their CD's
Amplified, the music thunders
under my feet
wakes the yidaki spirit, first music
singing this ancient land

Yidaki: ceremonial instrument, Yonglu, North-east Arnhem Land
Kalkadungu: music for voice, didjeridu, electric guitar and orchestra by Mathew Hinson and William Barton (Kalkadungu tribe), Queensland

Respect, relationships, renewal: Aboriginal perspectives on the worlds of tomorrow

This is an edited version of the Keynote Address to the Quite Frankly Conference, held in Perth, 2018.

Ambelin Kwaymullina

Ambelin Kwaymullina is a Palyku novelist, illustrator, and a Senior Lecturer of Law at the University of Western Australia. Her academic research focuses on both public law, and on Indigenous peoples and the law. She is also an award-winning writer and illustrator, and a commentator on diversity in Australian children's literature.

I am an author of Indigenous Futurisms, a phrase coined by Aninishaabe academic Grace Dillon to describe a form of storytelling whereby Indigenous authors use the speculative fiction genre to challenge colonialism and imagine Indigenous futures (1–3). Indigenous Futurisms present both challenges and opportunities for Indigenous storytellers as we speak our truths to the settler-states—and the settler literacies—that were created out of, and continue to benefit from, our dispossession.

You are on Indigenous land

There is a degree to which the writing of speculative fiction is no different to telling any other Indigenous story, because the very notion of 'speculative' depends on where, and how, the borders of 'the real' are drawn. As I've commented before, to the extent that Indigenous stories challenge Eurocentric realities and myth-making about Indigenous peoples, all of our stories might be viewed as speculative (150). To the extent that our narratives embody Indigenous truths, none of them are. Yet our truths are often read as fictions, while the fictions other people write about us are read as truths. This extends to the policy realm, with the continual rejection of evidence-based, Indigenous-owned initiatives in favour of ideologically-based, settler-controlled initiatives that spring from what White academic Sarah Maddison describes as 'the colonial fantasy', the 'belief that colonisation is already over' (xviii). She writes:

> White Australia cannot solve black problems because white Australia is the problem [...] For First Nations peoples to recover from the multiple harms of settler-colonialism they must change the terms of the relationship and take control of the structures, systems and services that they need, free from the control and interference of the settler-state [...] Structural

> change is needed, and this can only happen when settlers let go of the fantasy of colonial completion. (xliii)

The pervasive privileging of settler voices over those of Indigenous peoples is no accident; it is a necessary part of creating and sustaining settler-colonialism. If Indigenous law and life ways—and the knowledges that arise therefrom—had been accepted as equal to those of Western Europe, the very basis for claiming the land vanishes. *Terra nullius* and like doctrines all depended for their legitimacy on a single idea that was once described by Robert Williams (Lumbee) as the 'central sustaining idea' of colonialism: 'that the West's civilizations, are superior to those of non-Western peoples' (6).

In the speculative fiction realm, this central sustaining idea finds consistent expression in endless iterations of space-faring explorers encountering 'primitive' alien (Indigenous) populations to be eliminated or 'rescued' by the nearest white saviour. These stories did not emerge from a vacuum, and certainly not from the future; they are the continuation of the colonial past. Nor are the consequences of such tales confined to imaginary worlds. Indigenous peoples know, only too well, the violence that emerges from stories of Indigenous peoples as 'less than'. Thus, the Wirlomin Noongar speculative fiction writer Claire Coleman characterises all Australian historical novels as 'post-apocalyptic, because all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people alive today are the descendants of people who survived an apocalypse' (np). She writes:

> White people brought their own culture, their own religion. Seeing ours as completely lacking in value, they used their military might and their control of the resources they stole, to force their culture on us. There are survivors, there is living culture—but so much, so very much, was lost.
>
> In summary: white people stole our land, stole our children, attempted, and nearly succeeded in the complete destruction of our culture.
>
> We, the Indigenous people of this continent, now live in a dystopia. (np)

Nor is dispossession limited to our lands; it also includes our stories. Some of this is through the writing of stories by non-Indigenous peoples who purport to speak in our voices or to our worlds, claiming our pain and our beauty for their own. These stories crowd out our own, denying us opportunities to speak. This is not necessarily a product of the intention of the writers but of the larger system of oppression within which they exist. Non-Indigenous writers cannot escape their settler-privilege, and all settlers are privileged in relation to Indigenous peoples because everyone who came here post-dispossession benefited, or inherited the benefits of, the dispossession of those who were here before. Non-Indigenous writers can certainly challenge their privilege, but I contest the idea that this can be done through telling stories about Indigenous peoples. It is colonisers who occupy space, and decolonisers who yield it. As Melisa Lucashenko (Bundjalung) has written:

> It's an interesting question whether Australians will ever stop fantasising about us and deciding that it's critically important to world history that they tell their stories about us, whom they dispossessed and murdered and now want to pity or exploit on the page [...] maybe one day whitefellas will stop writing rubbish about us and maybe they won't. We must continue to insist that we are the sole owners of our own traditional stories and the authors of our own lives. (np)

But Indigenous peoples still face significant obstacles in seeking to be the authors of our own lives and our own stories. In literature, we continue to struggle to get our stories published because they don't comply with what white publishers think Indigenous stories should be, and our works are consistently overlooked by award judges, often in favour of works about us by non-Indigenous peoples which tell white saviour stories or reproduce toxic stereotypes about Indigenous realities. Those that wish to respectfully learn of Indigenous peoples should seek out our sovereign voices and listen to what we say about ourselves, in all our complexities and contradictions and diverse realities. In so doing, you will support Indigenous imaginations and thereby, our futures.

Our cultures, our contexts, our stories

In her memoir *The Calling of the Spirits*, Yuin Elder Eileen Morgan writes of a hidden valley of Aboriginal people who live naked as our ancestors did, and have a single set of clothes to be worn if ever one of them ventures out of the valley (93). It seems to me that Indigenous people send out many of our stories in much the same way, with Aboriginal meaning clothed in Western forms, that we might be understood. But because these are not our clothes, we alter, we adapt, and we subvert. And all too often, our agency is not recognised and our stories are criticized, either for not sufficiently complying with Western forms or for not sufficiently complying with Western ideas about who Indigenous

peoples are supposed to be. Part of this misunderstanding informs and is informed by a persistent mischaracterisation of Indigenous peoples as lacking in literacy or literature.

Indigenous peoples are rich in story; we always have been. Yet the strong, proud, defiant generations of Indigenous peoples—the holders of the stories—were (and are) called illiterate. In Western literary spaces, it is rare that this word 'illiterate' is ever qualified; rare that anyone recognises that when they speak of Aboriginal literacy levels as low, they are only talking about one kind of literacy. But there are other literacies that inform our storytelling that spring from ancient knowledges and traditions far older than those which inform the Western literary canon.

The Aboriginal nations of Australia are all founded in what is sometimes called the Dreaming, although the word Dreaming is an inexact translation of an Aboriginal concept that has no English equivalent. The Dreaming is the beginning from which all other beginnings emerge, for whatever existed here before could not support life as we know it now. The Dreaming is the movement of the Ancestors, who swam, fought, slept, and danced their way across the continent, and in so doing, created all that is. The Dreaming is the ongoing creation of reality, for it is non-linear; it was, is and will be. And there is not one Dreaming but many, as all Aboriginal nations have their own Dreamings which connect to the Dreamings of other Aboriginal nations through the passage of the Ancestors, the songlines. The Dreaming is a concept that cannot be held by the word 'Dreaming'. As Aboriginal scholar Vicki Grieves (Warraimay) writes: 'English terms carry the burden of communicating what life itself is all about, in every manifestation and meaning, in all time, and as such they are not at all equivalent to the Aboriginal meaning' (8).

While there is not a single Indigenous way of knowing, there are some broad underlying principles that inform Indigenous worldviews and shape our perspectives. These principles are drawn from the Dreaming stories which tell us that the world is holistic; that it is animate; and that it is non-linear. These principles are not implemented in identical ways in every Indigenous nation; we are diverse in how we relate to our diverse environments. But these principles have profound implications for how we conceive of what is real and what is not, and how we imagine our futures.

Holism

I once defined holism in Indigenous terms as a pattern that is stable, but not fixed (12). This pattern has many threads of many colours, and every thread is connected to, and has a relationship with, all of the others. The individual threads are every shape of life. Some—like human, kangaroo, paperbark—are known to western science as 'alive'; others, like rock, would be called 'non-living'. But rock is there, just the same. Human is there, too, though it is neither the most nor the least important thread—it is one among many; equal with the others. The pattern made by the whole is in each thread, and all the threads together make the whole. Stand close to the pattern and you can focus on a single thread; stand a little further back and you can see how that thread connects to others; stand further back still and you can see it all—and it is only once you see it all that you can recognise the pattern of the whole in every individual thread. The whole is more than its parts, and the whole is in all its parts.

A holistic worldview shapes a different kind of reasoning to the thought patterns born of the reductionism that has underlain much of Western thought. One of the easiest ways to broadly distinguish between reductionist and holistic thought is to consider how thinkers of each tradition might go about explaining an object, such as a watch. A reductionist thinker would seek to understand the 'whole' of watch through an examination of the individual parts. A holistic thinker would focus on the connections between the parts and between the watch and the wider world. To put this another way: ask a non-Indigenous reductionist thinker to explain a mountain, and they might speak of the age and composition of the rocks that form it; of its height; and perhaps the first human to reach the top. Ask an Indigenous thinker to explain the same mountain, and they might speak of the river that runs past it; of the birds that nest upon it; of the earth below or of the turning stars above. All of these things would be part of the story of the Ancestors or Ancestors that is/are the mountain, and since the whole is always more than the sum of its parts, it is only through these connections that the mountain can be understood. Furthermore, since the whole is in all its parts, every piece of the watch contains the watch entire, and every pebble the mountain. Thus, everything is formed and informed by the whole of Indigenous homelands; it is the earth that gives meaning to all existence.

Animate

The word 'animate' does not equate to 'animism'. The term 'animism' is part of a colonial lexicon imposed upon Indigenous peoples, and it is considered by many to be offensive. As Tewa Professor Gregory Cajete writes, animism is a term 'steeped in Western scientific and cultural bias. Along with words like "primitive", "ancestor worship", and "supernatural", animism continues to perpetuate a modern prejudice, a disdain, and a projection of inferiority toward the worldview of Indigenous peoples' (26).

An animate world is one in which everything is alive. This includes humans and animals and plants but also rock, wind, rain, sun and moon. Everything lives and everything has consciousness, agency and a role to perform to hold up creation. Further, since everything is alive and it is the nature of life to be dynamic, the world is a place of constant movement. Life informs life through interactions within the networks of relationships between all living beings that comprise the world and that are mapped through Aboriginal kinship systems. In Indigenous societies, to be a fully realised human being is to be part of a collective which means being responsible to the collective, including by sustaining the relationships that constitute a lawful way of being. This collective extends beyond human beings to all life in Country (and all of Country is alive). Thus, to be a fully realised human being is to exist in such a way so as to ensure that all life has the same opportunity for self-realisation.

Indigenous stories of ourselves, our families and our homelands are layered narratives that are only meaningful in the context of the greater stories that shape our existences, remembering always that all living beings have their own stories (and perspectives) on their worlds. Indigenous societies place a high value on respectful speech (rather than what is sometimes referred to as 'free speech'), and respectful speech requires that the boundaries of other living beings are not transgressed and the right of peoples to speak their own stories of their own selves, families and homelands is always honoured.

Non-linear

On a linear view, time runs in a line from the past through the present and on into the future. Time can equate with distance, in the sense that events which happened yesterday are spoken of as being 'closer' to the 'now' than events which happened decades or centuries ago. Time can also become a tool of ideology, with colonial characterisations of Indigenous peoples as being of an earlier (less 'advanced') time through the use of terms such as 'primitive', 'prehistoric' and 'prehistory'. Thus, in the words of Yuin Elder Max Harrison, 'distance and time distort thinking and alter truth' (68).

In Aboriginal worldviews, time is not linear. All living beings cycle through patterns of movement and transformation but these movements are not fixed to a linear frame that would prevent life from being life (which is to say, dynamic and therefore constantly moving). It is possible to connect with moments that would be thought of in a linear sense as being 'past' or 'future' through different processes, such as ceremony. And the degree to which humans have moved 'away' from traumatic events is not measured by the linear years that have passed since those events but rather, the extent to which affected relationships have been healed. Or as we wrote into the novel *Catching Teller Crow*: 'life doesn't move through time [...] Time moves through life' (5).

To conceive of time in a non-linear way is at once a great gift and a great responsibility. The responsibility is that our individual actions matter powerfully, radiating out across relationships and affecting all that might be thought of in a linear sense as past, present and future. But the gift is that the passage of linear time has never moved us so far that we cannot take meaningful action to heal the wounds of colonialism.

Writing the past, present and future: an extract from *Catching Teller Crow*

The novel *Catching Teller Crow* (published in the US as *The Things She's Seen*) tells the stories of three Indigenous girls, and through them, their families and the generations that went before. The extract below is written from the perspective of Aboriginal teenager Isobel Catching:

> We're on top of a rocky hill.
> Mum's hair is redder than the setting sun.
> 'I told you not to trust a colour called Scarlet Dream,' I say.
>
> She grins. 'How do you feel, Izzy?'
> 'Cold.'
> Mum's knitting is as bad as her hair dye.
> My jumper's long, but it's not warm.
>
> She puts her jacket over my shoulders. 'Now?'
> 'Warmer.'
> 'Calmer?'
>
> I nod. Calmer.
> More than back home.
> Where people are mean. Unfair. And I'm angry. I'm not good with anger.
> It lights my blood like flames.
> I become fire.
>
> But on this road trip, Mum's taught me words that control fire.
> The names of the Catching women, from my great-great-grandma onwards.

Granny Trudy Catching . . . Nanna Sadie Catching . . . Grandma Leslie Catching . . . Mum...

Me.

I don't say their names aloud.
Our family don't speak the names of the dead.

So I say them in my mind.
And in my heart, I can breathe.

I always knew Catching women were strong.
But I didn't know what they'd been through.
Not everything.
Not until Mum told me on this trip.
'Catching women are fighters,' Mum says. 'We've had to be, to survive. And all the strengths of the Catching women flow down the family line and into you, Izzy.'

I bury my face in her jacket. She smiles.
The sky rumbles.
Her smile dies.

'It's not supposed to rain today. We need to go!' We climb down the rocky hill. Race to the car. The land here is flat.
It floods when it rains.

Mum starts the car. 'Seatbelt!'
Rain falls.
We bump over rough ground. Back to the road. Lightning flashes. Thunder roars.
The rain falls harder.
The windscreen wipers can't keep up.
Mum turns on the headlights, but it's useless. The storm swallows everything.
We can't see.
The highway. Where is it?
A wall of water smashes into the car.
The river!
My head slams against the window.
My eyes close.

Time passes.

My eyes open.
Someone's shouting. Mum.
She's tugging at my seatbelt. Trying to get it undone. She's reaching round a tree to do it.
There's a tree growing in the car. Weird.
Not weird. It's a branch.

The front window is shattered. Water pours in.

Mum shouts again. I can't understand her. The water is up to my chest...
My neck...
My chin...

Mum's eyes meet mine. Her lips move.
One last word.
Water swallows me whole.

The seatbelt clicks.
The current sweeps me away. *Mum!*

My head spins.
My arms and legs won't work.
I'm going to die.
All the strengths of the Catching women flow down the family line and into you.
That matters.
Nanna Sadie. There's something about her I've got to remember.

My lungs scream for air.
I'm lost in the dark of the water. No up and no down.

Words shine in the dark beneath my feet. They speak in Mum's voice.

When your Nanna was little the government took her away from her mum. They had a law back then that let them take Aboriginal kids just because they were Aboriginal...

Her voice wouldn't lead me wrong. Down is up!
I turn in the water.
I follow the words.

They stuck her on a ship. She was going to a bad place. But the government people didn't know about your Nanna's strength with water. She was born in a big storm, and when she cried for the first time, a sound like thunder came out her mouth.

My mouth opens.
It wants air.
It fills with water. I'm choking!
I roar.
A sound like thunder pushes the water out.

She jumped off that ship into the waves and swam. First through the sea until she reached the shore, then through one river after another, all the way back to her mum.

Your Nanna could swim like a fish.

My legs move. I kick.
Once. Twice. Again.

I swim like a fish.
I swim like my Nanna.
I burst through the surface.

Breath heaves.
In.
Out.
It burns. I keep gulping air.

Rain still falls.
I'm being dragged by the current. My arm hits something. A tree?

I grab hold.
Not a tree.
A root, attached to a tree on the riverbank. I claw my way up.

Lightning tears the sky.
There's a shape lying on the shore.
Mum!
I stagger over.
The lightning fades.
I reach her in the dark. Drop to my knees.

'Mum, wake up!' Lightning flashes. Mum's eyes are open. Staring.

But not *seeing*.
I press my finger to her neck

No pulse. She's dead.

I cry until the lightning dies.
I scream until the thunder fades.
I howl into the dirt.
Give her back!
But the earth stays silent.
Soon I'm silent too.
I fall to the ground. My eyes close.
I don't want to wake... But I do.
Everything is strange.
Two suns hang in the air.
There's no river. Only a stream.
The trees have no leaves. They crowd together in a forest of sticks.
All the colours are washed away.
The sky is grey not blue.
The trees are dull not white. Even the suns are pale.
Where Mum's body was is an empty space. She's gone.
Impossible.
Her body was right there.
I stand. Pat the earth as if it has eaten her.
Nothing.
Maybe her body hasn't gone anywhere. Maybe I have.
Somewhere different. *Somewhere else*.
My head throbs. I put my hand on it. There's something grainy matted in my hair. *Blood*.
I'm hurt. Alone.
In some other-place.
I should be scared.
But I'm not.
Mum's gone. Nothing else matters.
Memories stab my brain.
Us on that hill. The storm. The drive. The water. She said something to me.
Just one word.
Right before she unclipped my seatbelt.
I couldn't hear it then. I can now.
Live.
I fall back to the ground. My heart is hollow. Empty.
My body is heavy.
Weak.
Maybe I'll fade away...

Like the colours of this place. Yet I don't.
Live.
My throat tightens.
Tears run.
The last thing she did was save me. She asked for one thing.
Live.
I don't want to. But I've got to.
(29–38)

Concluding thoughts

Catching Teller Crow is speculative, and it is not. The history of Isobel Catching's family is based in the very real trauma inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the settler-colonial state under the laws and policies that created the Stolen Generations. These laws and policies began in the latter half of the 19th century and continued for around a hundred years. My own family had two generations taken away. The Australian Human Rights Commission has estimated that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed between 1910 and 1970, and that no family escaped the effects of forcible removal (np). This leaves Indigenous families with the dual legacy of the terrible heartbreak of Stolen children, and the great strength it took to survive being taken or having a child taken from you. And both the heartbreak and the strength stretch across space-time to inform the existences of Indigenous peoples.

The world with two suns to which Isobel Catching travels is invented, but the experience of moving between worlds is well known to Indigenous peoples. We must daily contend with structures that reflect nothing of our cultures, histories and experiences and therefore, are alien to us. And like all Indigenous stories, *Catching Teller Crow* is part of the global work of decolonisation for which imagination is a vital component. In the words of Dakota professor Waziyatawin:

> At one time our ancestors would have had difficulty imagining living in a state of unfreedom. Now we have difficulty imagining living in a state of freedom. This is perhaps the most profound impact of colonialism in our lives. It reveals a limitation in thinking so severe that it prevents us from reclaiming our inherent rights as Indigenous Peoples of this land, even in our dreams. (np)

Melissa Lucashenko has spoken of writing as a sovereign act, and one through which Aboriginal people 'can exert power not only over the national story or the regional story, but also over the [...] stories we tell ourselves about who we are as Aboriginal people' (np). Storytelling helps us reclaim our individual and collective futures as Indigenous peoples. It is part of the healing processes necessary to begin to overcome the ongoing wounds inflicted by colonialism. And it is also part of mapping what a decolonised world will look like, for as Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and non-Indigenous scholar Wayne Yang write: 'decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity' (35).

To be an Indigenous speculative fiction writer is often to write of things which are not speculative. And among the many things I don't need to imagine are alliances between different peoples, privileged and marginalised, coming together to seek a fairer and more just world. I don't need to imagine these connections because they already exist.

My mother once thought about the moment when the First Peoples of this land sighted the invaders approaching the shore. She wrote:

> I have sometimes thought back to the moment when Captain Arthur Phillip, lover of law, order and agriculture, arrived in the hot sultry summer of January 1788 to establish the first British colony. By then, the children who had been playing on the beach when Cook arrived were grown with families of their own, and this time from the headlands they would have seen not one, but many ships breaching the horizon: two warships, three cargo ships and six transports. For that brief moment, as two vastly different peoples gazed at each other in curiosity across a brilliantly blue watery expanse, the future lay wide open, vulnerable to the good or evil the ships would bring. What would happen when they finally crossed that sunny, dazzling distance? How would the relationships between these strangers to our shores and peoples like mine play out? What would the Australian nation of the future one day look back on and call history? The innocent idealistic part of me likes to believe there is hope in every moment; that the die is never cast until the moment has passed. Perhaps even then, despite the unlawful claiming of our land, hope lingered among the sharp smelling eucalyptus leaves whose vaporised oil rises beyond the bush on warm and sunny days to cast a cleansing blue haze over the land. This was such a day.

> Far seeing individuals are born into every nation. This causes me to believe that the possibility of forging a just future is always present, if only we have the vision, will and courage to pursue it. (Morgan 2008, 274)

Perhaps in the end, the future—all the futures—will be made by the far-seeing people.

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One Infinity

after *One Infinity*, Beijing Dance Theatre's and Dance North Australia's premiere dance performance, Malthouse Theatre, October 2018

Shari Kocher

Shari Kocher's *The Non-Sequitur of Snow* (Puncher and Wattmann) was shortlisted for the *Anne Elder Award* in 2015. Recent awards include the *Venie Holmgren Poetry Prize*, the *University of Canberra Health Poetry Prize* and Runner Up in the *Newcastle Poetry Prize*. She holds a doctoral degree from the University of Melbourne and works in a freelance, supervisory and remedial capacity.

Writing with a horsehair brush
dipped in water on bare boards, air
dissolves in a moment the poem
that has entered, and altered,
the quantum field.

A dancer, too, slips into
and through this invisible
eddy: swirls and triangles beneath
a floodlit slow crawl upward
through millennia: the stew

inside the cocoon a choreography
of light: cloud-fish, wildebeest,
nautilus flood, wild murmuration,
flesh, bone, muscle, blood. I
was charged by wild horses once,

a child of five, tearing through a field
of burning grass, heads held high
and tails streaming, their glance
on me as they thundered past,
both a promise and a warning:

the sheer ecstasy of the ground
shaking their wild hooves.

making something into nothing
Sandra Renew

Sandra Renew's published poetry includes a range of critique and commentary through exploration of the themes of border crossings and inclusion. Publications include *Acting Like a Girl* (Recent Work Press, Canberra 2019).

she never says her partner's name
contorts the language and her weekend news
avoids the pronoun that signifies, specifies gender
pronouns keep her singular
relegate a somebody to a nobody

A Late Flowering
Rosemary Stevens

Rosemary Stevens is an Australian writer with a background in publishing and editing, currently teaching Professional Writing at Curtin University. She has had short fiction and nonfiction works published nationally and in Southeast Asia, including by *Westerly*, Fremantle Press, SWAMP and *The Straits Times*.

Men! We are starved of them. And boys. Anything in trousers attracts our attention. Beards, muscle, burly shoulders. *He's looking at me!* Giggles behind furtive hands. Wolf-whistles. But Mother Superior has it under control: We are to keep well away from *the workmen*.

Convent girls in pleated skirts, striped blouses, knotted ties, we swarm into the new wing tacked onto the old via a corridor of light, banks of windows admitting a brave and muted brilliance. It pools around our regulation shoes as we queue outside the science lab, domain of Mrs George (who conceived out of wedlock, as the rumour goes).

She strides towards the blackboard with a toss of the head, loosening her silky mane, and chalks: THE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM. White on black.

Spine erect, I sit with legs cling-wrapped to the stool, buttocks clenched, fighting the urge to blush or catch Pamela's eye. We've talked about our periods and how her mother said they were forever. *Not* about the things I couldn't ask when Mum raised the spectre of *the curse*, my eyes willing the carpet to do a Mephistopheles and swallow me whole.

Silence. Not a snigger, books open at page 61.

We're well into the curriculum, having already studied stamens and calyxes, the furriness of bees, floral runways painted in hot red lines on yellow petals, open… inviting. We're ready. Eager. Page 62 shows the female reproductive system with its floral swirls and branching arms, leafy hands holding onto eggs by suction. There's a heart-shaped space where the baby grows, but I can't see how it gets there or how any of it maps onto my own body. Nor how the bee comes into it with its pungent sting. Of course, I know the sniggery version. We all know that, mostly from Pamela, who says Candice did it outside St Marys behind the Christ-like statue with the too large hand, held up in caution since the original one got stolen. Finger pointing to heaven. *Did it* with one of

the boys from King Charles Grammar up the road. But just exactly what they did and how… well, I guess any minute now we'll know.

Mrs George brandishes her chalk, and sidelining female complexities, replicates THE MALE SEXUAL ORGANS, title underlined to save us doubt. The male, it seems, comes first.

I don't see the pun. At fourteen, there's a lot to grasp.

Outside the window, the mighty chestnut drops its burnished nuts that later Sister Martin will roast for us if we gather them, filling our pockets to bursting and thwarting their chance to grow into baby trees.

The penis. Mrs George points to a device thrusting out and down like a garden tap but without a handle to turn it on. *The male is the active component.* I know this already from the way Dad slams the door announcing his tiger presence after work, the way he assumes his place at the kitchen table while Mum flips eggs, dashing between toaster, kettle and stove. The way he unloads the dramas of the day, lifting a palm to receive the cup and saucer Mum administers, a dash of milk two sugars. The way the boys skive out of washing up and get away with fistfights under the table, while I do not.

All this I will know again viscerally after the infidelity and the long, painful divorce that leaves me a single mother with two teenage boys. My body will weigh all this like a secret in its most intimate interior, incubating the cancerous nut buried in my breast.

Mrs George snatches up the ruler and thwacks Mary on the hand. *Pay attention!*

I will know this anger too, clenched inside like a fist.

Mrs George sketches the female system under the male apparatus. How complex it is. How beautiful, the womb embraced by fallopian arms, fallopian fingers paying out eggs that will one day cease. And release a new wave of possibilities. Fingers unfurling to caress the keys that will unlock the words, joining past with present to forge a future where I will stand like Mrs George before a class, and not strike out. But birth instead this pent-up thing that flows like ink onto the page and blooms.

The Earth Will Outshine Us

after Elisabeth Cummings'
Arkaroola (2004)

Kathryn Fry

Kathryn Fry has poems in various publications including the Newcastle Poetry Prize anthologies of 2014 and 2016. Her first collection, *Green Point Bearings*, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2018.

She's not there now, nor are you, though
some scenes still lodge in your bones.
Wherever you look there's a story edging
the next. Her brush dazzles the text into

lines, into steady and broken passages
and notes of bellow and lore, heavy in
the slanting. You hear echoes of things
said, you see a mirage of heady motion

as if it's the erosion of earth in time lapse,
the light exposing the rise of dryland teatrees
down by Wywhyana Creek, to the grass trees
up by Sillers Lookout. As if this is a lesson

in seeing all your years vibrate against one
another, the peaks and scatterings, even
the cracks awash in the pleasure of rampant
cadmium. Yet the earth will outshine us all.

And out from the flood plains of Lake Frome
(the white glare of its granules), a falcon
maps the valley and sweeps above the dots
of spinifex, your eyes primed for the swoop.

van Gogh's *Digger in a Potato Field*

Josephine Clarke

Josephine Clarke is a member of OOTA and of the Voicebox collective. She has had poetry and short stories published in print and online journals, including the ABR States of Poetry WA, Series 2.

in my suburban garden
I have planted you
and sweep wine-stained leaves
from the sterile grape
across limestone pavers

my fruit trees stand in pots
cherries arrive in baskets of plastic
almonds shelled and blanched

I think of you in snow
the unforgettable mountain summer
vines growing
on narrow terraced lots

yet when the hem of my skirt brushes my ankle
I remember that first time
in Amsterdam
when I recognised you
leaning on the rake
to work soil

a hushed and dimmed museum
the word *potato*
bringing the smell of dirt
the thudding of chubby tubers rolling
over the belt of the harvester
so far from home

I knew it then
the ease of your toil with earth
I saw it then
your hands and *terra* passing one to the other

The Randolph Stow Memorial Lecture

Saturday 23 February, 2019

Andrew Lynch

Andrew Lynch is Emeritus Professor of English and Literary Studies at The University of Western Australia. His recent and forthcoming publications, as co-editor and contributor, include *A Cultural History of Emotions*, 6 vols, (Bloomsbury, 2019) and *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe, 1100–1700* (2019). He is also an editor of the journal *Emotions: History, Culture, Society*.

It's a great honour for me to be asked to give this memorial lecture for Randolph Stow. Thanks to the Westerly Centre and the Festival for inviting me. Stow's writing has been a part of my life since my early twenties, when I was given the Penguin *To the Islands* (1962) as a birthday present. I didn't know then that when Stow wrote it he was the same age as me reading it, or that it was his *third* published novel. After that, I read *The Merry-go-Round in the Sea* (1965) and *Tourmaline* (1963). Then in my early years here at the University of Western Australia (UWA) I first read two more: *Visitants* (1979) and *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (1980). Quite a few years later, after many re-readings, I think of Stow as a great artist, a poet amongst the English-language novelists of his time.

This lecture exists to honour Randolph Stow as an Australian writer, and especially as a West Australian. It takes place in the state where he was born and raised, in the city where he went to secondary school, and at this university where he lived (at St George's College) and was a brilliant student and literary and theatrical figure. Stow had long left Australia when I first came to Perth, but there were plenty of people around the English Department who knew him, and who feature in the recent biography by Suzanne Falkiner—including Peter Cowan, Bruce Bennett and Bill Dunstone. Also Dr Helen Watson-Williams, to whom he once submitted an essay beginning 'Dear Mrs Double-W, I hope our prose will not trouble you'. He must have been daunting to teach. One of his tutors remarked:

> He invaded authors (as someone said) like a monarch. Instead of being content with the necessarily thin selections of the syllabus, he would sink himself into everything he could find by each author we came to. (Falkiner 78)

What really comes across to me about Stow's time at UWA is the breadth of his interests and studies, and how deeply the formation of his identity as an Australian writer was marked by both local immersion and world awareness. As Suzanne Falkiner tells us, by the end of Stow's four years at UWA, he had a BA in English and French, had written three novels (one unfinished), published thirty-five poems and numerous skits and dramatic pieces, and had work broadcast on the ABC (from the age of eighteen) (Falkiner 104, 82). He knew German and Latin, taught himself Italian, Spanish and Scots Gaelic, and read widely in anthropology—this was before UWA had an Anthropology Department—and in art. Stow's educational and intellectual environment was confident, outward-looking and active. During his time as an editor of *The Winthrop Review*, an ancestor of *Westerly*, it published Australian writers, including WA locals Donald Stuart, Olive Pell, Mollie Skinner and Mary Durack, but also work on French, British, American, Irish and Hungarian literature, art and theatre, and it stood in opposition to censorship and the White Australia policy. It's not what you might expect of mid-1950s Australia, deep in the Menzies era, and often characterised as a time of second-hand Britishness and cultural cringe. From the beginning Stow was finely attuned to his local landscape. Yet he always saw and heard things in a larger mindscape of language, place and time. He's famous for his evocation of particular places, whether it's the Kimberley, the Mid-West coast, the dry inland, New Guinea or East Anglia, but in other ways his books are about interpenetrations of times, places and languages. He learned languages and you might say he learned voices too. He heard voices, from the living and the dead, and let them speak in his books about the conditions of life in time and place. That's one reason why I think of him as a true historical novelist. My talk tonight is going to wander through this landscape and mindscape, looking at some of the interconnected themes that preoccupied Stow throughout his novels—trauma, myth, love and home.

The first of these themes is trauma. All Stow's novels are about crises in which individuals and communities face historical changes and revelations in consciousness that threaten their sense of being in the world. His novels are all acts of recovery, creatively working over the past. Stow's distinctive method of working was first to construct the details in his head, then to write the narrative down on pen and paper at high speed, and usually at a long distance in time and place, before revision. *Tourmaline* was written in Leeds; *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* in New Mexico; his New Guinea novel *Visitants* in Suffolk. His work can't be divided into 'Australian' novels and 'other' novels, because his idea of consciousness and his artistic

methods didn't work like that. Consciousness is layered. Disparate images connect. Memories persist. Voices from one place are heard in another. Old events and words return out of time.

Trauma

I'll go back to *To the Islands*, first published in 1958 when Stow was twenty-two. It's set in 1957 on an Anglican Aboriginal mission station in the Kimberley. It has, in Stow's words, 'a *King Lear*-like theme' (Stow in Falkiner 180), of an old man's madness and self-realisation in the wilderness, and is shot through with reference to medieval lyric, Jacobean drama, hymns and liturgy, folk song and the poetry of Baudelaire, Hopkins and many others. It also contains an oral history, sourced from Stow's friend Daniel Evans, of a massacre of Indigenous people in 1926 (Falkiner 165). In this novel, Stow tries to come to terms with the incompatible in his consciousness as a settler Australian: his family love of the land, his European education, his knowledge of Indigenous culture, and also of the criminal history of white colonisation. The protagonist of the story, an ageing Anglican missionary, Stephen Heriot, has lost his sense of purpose in life, and believing he has killed an Indigenous man, wanders into 'Dead Man's Land', thinking about 'being born out of crimes': '"It was because of murders that I was ever born in this country. It was because of murders that my first amoebic ancestor ever survived to be my ancestor. Every day in my life murders are done to protect me. People are taught how to murder because of me"' (*To the Islands* 159–60). Heriot feels personally implicated in an endless cycle of violence. Part of this feeling comes from self-obsession and melancholic introversion, but part of it comes from his increasing inability to disconnect the work of his mission from the broader mission of colonial exploitation. In his pastoral life, he looks for a fusion of Indigenous and European cultural expression. But, as a white man, he comes to see himself as an aggressor to the local people, and his attempts to identify with them create a sense of survivor guilt. Typically of Stow's protagonists, Heriot's ending is to find himself alone. Yet in his aloneness he takes the next step on an inner journey, as at the land's edge he looks out over the sea for the islands of the dead:

> The old man knelt among the bones and stared into the light. His carved lips were firm in the white beard, his hands were steady, his ancient blue eyes, neither hoping nor fearing, searched sun and sea for the least dark hint of a landfall.
>
> 'My soul,' he whispered over the sea surge, 'my soul is a strange country.' (208)

Stow once wrote, 'The environment of a writer is as much inside him as in what he observes' ('Raw Material' 4). His books are famous for the sense they give of the physical environment, but I think they were also ways for him, a very private man, to discover and share through visible signs the invisible nature of his mind and soul. The 'country' of his novels is his shared soul. Their existential bleakness and constant awareness of loss and death are not depressing; they are the default conditions in which he celebrates acts of shared love, and creates moments of benign connection.

Take for example the scarifying passage in *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, when Rob realises the loss of his childhood home,

> asking himself how a country town on the sea had become a provincial seaport, how a world so congruent, so close-knit by history and blood and old acquaintance, had become fragmented into a mere municipality. (215)

As Rob comes to think:

> The world the boy had believed in did not, after all exist. The world and the clan and Australia had been a myth of his mind, and he had been, all the time, an individual. (283)

Stow is not usually seen as a 'realist' writer, more as a novelist of consciousness, but his work is full of insights into how consciousness is formed within the surges of historical and social change. The young man of *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* goes through the same kind of grief for lost community and faith as the old man of *To the Islands*. Each grieves for a lost myth. But the grief brings understanding and new discovery, and re-affirms strong attachment to place and lived time. Our sense of Rob's loss depends on our knowing what he has had, through the amazing early chapters of the book which create such an intimate community of the land, the family, the young boy and the reader. Death and loss make communion all the more important. The book gives us, permanently, what it takes away. In this sense, the 'myth' exists in reality.

Myth

This brings me to the next theme, Myth, and to the two books by Stow I want to talk about most: *Visitants* and *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, published in 1979–1980. *Visitants* tells the story of Alistair Cawdor, a patrol officer in the Trobriand Islands in the late 1950s, at a time when Papua New Guinea was an Australian dependency. Cawdor's wife has left him. Because of this, he feels an increasing sense of shame in his dealings

with the local people. He is excited by reported sightings of a 'star-ship' above the islands, which he half-connects with the story of Christ's nativity. He is filled with epiphanic 'joy' at the news of the star-people's ship—'His face was moved, he was suddenly like a child. "In the star-machine, you saw people?"; "O Christ, no. Don't you see?"' (106–107) But he tells the Islanders that it is merely '"crazy talk"': '"I think it is a machine of the Americans"' (107). '"It is a story, that is all. [...] There are no people in the stars"' (101). He is desperate to believe, and to hold communication with the world beyond time and space, yet constrained by rational norms. He loses himself between the 'It is' of his desire for the myth and the 'It can't be' of modern scientific convention.

The sightings also stir up a belief in some of the Islanders that they are about to receive restoration of wealth stolen from them by the European settlers. At the end of the disturbances that follow, Cawdor suicides. He has become prey to psychotic delusions through cerebral malaria: 'It is like my body is a house, and some visitor has come, and attacked the person who lived there' (189). But his last words are '"I can never die"' (186) and his last writing is a version in the local language of the words of Julian of Norwich, a 14th-century mystic: 'All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well' (188). They hold a promise of an obscure meaning to existence and consolation for suffering.

The Girl Green as Elderflower is a version of these events in which recovery is possible, and Julian's words that 'all shall be well' are tentatively fulfilled. Stow wrote the two books partly in tandem. He was not able to finish the dark ending of *Visitants* until he'd finished *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, written first though published later (Stow in Hassall 311). Its narrative runs over the course of a year as Crispin Clare, a version of Alistair Cawdor who has survived, gradually recovers from his trauma in the Suffolk village from which his ancestors originally came to Australia. In its outline this looks like a story of recovery achieved by coming 'home' to a place of origin and in some ways the novel stages it as that, as a re-affirmed sense of heritage and belonging. This kind of thing is exemplified by the dust-jacket notes of the first edition, probably supplied by Stow himself. The notes speak of Stow's 'forebears, East Anglian on both sides of the family', and state that 'much of his adult life has been passed in his ancestral county, of which his great-great-grandfather was an industrious historian'. The later identification of East Anglia as 'home' might seem intended to silence four intervening settler generations, in a mood of cultural rejection. In the manuscript of *Visitants*, written close to the same time, Stow's acknowledgement of a Literature Board grant 'during the heady early days of the Whitlam government' (191) is followed

by the later deleted words: 'before the lumpen-bourgeoisie re-established its Nixonian dictatorship. This book is *pour prendre congé* of my native land'. But for all this talk of forebears and inheritance, we can note that the Australian family dynasties in Stow's earlier novels are mainly very unhappy: there, ancestry is trauma. In interviews, Stow claimed to 'feel like a Suffolk boy' (Kinross-Smith 20), but *The Girl Green as Elderflower* complicates the 'ancestral' relation to country with many hauntings and temporal displacements.

Clare is possessed by memories of his recent time as a colonial patrol officer, which has culminated in a psychotic episode and attempted suicide. This back story, frequently recurring in the novel through dream, voice or somatic memory, closely associates *The Girl Green as Elderflower* with *Visitants*, and breaks down the boundaries between ideas of an ancestral 'home' and its implied colonial alternatives. These are revealed as strategic constructions within the same psychic struggle, rather than fixed locations or separate states of being. Is Clare really at 'home', or in exile? How do you find 'home' after grief and loss?

The Girl Green as Elderflower deals with this conflict between myth and science in an indirect way by introducing into its framework a series of stories based on English authors of the 12th and 13th centuries. They are medieval tales of marvels but written to engage with the lives of the modern characters in the story. They include: a wild man of the sea captured and brought on land; a mischievous sprite named Malkin; a phantom dog mourning the death of his master; and several versions of the central story: two green children of unknown origin are discovered in a pit; the boy dies, but the mysterious green girl lives on and eventually marries a local man. She is called both Mirabel—the girl to be wondered at—and Amabel, the girl to be loved. She becomes for the text an emblem of desire, curiosity and creative potential. Mirabel/Amabel complicates ideas of fixed 'origin', 'home' and 'exile' by telling different stories of where she has come from to anyone who asks her. She answers the question 'where are you from?' in different idioms, according to the nature of the questioner. To a farm labourer she is the worshipper of a fertility god; to a knight she is an orphan needing protection; to a priest she is a Christian devotee of St Martin, patron of generosity; to a young and timid clerk she is a sorceress; to the sole survivor of a massacre of Jews she is a Tartar child sold into slavery (125–134). In each case, the questioner's wish to know the stranger's origins intersects with her different wish to be loved and to find a 'home'. The variety of answers mocks the ethnographical and theological terms which are used to describe her: '"My test has failed," says the priest "and therefore I am forced back to my first position, which

is that they have fallen from the moon"' (120). Mirabel/Amabel leads on her interlocutors with inventions suited to their favourite discourses. She disallows their pretence of scientific distance and exposes the erotic investment in anthropological enquiries. She refuses definition, refuses to allow a distinction between myth and science, marvel and reality. Through her, the wish to understand is frustrated by multiple answers, yet consoled by the continuing renewal of desire, and kept from the possibility of tragic finality. The point for her is not to 'know' but to be able to love, to find home.

Stow uses the middle ages in this novel to extend the sense of what is 'there' in the conceptual landscape, much as he involves *Visitants* with eye-witness reports of the 'star ship'. These narrative supplements make up for perceived absences in straight history. The point of their inclusion is as much about relativities of the real and hierarchies of knowledge as about literal truth-content. Much of the uncanny material in the novel is communicated by the invisible sprite, Malkin, also taken from a 12th-century chronicle, who speaks in Latin, Suffolk dialect, and the language of the Papuan region where Crispin Clare has been traumatised. She is a kind of counterpart to Clare's own troubled psyche. Through her intervention the borders of the 'real' are opened to include myth, legend and other marvels, what the historian Nancy Partner calls 'the dazzling variety of 12th-century "reality"' (140). The medieval communications that Clare channels through Malkin slowly involve him in a more benign version of the 'voices' that have been a part of his mental illness—'"people talking too fast and too low for me to understand"' (75). He is still 'possessed', but now by an intelligible and conversable spirit, which allows the products of delusion and over-imagination, the irrational, conventionally the 'medieval' in modern culture, to be faced and brought under discrimination.

Stow's medieval does not console the modern by offering escape. Clare's medievalist stories are themselves forerunners of modern traumas: race-hatred, genocide, rape, homophobic violence. The massacre at Lynn is linked to the Holocaust; the tale of the 'wild man caught in the sea' references the hatred of the National Front 'for foreigners swamping the country' (92–93), and the latent hostility in the anthropological study of 'wild' people. Rather, the point in Clare's medievalist creations is their ability to acknowledge likeness in difference, and to establish a more equal dialogue with otherness. To Clare, as an exiled stranger in the place, the medieval tales of abandonment and dislocation, with their lost, alien figures subjected to scrutiny by the 'priests' and 'psychotherapists' of the period, present a likeness to his own situation. The tales recall his grim history as colonial anthropologist, but in a benign difference from the fate of Alistair Cawdor, they bring him to see the inevitable occurrence of pain within a cycle of death and remaking, rather than as infinite trauma—what he earlier calls 'the everlasting terror of a process without term' (32). The point of the medieval tales lies in their imaginative communication and desire for connection with others. Although Clare's medievalism might seem unpromising, a confirmation of his status as 'relic of the past', it symbolises the bridging of distance, the acceptance of difference, and the necessary co-existence of incommensurable and inexplicable data in consciousness. The novel is about being able to live with things you don't understand. In its broader context, Clare's new life in Suffolk becomes not just a personal therapy but a statement of how the world and community might be re-imagined and re-inhabited after grief and disaster.

Love and home

Finally, and briefly, my last theme—love and home. All Stow's novels are about love. For him, love brings grief, but it is the creative energy that survives trauma and death, and allows continuity. It's not so much that the novels are 'about' love. For Stow, writing is a form of creating love, a way of bringing about intimate connection and communion. That's overt in the fabulous ending of *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, when Mirabel/Amabel finds her peace at last: '"Oh my love," she said, "Oh my own one. Oh my home"' (165). The creative 'green' energy in the book is inseparable from Mirabel's search for love. Her story realises in surprising ways the network of desires that makes up Clare's re-admission to community, and finally offers him a glimpse of 'home'. It's not ancestry—'where are you from?'—but where you love that makes 'home'. The priest at Mirabel/Amabel's deathbed invests grief and love with religious significance. '"In love is grief… In grief is love… Pity my grief. Let my grief teach you to love mankind"' (166). That language clearly attracts Stow, but the book doesn't give it final endorsement. I'd like to end here in a different idiom. In a short essay on poetry he wrote in 1957, Stow says he met 'an old man in a pub in the north of South Australia'.

> He lectured me on the value of poetry in life. 'Poetry,' he said, 'is a veneer.' And then, 'You see that door up there? It looks solid. Maybe it's rotten all the way up with white ants, but it hangs together on the outside. You know why? Because the white ants inside are all holding hands.'
>
> […L]ater [Stow says] it struck me that he had his metaphor reversed. It is poetry that causes white ants to hold hands. (Stow in Falkiner, 183–184)

To me, this is a great description of what Randolph Stow's novels do. They're ways of letting us hold hands as community, and of making the disparate phenomena of the world 'hang together' in our consciousness. Thank you for letting me share my enjoyment of them with you tonight.

Note on the Text

Some of this lecture was drawn from an essay published in *Australian Literary Studies*: Andrew Lynch, '"I have so many truths to tell": Randolph Stow's *Visitants* and *The Girl Green as Elderflower*', *Australian Literary Studies* 26.1 (2011): 20–32. DOI: https://doi.org/10.20314/als.ddb41c538d.

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Bracing Ground

Anne Elvey

Anne Elvey, author of *White on White* (2018) and *Kin* (2014), is managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain* journal, holding honorary positions at Monash University and University of Divinity.

on Boonwurrung Country

lachrymose gum
of age and botanical name
unlearnt
stands outside the primary school
where
told by the over
lay of maps
old on new
the wetlands
used to end except for
season
where
beneath the tree
appropriation
stakes
an unanticipated gravity as if
I had stepped into
a gulley

Melaleuca Suite

Stuart Crowe

Stuart grew up in the Great Southern in the 1960s and 1970s and the influence of the landscape and history continues to be reflected in much of his poetry.

I

Steamed fish in skin
of paperbark soft as flesh and layered
like pastry peeled back

in sheets—read in
every fold a landscape, reclining
under melaleuca groves

your children unfold
from within these pages of skin
growing within your flesh

II

Wheat bag towers above
the stubble, the local architecture
of memory

every sack carried on the backs
of fluid Lumpers building hand-laid pyramid
stacks found only in sepiad photos

at smoko their legs hang over
the tiers of bags like the Diggers on the side
of the great Khufu

fading memories turned into
pillars of sandstone, their colours
the cool palette of paperbarks

III

Sometimes in defiance
of the chainsaw a fencepost
distinguishes itself,
one out

of uniform, rootless but
pushing against its purpose
and reshooting a virulent head
of green.

The Abortionist

Siang Lu

Siang Lu was a 2015–2016 winner of the Australian Society of Authors Emerging Writers' Mentorship Award and was shortlisted for the 2016 Varuna Publisher Introduction Fellowship. He is represented by Andrew Lampack, of the Peter Lampack Agency.

The abortionist came at noon, and there was nothing Mao Wen Bo could do but let the man in, and now they stood, staring, in the dining room, not particularly liking one another.

He opened his medicine bag and placed the surgical instruments on the table.

Forceps, speculum, syringe.

They were clean and sterile. No blood on them yet.

'Listen now,' stammered Mao Wen Bo, 'there must be some kind of mistake.'

The abortionist was a small man, dapper, with elegant hands that might have easily belonged to a concert pianist or a locksmith.

'I'm afraid not,' he said.

He had burnished grey hair and harmless bifocals and a slow shrug that seemed to say *I'm on your side, in my own way*, that apologetic smile of his, benign, the way tumours were benign.

Uterine dilator, cannula.

'I met your mother the other day, she came to the clinic.' The abortionist was making conversation. 'A pleasant woman, and, my God, *very* funny, don't you agree?'

'Yes, I suppose, but now look here…'

'Quite a bit of a flirt, too! But I guess that's not something a son is very much dying to hear now, is it?'

'I don't care about that, *please* would you…'

'Well, I admit it's true, she's quite a woman. I tell you, it's not often in my line of work I find a patient so…'

'Listen to me,' Mao Wen Bo shivered, 'for God's sake, it's not her decision, it's mine! I'm a grown man! You can't just abort a *grown man*!'

Curette.

Cranioclast.

The abortionist didn't know whether to look amused or concerned at this outburst. 'Grown man? Well, that would be quite a problem, of course. A grown man, you say. Are you sure?'

'Yes of course.' Mao Wen Bo was now growing impatient. 'You think I don't know myself?'

'Well…' The abortionist looked thoughtful. 'Perhaps you have some documentation to confirm this? I could revoke the procedure if you provided me, say, a birth certificate, passport, that sort of thing. Well. I'll come back tomorrow then, give you some time to…'

'Yes, come back tomorrow.' Mao Wen Bo pushed him to the door, and rather roughly, out onto the pavement outside. 'I'll have it all ready by then!'

Mao Wen Bo stared at the closed door for a long time.

He knew, in any case, where his birth papers were, exactly, so that was no problem at all, he would get them later, after making a cup of tea to calm himself down. But there was something wrong with the teaspoon, the way it jerked about and made the coarse grains of sugar spill and scatter, the tiny crystals forming constellations on the kitchen counter.

Mao Wen Bo swept away the spilt sugar with the back of his hand, and that was good—the counter was now clean—and he continued with this movement until the sugar was all on the ground and this seemed to solve the problem somewhat, as long as Mao Wen Bo was willing to never acknowledge the floor and its mess, or look down, ever again.

He felt he was capable of this.

•••

Mao Wen Bo went out for a walk.

The weather was nice out, and it would be good to go for a walk, he decided.

Mao Wen Bo remembered now, very clearly, *exactly* where he had left his papers, so that was not a problem at all, he would get them and put them on his table as soon as he got home from the walk, or maybe after dinner, or just before bed, so he wouldn't forget.

Outside, the street was empty, which was strange for this time of day. There were always people, neighbours and friendly strangers, who would wave to Mao Wen Bo and wish him good day and so on, but today the street was empty.

'I will walk,' Mao Wen Bo said quietly to himself, 'until I see someone. Anyone, a child, an old man. I will raise my hand and we will make small talk about the day, perhaps about the weather and the weekend and the weather on the weekend and whether the week will end and yes, it will

be nice to talk with someone, and then as soon as that's done, a look of genuine surprise will come over my face and I will tell them, I'm sorry, but I've only just this second remembered that I have something urgent I need to check, and it's got to be done now (a matter of life and death, really) and I will go straight home and look for my papers. That's what I'll do. I will simply walk until I meet someone, and then I'll go straight home and do that thing.'

Mao Wen Bo encountered no-one.

He walked for three hours.

• • •

Mao Wen Bo came into the town square, where there were crowds of people. These were the first people he had seen in some time, and he approached and saw they were jostling in long lines.

He joined the queue. Mao Wen Bo hadn't forgotten the promise he had made to himself—there wasn't much time anymore, because it was getting late now and he would have to return home quite soon.

There was an old man, here, in front of him, who looked very much like the abortionist, but wasn't, Mao Wen Bo was sure. He would do.

'How are you today?' Mao Wen Bo smiled to him. 'Nice weather we're having, isn't it!' But it was much too loud in the town square and the old man couldn't hear him, and Mao Wen Bo decided he would wait until they were both inside the building, where it would be quieter at least.

He remembered now what this place was, and what was happening, and why there were so many people. They were all here for the art exhibition, a long-awaited exhibition, a famous one, one of the famous ones—and Mao Wen Bo had in fact planned on coming to the gallery, he had been on his way here before his plans and the day had changed. So it was lucky, then, that he was here.

His twin sister, Gu Ting, would be here too. She was the curator's assistant.

Mao Wen Bo's breath misted the window as he stood on the outside, looking in. He scanned the faces inside but did not spot her amongst the crowd.

He went in, nonetheless.

• • •

Mao Wen Bo waited, for Gu Ting, in a corner where there sat a quartet of musicians, violinists and cellists and so on, who squinted into their sheet music and excreted a forgettable tune that faded to the background and evaporated into the air.

There was a needless complexity to the gallery, a certain haphazardness that alarmed and confused the patrons, who, when they wished to view the artworks in any sense or semblance of chronology, or category, or style, found themselves travelling great lengths, like mice in a maze. They stared, slack-jawed, at familiar portraits and statues, not knowing whether these artworks were duplicates and triplicates, or whether they had lost their way inside the maddening halls and were simply retracing their steps.

But there were others who were untroubled, who focused their attentions on a singular work of art, solely and at the exclusion of all others, and Mao Wen Bo noticed it was these lucky few, who, along with the dumb and the stupid and the aimless, felt any measure of satisfaction within these walls.

'Wen Bo, you came.'

'Gu Ting.'

They embraced—the brother and the sister—for an amount of time that seemed sufficient, for they were careful not to overdo things. Mao Wen Bo pulled away and folded his arms, and Gu Ting mimicked his posture, smirking like a villain.

'Your hair is shorter,' he didn't say, even though it was, and much shorter than he had ever seen and anticipated, and Mao Wen Bo stopped these words in his throat because he had caught that glimpse of almost-laughter in her eyes, daring him to say it or not say it because she knew his habit of acting as though nothing had ever changed, or else, when things were now different and undeniably so, to pretend he had known it all along and by this logic deciding that nothing further need be said.

So he said nothing, and instead turned his attention to the musicians.

'Don't you think,' said Mao Wen Bo, 'this violinist, the one on the right, don't you think he looks a lot like father?'

'No.'

'You didn't even look.'

'I know what the musicians look like. I hired them, after all.'

'A man came to visit me this morning,' said Mao Wen Bo, 'and he reminded me very much of father. The way he spoke, and the smell of his clothes… This music is terrible.'

'Yes, I chose the music.'

'And look, that cellist just played the wrong note.'

'Yes, the curator likes it that way,' she said. 'They're under orders to do this kind of thing every now and then. It makes people focus on the art.'

'I see,' said Mao Wen Bo, though he didn't at all.

The violinist who looked like their father scowled, having overheard the entire exchange. He trilled nonsensically and wrung a vibrato that

made the instrument weep, playing beautifully until Gu Ting glared at the man to stop.

'Gu Ting,' Mao Wen Bo pulled her aside, as if to ask her something very important, but instead he looked down at his shoes, 'did anyone come by today, to see you?'

'At the gallery, or at home?'

'Either. Both.'

'No. No-one.'

'I see. And have you heard from mother lately?'

'Yes, I spoke to her just last night.'

'And did she say anything?'

'About what?'

'Anything unusual?'

'No. Just the usual. Only the usual. Always the usual. Nothing but.'

'Okay, no don't worry.' Mao Wen Bo looked at the door, feeling a sudden hatred now, for his sister, who it seemed had not received a visit from the abortionist, or at least was lying about this and other things.

'Do you want to hear a secret?' Gu Ting whispered.

'No.'

She ignored him, 'There is no art.'

'Here?' Mao Wen Bo asked. 'Or everywhere?'

'Here,' she nodded. 'The shipment was due over a month ago, on loan from the Port Man Tou Replica Art Museum, but we received nothing.' She lowered her voice conspiratorially, 'the vessel carrying all the art was sunk somewhere in Lake Bao Tou. No-one knows where. These are just fakes and replicas.'

'Do these people know that nothing here is real?'

'No. Only the curator and myself, and mother and now you.'

'Mother?'

'Yes, it was her idea. After I told her that everything sunk. This was her idea.'

Mao Wen Bo had a sudden vision of those crates and boxes and portraits and priceless collections let loose and drifting somewhere out there, or else sunken, like treasures, on the seabed—those French stained glass windows and frescoes from Angkor Wat, and the statues of Christ, of Ganesha and Vishnu, of multi-limbed Bodhisattvas now forgotten and settled at the bottom of the world.

'I have to go,' said Mao Wen Bo suddenly. 'There is a man who is coming to see me tomorrow and I've just now remembered where my papers are kept. He needs to see them, you see. They're all in a file in my room with all the other photocopies. The photocopies, that's all I remember, but that will just have to do...' He trailed off, losing himself in the art that he now found so mesmerising, all of a sudden.

He looked for the door, because it was late, in any case, but the traffic of the crowds disoriented him, and he didn't know where the exit might be, though he realised now that *someone* would know, so he let himself be taken in by the maddening mass that moved, never right to left, or left to right but instead here and there, or here but not there, or there and there alone, going one way and then doubling back, forming groups, lingering, shuffling, dispersing, their lips forming low murmurs of conversation as they continued along their aimless trajectories like autumn leaves along a pavement, their feet inscribing invisible patterns restlessly along the ground.

Notes Toward a Theory of Making

Joan Fleming

Joan Fleming is the author *The Same as Yes* and *Failed Love Poems* (Victoria University Press). Her third collection is forthcoming with Cordite Books. She holds a PhD in ethnopoetics, a project which arose out of historical family ties and ongoing relationships with Warlpiri people in Central Australia.

(Motupipi, Golden Bay, New Zealand)

For a time, I lived in a kind of treehouse in the South Island with a man named Guy. The steps were spongy wood planks stapled over with chicken wire. A goodly crevice in the limestone with a fitted steel lid made our composting toilet. For a couple of months there, all we ate were buckwheat zucchini fritters cooked on the camp gas burner. They were damp and thick as op shop novels.

Guy once arranged a pile of pine and rata wood offcuts into a six-foot block in the bush, just out of sight of the road. His Cube. His brother might have photographed it, but Guy never did. Never would.

He would take his leave of me to make the better part of one of the Great Walks carrying only a sleeping bag and seven cheap muesli bars. One time, his tramping costume was soft white pants, a pair of Le Coq Sportif tennis shoes, and a daffodil-yellow linen shirt. It might have had him mistaken for an Auckland lawyer were it not for the beard and the garden dirt.

He would come back with his eyes in flash like melting glaciers, having made something that never needed to be titled. Was it the walk itself? Or the thought of a book that was written in an instant, in the wind inside his head, and never needed to be made or measured?

///

(Tanami Desert, Central Australia)

You have been in the desert for twenty-four hours, and ten half-moons of dirt feel permanent under your fingernails. The blades of the thighs of your pants are grimed red and black, from the black film the cooking fire leaves on the outside of every pot. After three days, a ring of rust appears at your sock line. This anklet is starker on white skin. The pads of your palms are tougher, and oxide now marks out the fork of the life line, and the lines of the head and the sun and the heart. The red dirt writes a story on you and when you go back to town, it takes a while, but you will wash it off.

///

(Tanami Desert, Central Australia)

A new cooking pot is bought from the shop, and it goes black, and another is bought from the shop, and it goes black, and another is bought from the shop.

We are days out bush and the kids are holding mulberry branches and brushing the red dirt a fair way out from our swags. They are brushing the dirt from the dirt. 'We're sweeping our rooms!' they say.

///

(Melbourne)

With the pleasure of an avoidance activity, I assemble a book of photos on my laptop instead of writing the thesis chapter that feels like a chore. I drag squares of colour into their arrangements: faces, caves, dogs, camp spots. The boxes of text are Alice Nampijinpa's words, Ambrose's translations, my selections. I post the photo book and it is exclaimed over and carried for a time, and then it is lost. Lost, or did it get caught in the rain? I make another and post it and it is carried for a time and then it is lost. *You gotta send that photo book, Nungarrayi*. Every time I visit, I take a new photo book.

///

(Yuendumu, Central Australia)

My grandmother, a missionary's wife, keeps a diary. Every day from 1950–1975, she washes their things. The red dirt comes reluctant out of the linens, the dresses, my grandfather's black preaching pants. In summer, they crisp in a moment. The big, drained Copper bowls the dry heat and it shimmers, a private sun. Every day the dirt comes back. My grandmother writes this as their story.

///

(Tanami Desert, Central Australia)

The desert, for many, is a place of firsts.

One evening, a dog chews the cover off my Kim Scott novel. (My homework.)

Another evening, I haul my suitcase down from the Toyota to get at my notes. There are things tonight I want to capture. Later, I kneel back down to put my notes away, and I see a dog has left a present on the top of the suitcase: a tidy turd.

///

(Melbourne)

Round three of a chronic tonsillitis is fattening my throat. When I move, the world is syrup. I haven't managed to think straight in weeks. Stepping from the kitchen with a cup of tea, I stub my toe and suddenly everything boils and I am a mess on the carpet, inconsolable. I will never make anything again. I have never made enough.

I am spending weeks on an application for a modest promotion at the University where I have taught for nine years. A helpful colleague—throat cleared, shiny as a whistle—gives me a little feedback. 'See this part of your CV? Make sure you quantify it.' Quantify it? 'These poetry prizes—in the right-hand column—put a dollar amount.'

My mother, the doctor, the whiz, the qualified *MENSA* member, calls to see how I'm going. Our conversation resembles a verbal report card: '… and I'm onto the third chapter now… several new poems coming out in …' I build my little popsicle stick city of Things I Have Done. I sing my little song of *worthy, worthy*. The influence is hers; the fault is not.

///

(Wellington, New Zealand)

My mother and I go to see a screening of *The Red Shoes*. The city's fellow captives are beguiling. Her white body makes all the correct forms. The shoes dance her and dance her. She can never stop.

///

(Tanami Desert, Central Australia)

Red dirt is getting in through the hole in the toes of my hiking boots. These boots are the best I have ever had because the hard spine of them has already been broken, but they do need attention. I peel off the duct tape and a glittering crust of red adheres to the residue. It satisfies, to pull off a new length of the silvery tape—its ripping sound, that is the sound of something being mended—and wrap it round again.

Writers Development Program

Westerly presents a selection of writing from the four participants in the 2018 Writers' Development Program. We are proud of the writers' efforts, and grateful for the support of the Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre and the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund.

at the hospice

Kyle Orton

Kyle Orton was born in Western Australia's Gascoyne region and has developed his poetry since his early years. He now lives in Perth with his wife, and enjoys continuing to hone his craft on the porch, mostly of an afternoon.

box flower-beds
broad as bassinets

uniformly rest below
twin rambutans
shading the leaning gate
in a roman fence

I consider eating
a rambutan from the tree
but do not know
its seasons well

when it is sweetest
or at least when less bitter

I am given instead
a small bowl of peach slices

and when she wakes
she sleepily eats
from my fingers
all slick with peach juice
and tobacco

axe handle
Kyle Orton

salvaged wattle
brought to lustre
through savage
use alone

the olive haft
a cruel long bone
that blossomed
from the block
and cast a
deliquescent shadow
in the grass

our Sunday air
all at once chortled
with cordial squalls
of chook-mote

the results
packed into pillow-slips
are slung
over the shoulder

Winning Sadie
Nicole David

Nicole David is a writer and musician from Perth with degrees in fine arts and internet studies. She currently works in digital learning and design at Curtin University.

So I'm standing here with this lottery ticket, and I feed it into the machine, and it goes nuts, just completely nuts, and the guy behind the counter, Neil, who's been taking my lotto money for five years now, ever since he took over the kiosk from his dad, he says, 'So Rufus, how much you won, buddy?' And he looks at the machine, and then he grabs the ticket out of my hand, and then he looks at me, and he starts jumping up and down, and he's shaking the ticket in the air, which kind of makes me really nervous, like if he shakes it too fast it might go up in flames right then and there, and then he's yelling in the middle of the North Penrow Shopping Centre, 'A millionaire! I've made this guy a millionaire!' and he's not looking jealous or pissy or anything, he's just full of joy about the whole thing and I suppose he's thinking he can put up one of those banners now, over his little kiosk, you know, one that says *Division One Winning Lottery Ticket Sold Here.* He calls a news station to come down, and he wants me to stay, but I say I have to go. I like my privacy.

As I drive home, I realise I'd have liked Sadie to see me on the news. I imagine her choked up in front of the telly, realising she's got another thirty years of work to slog through before she retires with a crappy pension cheque and Tuesday Mahjong at the seniors' centre, while I'll be on my yacht, sailing into the sunset, sipping cocktails while some chick hulas around me, scattering rose petals or hundred-dollar bills. Because, you know, people get a whole lot more attractive to the opposite sex when they've got a Swiss bank account. Not to mention all the cosmetic surgery you can afford.

Sadie liked my nose. She said that once. We were on the beach and it was getting late and chilly, but she wanted to watch the sunset because she said it was something she never got to do any more since her dad passed—they used to fish there—and she turned and was looking at me side on, you know, in profile, and I put my hand over my nose and told her

I didn't like being stared at, and she laughed and asked why, and I said I didn't love my nose since all those incidents in high school smashed it up a bunch of times. And she said, *Don't be embarrassed. I like all of you, Rufus, even your nose*. And she took my hand away from my face and squeezed it in hers and went back to the sunset. Just like that. Like she hadn't just said the nicest thing ever to me.

The next morning, after I get off the phone with two lottery officials, I check the local newspaper. Neil is on the third page, hands clasped over his head like he's just won gold at the Olympics. I was buzzing so hard when I got home yesterday that I couldn't decide who to tell first, so I went straight back out and bought the most expensive bottle of whiskey I could find at the Cellar Merchants on Beecham, plus a pair of fancy crystal tumblers. I thought of Sadie when I poured my glass, and hers stood empty on the draining board. Then I thought, of course she'll come if I tell her about my lotto win. Of course she'll turn up all smiles and touchy-feely and interested again. And I'll never really know if it's about me or the money.

Because here's the thing: it wasn't me who bought the lottery ticket. It was Sadie. She sent it for my birthday last week, tucked inside a card as bland as white bread, signed 'Hope you enjoy your day. From Sadie'. No l-o-v-e or scrawled kisses, nothing that might say we'd been together thirteen months and twenty-seven days. Just 'From Sadie'. Two bullets. I guess she thought nobody else would send one, so it was a pity thing, an act of civic kindness. But there's no rule I've ever heard of that says you have to send cards to your exes, even if they're alone, so who knows.

An advisor from the lotteries commission turns up on my doorstep, plus a woman dressed like a social worker whose job it is to *help me adjust emotionally and psychologically* to the win. I'm polite and invite them in, but they're gone in under ten minutes when I make it clear that I don't need or want their help. I'm not an idiot. I'm not one of those instant millionaires who blows it all on cars and women and has nothing left in six months. I know exactly what I want, and I know it will only cost a fraction of what I've won.

His name is Dean Matthew Fitmore and I've seen his silver Lexus parked out the front of Sadie's house seventeen times now, three of them overnight. He works on Barridale Road for Meares & Associates, a law firm specialising in white collar criminal defence, which seems fitting for a man whose fashion crimes are heinous and multiple. He and Sadie went

to high school together. They reconnected online while we were together, and when she talked about him that very first time, I knew straight up he was trouble we didn't need.

There are a few people I could call on. People who know people. You know. My cousin Brett's best friend in high school got done for arson, spent some time away, went from small time to major player by the time he got out. He'd know somebody. Or Charlie West, who grew up in the house across the street from me and joined the police straight out of high school. Charlie knows people. He was always one for poetic justice and he had a gambling debt to rival national debt. I know a lot about Charlie. He owes me.

Of course I'd never really do anything like that.

Instead, I think about what it might be like to meet him in the street. The two of us, face to face. I'd say, *Dean Matthew Fitmore, tell me, how much would it cost for you to leave the country and never come back?* And after he'd laughed and tried to brush me off, I'd take out a wad of cash to show I wasn't fooling around. *I'll give you a million dollars*, I'd say. And his eyes would go all big and he'd start looking around to see if we were on camera or something, and I'd peel off a pile and shove a few grand into the front pocket of his shirt and tell him to start thinking hard. And he'd have to decide what she was worth.

Because I already know he can't care like I do. High school or not, there's nothing like what we had.

We met because she backed into my car. There was barely a scratch, but Sadie left a note and her telephone number. She didn't look surprised when she first met me, didn't stare in that way some people do, just shook my hand and kept saying how sorry she was. I was nice about it. I mean, I knew who she was. I'd seen her walking to and from the apartments across from my place every weekday for months to catch the 407. She kept apologising, so in some bold, mad fit of upper-handedness I said she could make it up to me by buying me a coffee one morning. I knew she couldn't really say no and still seem sorry, so maybe I took advantage, but she grabbed the suggestion like a lifeline and we arranged to walk up to Café Mason that Saturday.

I was sweating by the time we stepped into the cafe, though it was only a block from our homes and mid-autumn. Sadie pointed to a couple of seats by the window, crowded between a couple with a yoghurt-wielding toddler and a family of six hoeing into plates of pancakes. We ordered at the counter—she even asked how I took my coffee—and she bought blueberry muffins, too.

Sadie did all the talking, who she was and what she did and things she liked. I sat back and tried to breathe slowly and listened with my hands around my mug and marvelled at everything. A pigeon landed outside the window and she told me about how her dad used to breed them.

'Does your dad live around here?' I said.

She looked up and opened her mouth, held it that way for a moment, while her eyes started blinking like strobes, and then she closed her mouth and her eyes leaked straight down her pink cheeks, though the rest of her face stayed still.

'I'm sorry,' I said.

She grabbed my hand from across the table and nodded, jaw trembling, water still running, like from taps that need new washers. We sat there like that for maybe fifteen, twenty minutes. Watching the pigeon. Watching the other customers. Watching each other. There were more words coming out of Sadie's mouth, but all I could do was watch the movement of her lips. The waitress came to clear our table and Sadie pulled her hand away, reaching into her bag for tissues to tackle her streaky eyes and red nose.

After the waitress wiped down the table and departed with the tray, Sadie said I was a good listener. I didn't tell her that's only because I never know the right thing to say, so I just keep quiet. People tend to keep on talking when you do that. Occasionally you get a bad silence, when they're waiting for you to step in and douse it with words, and then there are good silences, when you're both just being who you are. We sat in a good silence for a while. Four friends joined the pigeon and they performed a small comedy when a preschooler threw half a bucket of chips out of his pram. A frazzled courier arrived and unloaded crates of milk. A couple of teenage girls dressed for evening instead of nine in the morning danced past waving cigarettes and reams of bangles on their arms.

'Shall we go?' asked Sadie, reaching for her coat. I nodded, and we got up, and she waved to the barista and complimented him on the coffee. Then she reached her arm through mine, as though she had done it a thousand times before, and we set off down the street.

I've decided to tell Sadie I won with her ticket. I want to go to her apartment, but the silver Lexus is parked out the front. She never answers her phone these days, so I decide to catch her after work, like I used to. I get to her office building early and sit in the air-conditioned, marble-floored foyer, leafing through a travel brochure for Barcelona. The receptionist gives me a look over her tortoiseshell glasses, then reaches for the phone.

Two minutes later, Sadie emerges from the elevator at the same time as a security guard. I stand up to meet her. Her hair is unnaturally wavy and she's wearing a dress I haven't seen before: navy, slim-fitting, sleeveless, too short for the office. The security guard stays by the elevator, watching us.

'Rufus.'

'Sadie.' I can't help but smile at her.

'You know you can't be here.'

'I had to tell you something. About the birthday card you sent.'

She glances over her shoulder at the security guard and receptionist. Her cheeks flush. 'I don't know what you're talking about, Rufus.'

I lean in and the guard takes a step towards us, hand on his belt. 'You don't have to pretend,' I whisper. 'I know they're listening. The lottery ticket. I won first division. Seven million dollars, Sadie.'

'That's great. Congratulations. I have to go now.'

'You don't believe me.'

'I do.'

'What do you want? Anything. Just say it.'

She exhales a big puff of air, drags both hands down her face, then hooks them behind her neck, like when she's trying to stave off a migraine.

'You know what I want,' she says. 'I've told you. Repeatedly.'

'Sadie, we can—'

'There's no "WE", Rufus!' She drops her hands. 'There's me and Dean. And then there's you.'

'You don't mean that.'

The security guard is walking towards us. I know I don't have long.

'Tell me,' I say. 'Tell me, how I'm supposed to forget everything? You live across the street! I see his car there. All the time. What do you want me to do?'

'I can't be smothered any more, Rufus.'

'I said I was sorry! Over and over!'

'Enough,' says the guard, wedging a shoulder between us. We're the same height, but his neck is the size of my thigh. 'You need to leave the building now, Mr Keane. You can walk out, or I can escort you. Your choice.'

Sadie's nose is red, like before she starts to cry.

'It's not my choice,' I say. 'None of it.'

I get out the revolving door and onto the street before the inside of my chest swells to the size of a hot air balloon and bursts into a fireball.

Night has always been my worst time. The rattling thoughts start up, keep me awake. Sadie would be snoring lightly, and the window would be open

a little, and the breeze would dance across her bare arm and I'd feel the jealousy rise, that touch, the daring air quivering against the tiny hairs on her forearms, making them stiffen, then sliding across the sheet and passing me by on the way to the kitchen. Sometimes she'd mumble in her sleep and I'd listen, cocked for the sound of a name, or a sigh, or a clue as to what she was dreaming. Sometimes she'd get up in the middle of the night. I'd hear the toilet flush from down the hall, and then she'd take a little too long to come back to bed. I'd ask her when she climbed back in, *Where were you? What were you doing?* And she'd say, *I needed a drink of water*, or *I was just settling the cat*, and I'd think but not say, you never hurry back. And she'd roll over and go to sleep, oblivious to the churning in my head, and I'd lie awake for another two hours with the constant crashing waterfall of dead thoughts splattering their heads open on the concrete of my mind. In daylight Sadie could sense when the shadows were climbing my walls, and she'd shush them with words or hugs or lasagne cooked in her small, disorganised clutter of a kitchen. But not at night.

I jerk awake. Someone is hammering on the back door. I pull on a shirt and jeans as fast as I can. Before she posted her keys back to me, Sadie always came in that door. I hop down the hallway wrestling with the button on my jeans, too big for the slit in the thick denim. I yank open the door and Dean Matthew Fitmore grabs me by the throat and bulldozes me against the wall.

'Don't go near her again,' he spits. He hasn't brushed his teeth or showered. 'Not home. Not work. Not anywhere.' He mashes his full weight against me in a quick, brutal jab, rushing air from my lungs. He steps back and I drop like a deadweight. By the time I stagger onto my knees, he's gone.

I hold an ice-pack covered with a tea-towel against my throat and call Charlie West. I haven't forgotten the things I used to let him stash in our garden shed when we were teenagers and he lived across the street. He picks up on the second ring.

'Senior Sergeant West speaking.'

I introduce myself. I hear low, conversational background voices being cut off by the slam of a door.

'Rufus. Mate. Been a while.'

'I need to see you.'

'Yeah, look. We should catch up sometime. Pretty busy right now.'

'Charlie, you always said you owed me, and—'

'Yeah righto, you helped me out, that time, with fixing the car up and all that.'

I wonder if the police monitor incoming calls. I've never been near his car.

'You still living in Benorah?' he continues.

'Yes.' I can hear him tapping on his desk, a pen or his nails or something.

'Okay,' he says. 'That place we used to drink. I'll call by.'

'Tonight?'

'Maybe. Sure. See what I can swing.'

'I can pay.'

'Sorry Rufus, can't hear a—'

And the line goes dead.

I buy a bottle of water at the bar because I want to stay focused. I sit in a booth near the back where I can see people coming and going. I don't recognise Charlie straight away, but I know his walk—I see it as soon as he heads for the bar—and I get up and call him over.

I settle a dark ale on the scratched wood before him and slide back into my seat. Charlie's gotten grey and sinewy. He always wanted to use his father's bench press but wasn't allowed to touch it. I tell him all about Sadie, then about Dean Matthew Fitmore, and finally about the money. His eyes keep wandering over to the pokies until I tell him about the cash parked in my bank account, and the chunk of it in the backpack beside me.

'You for real?' he says, leaning in. 'Seven *million*? Shit.' He scratches his chest. 'What you gonna do with it? I mean, you got debts? Family? Dependents or anything?'

'Just me. Well, me and Sadie.'

'But she's with this Dean guy, yeah?'

I lift my chin and unbutton my collar so he can see where Dean Matthew Fitmore's hands have been.

'Righto. You want to file assault charges?'

'No.' I button my shirt. 'I can pay. Whatever you want.'

Charlie lifts his pint and takes a swallow. 'I'll remind you, Rufus Keane, that you're talking with a member of the Australian Federal Police.'

'Three million,' I say.

'I see it every day. Blokes trying to stake out territory that's not theirs. Plenty more fish in the sea, Rufus, and maybe you need to hire a scuba suit and a dive instructor to find a good one, but if you've got the dough…'

'I don't want anyone else. You don't get it. You of all people are meant to get it. I remember you with Suzanne.'

Charlie leans sharply across the table and pounds a coaster like a gameshow buzzer. 'Wrong,' he says. 'You don't remember shit. And you'd best keep it that way.'

'My memory's fine.'

Charlie starts blinking like he's got something in both eyes. 'That your idea of a threat?'

'I'm just saying. You owe me.'

Charlie levers back against the booth seat. 'You're going to wake up tomorrow, if you're lucky, and know this was a bad idea. You're going to remember who you were speaking to. And you'll get up and go out and buy a ticket to Bermuda or Spain or fucking Adelaide for all I care, but you're going to stay away until you're ready to pull your head out of your arse. If this Dean guy's as bad as you think, he'll dig his own grave.'

'I kept a diary,' I say. 'Stuff you stored at our place, dates and times, who delivered, who collected, how much cash they left under that plastic rock when I wasn't home.'

Charlie breathes through his nostrils, presses his mouth into a rigid seam. It's a bad silence that follows, a long one. I wait. Finally, Charlie swears, shoves himself out of the booth, puts his beer breath in my ear and says what I want to hear.

Two nights later I duck under the safety fencing and walk down to the condemned multi-storey with my backpack, like Charlie said. The black Commodore is already there, engine idling, lights off, one guy in the driver's seat and another behind him in the back. I stick my head in the passenger window.

'Rufus?'

'Yeah. You two cops, as well?'

The men look at each other.

'Sure,' says the one in the back. 'Get in. We can't talk here.'

I get in the front seat. As I fasten my seatbelt, I'm thinking about Sadie. I'm wondering if there's something in her that knows what's about to happen, that can sense that the world is about to change. And I wonder how soon it will be, exactly how long, before she notices that the guy she thought she loved is gone.

August Instructional

Andrew Sutherland

Andrew is a writer and theatre practitioner working between Western Australia and Singapore. Theatre works include *Poorly Drawn Shark* (winner of the Blaz Award for New Writing 2019), *Unveiling: Gay Sex for Endtimes*, and *Chrysanthemum Gate*. His poetry and prose can be found in numerous publications including *Overland*, *Visible Ink*, *Suburban Review*, *Muse/A*, and *~Bosie*.

Proposition: ghosts are constantly eating you alive.
Quantifier: you do not have enough substance as a human being to provide a ghost with any real nourishment.

1. you feel a ghost biting your lower lip.
2. you bite your lower lip.
3. your mouth is now a ghost.
4. you affix your bone structure somewhere along the tipping-point between sexy and spooky.
5. you hear some ghosts mutter that they don't find you sexy *or* particularly spooky.
6. you (non-verbally) invite the ghosts to chew upon your eyeballs.
7. you take a selfie. exposure: spooky. shadows: spooky/sexy. cool-tone filters: you decide.
8. there is now both more and less of you to be consumed; the universal quantifier, proved true and false, implodes. there is no such thing as ghosts. now, you are the ghost.
9. you perform a throaty *ooo* and jangle your imaginary chains all the way into September.

as if you were a pharaoh

Andrew Sutherland

i.

Leaving the cinema, Jay and I walk by wetlands, hands held against the trace of Hollywood's tears. *Don't you think*, I ask of the film, *that he was really a bad man*? An ibis wanders by the edges of my vision. *No, baby*, Jay responds. *I think he was a very sick man*. I agree, then let it go. The ibis hits the centre of my sight. I tell Jay we call the bird *bin chicken*. He repeats the phrase slowly and then nods, satisfied that this is true. *In my country*, he says, *there are no more*. Half-mournful and half-laugh: *because we ate them all*. I'm not sure how he means for me to react, but I cry at a lot of jokes—and I guess I cry at tragedies, too.

ii.

in Margaret River,

what love you bear
is stomped with grapes.
old soil enforced, returning
with a newfound ease.

and truth: it leans too close.

keep house content, then
shut your sheep-mind down.
all that pressure—lightning
storms that never strike.

you make a river, which
shall never reach the sea.

family is elastic.

numbered here, the dirt-white flock:
grown thirteen, twelve, and ten, and eight.

iii.

The far-stretched beak: curved into a mud-black scythe. Match the balding head; the shade that sprints along the neck to cede the black for feather-white. And then, the deep-skinned red, ringed in orbits, rounding eyes; or tucked away beneath the wings. A long-clawed foot, sharp-scaled and resting gently on a set of scales. The bones of fish are made to slide inside, bathed in garbage; waterfalls of disappearance. More pressure on the rust-gold scales, and a croak escapes to hover with the urban breeze. Perhaps it sounds like: *Everyone is sick. Not everyone mistakes a shotgun for a sneeze.* And now the bird tips forward to the liquid waste; delicately tastes the murk. It's there:

nesting somewhere beyond death, the wet-
lands slowly drain; anticipate the quake.

There is a Wonderful Game

Michelle Symes

Michelle Symes has been published in the former *Review of Australian Fiction* and selected to participate in the 2018 Westerly Writers Development Program and the 2019 Katherine Susannah Pritchard/Varuna Foundation Fellowship. Michelle is writing a novel through a PhD program at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. She has a background in journalism (*The Age*, AAP), documentary creation and corporate communications.

There are impressions of him everywhere. Traces of his grace in her glass teapot from which they'd drink cardamom tea. God in Arabic blesses her from the wall of her open-plan dining room. Around her neck, despite the hot weather, she wears his blue and pink scarf, the blue that matches her eyes; his scarf, which reminds her of their sunsets, and her desperate wish that difference, like day and night, could unite in cycles forever.

She returns to her writing, pauses to stare through the French doors, to the shapes of her courtyard: green foliage in shade and sun. A breeze shifts, leaves change to light, become leaves again, light; just shapes of colour moving that she can't hear, and without the sound they make no sense.

She takes a break from her writing, retrieves a peach from the fridge. It's rouged pink against a pale orange-yellow. She chops it, places the chunks in a bowl. Outside on the front porch, she eats, slowly, licks the juice from her fingertips, and it's as though she's eating a sunset.

He sends her a text in Arabic. She translates it, and it reads *I love you*. She replies back in English: *I love you*.

That night she walks the street as if she's walking inside herself. There are no sounds but crickets, frogs and her thoughts, shifting in the distortions of light and shadow. She tries to remember when she felt loved like this and she sees a silhouetted outline of her mother holding her as a baby, reflected in a night-time mirror. She tries to remember that sensation of being held, but the outline of her mother disappears.

She goes to his apartment to chance a meeting. His light shines in the night like a moon. He is home. There is no movement. It's 11pm. A person from a 24-hour gym comes out of a nearby building. He stares at her sitting in the car, looking up to the two-storey moon, and then gets in his car and leaves. She leaves soon after.

In the morning, she thinks about him on her way back from the beach, lets her hands steer her car to the same car park by his apartment that gave her the perfect view of his balcony. She feels ridiculous but she stares anyway. Off in the distance, she sees a man walking with a hat. But it isn't him. She keeps watch for his car in her rear-view mirror. She sees someone come out on a bike, and it could be him; they are swarthy, they have a beard, he could have grown a beard by now. But the bike is black. She is sure his is white. He rides towards her. It could be him. What if it is him? A spring inside her prepares her to jump out of her car, to alert him, to say look, I'm here. He comes forward skinnier in the face, younger too. Not him, and again she leaves.

She takes herself to the cemetery, the grass waving in the breeze. It follows her like a ghost. When they first started dating, Aamir wanted her to take him to see her mother's grave. She remembers that when he asked, she'd found it strange. It had felt like the proposed visit had more to do with him than her. A way to share a moment that might bring them closer together. He was always thinking of ways to bring them closer together.

There is no-one else at the cemetery. Her mother's grave does not have a tombstone. Rachel wanders for more than an hour onto the perimeters of the Catholic section, the Muslim section, before returning to the Protestant section. She is looking for an enormous Norfolk pine tree. Her father told her he'd planted a cone, and that it had taken root. That was twenty years ago. The tree must be fully grown now, but there isn't any pine tree anywhere.

She sits on the edge of the cemetery and watches grass wander and sway to the river. In branches above, crows are crowing. Rachel's hands have started absently turning dirt over and into the air. There's relief in repetition, in watching the repetition of her hands in dirt, of the collecting and falling, collecting and falling.

She lays herself on the ground, folding herself into shapes of shell and snail. Crows break the air with barbwire sounds and Rachel lies in the shade, listening; listening to the repetition inside her.

Again, last night, the rain marched down in thick welts and drenched all colour from form, greens of gardens and reds of brick houses all doused

to grey. Outside her kitchen window, light shines in water held poised on vine buds. When she touches droplets, they disappear.

She walks down to the river, kneels on the grey sand. It's cold. The river laps thin vowel sounds, hardly discernible but reassuring nevertheless. She holds herself and she sways, as if she's a river. She feels like a cloud on that river, and like sticks or bones, like eel and mud, like clay; she's the clay and she's been here for hundreds of thousands of years. And it's all running over her. It's time, in all its detritus, running over her. It will soon be gone. And she lets her body tremor; and the tears, more ghosts of her mother leaving her.

In bed that night, she's restless, her body so hot under the cotton sheets that she sticks her feet out to let them breathe. Through the window she can see night, grey and indeterminate, like campfire smoke. She gets up. It's the beginning of Spring but it's still cold, and the pane mists beneath her breath. She rubs a porthole view. Then, without thinking, her finger writes, *I am here*.

She used to think her father could protect her. In her bed she would sleep so neatly, like a matchstick, and she would dream that the man who took the other girl, the girl about her age in a suburb in Melbourne not so far from her, would come in the night and steal her, would slip through her closed and latched window, and carry her matchstick self away.

She used to think her father could protect her. When she was as thin as a matchstick, and shaking within from the unkindness of the world, it was he who would kneel with his elbows on her bed, hold his hands in a prayer, and listen. Capture her tremors like bugs in the low light of his cupped hands; never killing them, just letting them crawl and fly away to a place they belonged. Into the night air.

A girl in white silk curls around the corner on her bike like a kite, and picks up speed, circling legs in air. Rachel smells the breeze. It's a mix of salt and heated sand and sunscreen. She breathes it in, lets it travel into her, warm and friendly, and she hopes.

She feels the sand like grains of water; in the water her toes wriggle like fish, then she has no feet, no legs, then she's flying over water through light, sun-baked and scooped until she's immersed in waves, a good distance from the shore. She rolls onto her back, not thinking, just going with it, letting herself be nothing but glinting sun, and she closes her eyes and breathes; she's filling herself with quiet, this big and wide kind of quiet, and it sounds like water breaching against her body, swaying her; her skin murmuring in the water, making sounds of infinity, and she smiles and feels as big as the world.

Back on the shore, she collects her things. She has things she must do, but she stops to take one more look. She's staring at the few other beachgoers. A middle-aged couple, him asleep on a towel, with nothing covering his back. She assumes it's his wife sitting on the beach chair. His wife gazes out to sea. Rachel gazes too, into the blue, let's it all in, this light; breathes.

When a white seagull spreads its wings in sunlight, a beautiful shade of gold fans the air.

They meet again. In a café and bar in Fremantle. He's dressed in his check shirt—this one tan, with matching tan jeans. His shirt tucked in. She never really liked that. And loafers. Always a tad conservative. She sits. He smiles.

He likes her bag, its colour of pink and green. Her blue shirt and patterned trousers. She's started wearing more colours. She purchased these items while in Spain and after touring the Alhambra, wondering at the Muslim influence and thinking of him. Always thinking of him.

She observes a ring on his little finger. It's a silver band with an opening. He says someone told him it stopped snoring.

'Is it working?'

He says, 'I don't know, I don't hear myself,' and smiles.

The waitress asks if they want wine. Not looking at him, she orders a coffee and he a sparkling water.

Glasses of tap water are also placed on the table. She puts her hand out to touch the ends of his fingers. It's a game they play now they're not a couple. He puts the glass of water in between. Their fingers move the water for a moment. They're both smiling. But not really. She can feel that soft part of him is closed away.

There's more small talk.

He says, 'Let's not talk about our past.' His face turns away, scrunches up, as if the past is a discarded piece of paper.

He says, 'I need to go at 6.30.' Which gives them an hour. She wants to ask why. But doesn't.

Not long after, he says, 'So what did you want to see me about?'

'Oh, nothing. I just wanted to see you.'

He talks about his new business. She gives him suggestions. He's looking at her, nodding, but she can see other thoughts firing.

'We are good friends,' he says.

Later they walk to Bread in Common, where they first met.

Everything is always like old times.

'You remember when you tried to get me to walk into here,' he says, indicating with his head the pornography shop. He's trying to be funny. She notices he keeps trying to be funny.

She's seeing his profile, his pouting lips, his skin like water. His softness next to his resilience.

He buys a long bread stick which they pull apart by hand and eat as they walk up the street again.

She says, 'Will you walk with me to the bookshop? I'm buying a book on love for my book club.'

He says, 'I don't need to read about love, I just feel it.'

While they wait for the book to be retrieved, he comments on the poster behind the counter. The sepia profile image of a Sikh in a red turban, with the word AUSSIE in capital letters.

He says, 'I like the poster. At least here it doesn't get vandalised.'

She buys the book.

The shops are beginning to close and the streets are emptying to a grey light. She sees a bench across the road.

'I want to show you something. Let's sit over there.'

He nods, she feels like she's dragging him behind her. She pulls out the book he gave her on their temporary wedding day. *I Heard God Laughing*, by Hafiz. He sees the cover. Turns his head away.

'I want to show you this poem I discovered called "There is a Wonderful Game".' She hands it to him. 'It's about difference meeting.'

He reads it. Shrugs. 'Ah Hafiz,' he says. His eyes skate over it. He looks up at her, and for a moment he's Aamir again, his mouth and his eyes fill her and she's surprised because he'd said so clearly, let's not go there. It's only when the moment is gone. When the tenderness disappears, she realises the possibility of a kiss in the air. She missed it. If she'd been conscious of it, would she have gone there?

He was going to walk home, but then agrees to her offered lift. She offered it before, and now he is accepting it.

When she drops him off, he gets out, quickly. She watches him in her passenger seat, through her dirty window turning to mud in a surprise fall of rain. He looks like he's just going to keep going, but he turns to walk around to the front of the car, and she opens her door. She gives him a hug, he half turns from her, 'Don't touch me too much.' Then he's walking away, his head down, smiling, and she's getting back into the car. Rain has got on her Hafiz book, and she's wiping it away, then kissing her fingertips.

This Path Is Our Season Tonight

Jill Jones

Jill Jones' most recent books are *Viva the Real*, *Brink*, *The Beautiful Anxiety*, which won the Victorian Premier's Prize for Poetry in 2015, and *Breaking the Days*, which was shortlisted for the 2017 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. In 2014 she was writer-in-residence at Stockholm University.

Lone or in love, I've cursed much. Still,
Androgynous dusk. my lips work, the hankering
Its flickery shadow spoken. Flowers explode.
pathway among bat squeak. Even if we fall away
Argumentative dark. past the gates. Still, you're
A swooping conversation. here, crazy here.
Whispering cell light into your hand, or starlight.
Murmurs half-woken. Even if sky demands dark.
Walk and joke past pine Yes, I await you even
and oak. Flowers sigh in storms. Shall we kiss
before they bloom and in rickety bliss? O queer night
explode once more. warm us, keep us in keeping.
Up in the galaxy sea, stars reform. More than
Haze rewrites other couples as thought is born.
human waft, pink half-light. Our cloudy mouths waft
Blackbird and cicada sing an attitude. Then clarity
along with a stray dog, and clears our tongues.
our bent season. Midnight shakes out its angels.

A Sorry Business

Chelinay Gates

Dr Chelinay Gates (aka Malardy) is an Australian Indigenous doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, hypnotist, artist, author and book illustrator. Inspired by her four amazing children, she is committed to uniting with and giving voice to the collective wisdom of the older creative woman.

'Hey, Lucky-Child, want some?'

A long, bright red tongue stuck out of Jacob's mouth like some disgusting ice-pole. I was gently closing the door to St Mary's Church so that the candle I'd lit for my dad wouldn't blow out, when I heard Rhys yell out from behind.

'Black Bitch!'

Them white guys were closing in on me.

I leapt over the low cyclone fence to the left of the jacaranda tree and as my bare feet hit the hot red dirt, I legged it. Me and Frankie, we've got 'trackers' legs, just like Dad. Long, black chopsticks with knees thicker than my thighs and bony as.

Scared shitless, I couldn't let them catch me. Watching my long black legs stride out from under me, I realised they were being driven, not by me, but by that old gut memory of being *taken*. Leaving them bastards for dust, an ancient grief poured out of me. Sobbing, I kept running, not for me, but for my dad and every blackfella who's ever had to run for their life.

As clear as anything, the story Dad told us about being taken, came to life before my eyes. He was sleeping with his parents on his mother's Country way up north, past One Arm Point, the night he was taken. The Government truck drove over the sand dunes with its bright yellow headlights bobbing up and down to the weird sound of grinding gears. That same monster that had been visiting Dad's dreams several nights before.

Parents grabbed their sleepy kids, trying to hide them whilst begging them to 'stay put' and 'be quiet'! Dazzled by the headlights, cold and frightened and choking on the thick blue smoke from the waterlogged fires, Dad stumbled out of his hidey-hole.

The first catch of the night, he was easy pickings. He never forgot the sickly smell of cheap cologne, cigarettes and rancid beer on the breath of the man who snatched him up and threw him into the back of the truck's metal box. Soon, every child from that small community had been rounded up and locked in.

The kids could hear the adults pleading and fighting with the strangers.

'Alang! Alang!' (South! South!) Dad could never forget his mother's final words, warning that the children were being taken south. The driver planted his foot. There was a thud. His mother's voice was silenced. Blood-curdling screams echoed in from all sides. The truck lurched over a large hump and sped off into the night.

The rains had come in early and the roads were difficult to cross and the drive seemed to last forever. The truck stopped at a small landing where the kids were transferred onto a boat that set off into a raging sea. The kids knew if they wanted to see their families again, they'd have to jump ship.

Holding hands, all twelve stepped into the dark, angry sea. Petrified, the instinct to swim left them. As their small bodies broke through the surface of the water, the little girl clutching Dad's right hand was swept away. As they sank below the surface, the boy's hand he was holding with his left became cold and stiff. Dad let it go.

The darkness of the sea consumed him. Sinking downward, he heard a distant clap of thunder and believed he too would die. Suddenly, a flash appeared in the water above him. Facing the light, he saw a *jingi* (spirit being) materialise, and as it reached down to touch him, the sea became electrified as if fire and water were battling for space.

Then in that dream-like state, something soft snuggled up to him. In the inky blue water, his mother's young face smiled sweetly at him. Lost in the darkness of her eyes, he felt himself rising quickly through the water, breaking the surface into a lightning filled sky.

Probably a dugong swam in and brought him up from the deep, but to my dad it was his mother's last embrace.

The next day, he surfaced to a new life in Beagle Bay Mission Hospital, north of Broome.

Standing over him, a man in a suit kept asking him in English, 'What's your name? Come on blackie, what's your name?'

Still in shock, Dad kept repeating his mother's last words, 'Alang... Alang.'

'Righteo, Alan it is.' Turning to the German Priest, he said, 'So out of all them bastards, this little mongrel survived. Lucky hey? Now there's a name, "Lucky-Child". I'm putting that to paper. I reckon he's about seven, what do you think?'

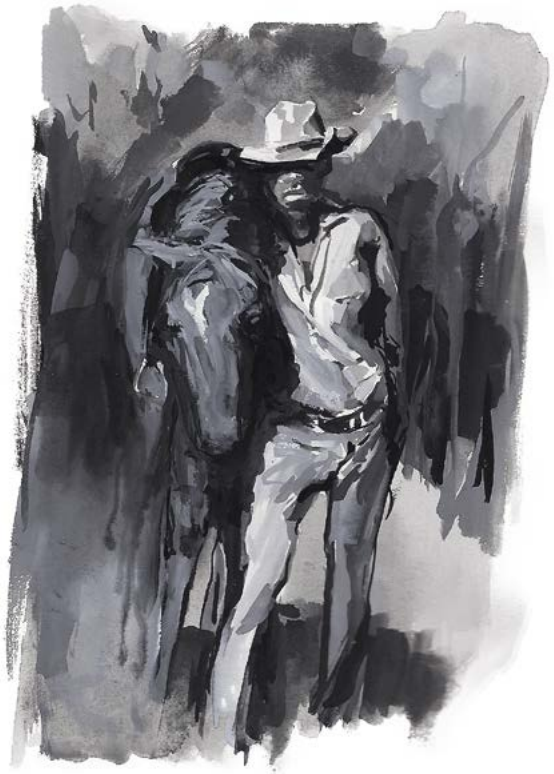
The priest shrugged. With the stroke of an official's pen, Dad became 'Alan Lucky-Child', born at Beagle Bay Mission on 5th April, 1961.

I suddenly realised that when you don't know *who* you really are, you can never become *who* you're really meant to be.

Glancing behind me, I realised I'd left Rhys and his mates for dust. I slowed down to a walk, happy to see the old mustering yard was just ahead. It was hot and humid and the air was thick with the intoxicating scent of the Giant Frangipani, mixed lightly with the smell of fresh manure and hay. She, the frangipani, lured me into her shadowy canopy to rest.

There, I put my bum to ground and deeply inhaled her sweet elixir. I was ready to talk to the spirits of those past, like our mob have always done.

As this world evaporated, I saw a glimpse of a spinifex fire threatening a cattle station just outside the township. In a whirl of dust the stockmen rode in fifty strong. Dad sat tall in the saddle leading his troop and as they thundered past, he turned to me and smiled.



Transported back to childhood, I went with him to tend the horses on the cattle station just outside the township. Dad blew out deep airy sound from his lips like raspberries and his horse, Lightning, pricked his ears and came in close beside Dad's long, bony body. Dad tapped Lightning's flank and the horse raised his hoof for inspection and a clean.

As Dad brushed him down, they puffed and snorted at each other, and with each snort, they moved like a dance to *a music of the wind*. I sat on a hay bale watching them, hypnotised by the rhythm. Finally, I fell asleep to the sweet, heady smell of molasses and chaff, and the airy sound of horse and man.

I remembered the good times, when Dad was happy, we were all happy. He would light a camp fire in our yard and the billy would be boiled for fresh tea. Dad made the deadliest damper ever—a tube of dough pressed around a stick and held over the fire until crispy and piping hot. Then we'd pull it off the stick and fill it with a knob of butter and strawberry jam. Yum!

This was yarning time. He would get his old baccy tin down from the kitchen shelf behind the flour bin and show us photos of him herding cattle from the old Country. He'd packed a million stories into his short life and he'd ridden the miles to match. But his only legacy was bandy legs and rider's crotch and a fail-safe salve from an old tracker called Sniffer.

'It keeps the bones strong like steel, them muscles firm as. No more stiffness, pain and balding, and it makes ya tackle work like a young buck's.'

> You mix up:
> 2 cups of emu oil
> 1/2 cup of goanna oil
> 1 cup of camel testicle oil
> 1/4 cup of Dragon's Blood (the resin from the Dragon's Blood Tree)

When the cattle stations fired the black stockmen, my dad lost his dignity and part of his will to live. 'The deepest thoughts,' he'd say, 'come to a man when he's on his own.'

Lying back against the trunk of the frangipani tree, I ran my fingers through the warm red sand and I imagined him riding this vast land, in tune to an ancient rhythm that us townies couldn't hear.

I knew the rising sun gently called him into the saddle and the heat of the day would make him rest up. Watching the colours of the setting sun always melted his heart and would bring a tear to his eye, and with a lump in his throat, he'd tell us, 'When the darkness comes in, all the little

creatures find their voice. That's when ya know ya never alone.' Sitting round the fire, billy boiling, yarning with his mates about the old days would take him back to his home out on the plains where the *bundarra* (stars) seemed so close, you could reach out and touch each one.

It's a long way between drinks when you're herding cattle across the Top End, everyone you meet is a real character, no-one's normal. They've all run away from something, people, places and things. Out there, in the land *beyond beyond*, our Country moulds them so they become a part of the landscape.

Dad was a natural actor and could mimic anyone, even animals. When he'd spin a yarn into his stories, we'd all be fixed to the spot, even the coppers, time would stop and he'd let you ride with him on his amazing journeys.

Like every good stocky, he could sing, play the guitar and gyrate his hips like Elvis, women couldn't take their eyes off him. But Dad's voice had a special something. If he hummed in a certain way, thousands of bush cockroaches would line up side by side, head to tail, covering the ground. To them cockroaches and most animals, he was God.

The old fellas said, Dad had the mark of fame, a big gap between his front teeth and a beauty spot under his right eye. But when you're *julgia* (broken) and lost, your luck sours and people know you for the wrong sort of acting out.

When his mood was starting to head south, he'd get out the old mouth organ. I'd feel my emotions rising long before his big black lips touched the silver edge to play. When he'd gently breathe all his sadness into that thing, a melancholy would descend over our house. Mum and us kids knew that our tin roof and the four walls that we called home, was in fact his prison that made his heart real sick. Although he was free to go, he couldn't leave.

So, to forget who he *really* was, he drank. But the drink never let him forget. Instead it made him wild with rage, and later, angry with shame.

Looking back at the church I'd just run away from reminded me of how my dad could love something and hate it at the same time. Like, he hated the church because they killed his mother and abused the little kids they stole, but he loved Baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary. When he was battling his demons and needed time out, if he wasn't in jail, you'd find him kneeling in front of the statue of Mary Mother of Peace holding Baby Jesus on the pearl-shell altar at St Mary's. That's where I'd lit a candle and said a little prayer for him.

Turning to face the ocean, the salt water in my veins responded. Lurching to my feet, I couldn't resist the urge to walk, as if magnetically drawn to Town Beach, the place where my *rayi* (soul) found its home in my mother's womb sixteen years ago.

Standing at the town end of the beach, a chill ran through me. The memories of that night, 13th October last year, hit me like a *jakiny* (barbed spear) through the chest. Mum was frustrated because we'd all just come back from fishing and Dad was already drunk. She threw her bucket of fish on the floor and yelled, 'Stop the fucking grog and get a job!'

'You don't know what it's like to be stolen,' he sobbed.

Fired up, Mum raised her voice like never before. 'Get over yourself! I don't know my father and my mother disowned me when I did *wrong way marriage* to you!'

'Fuck off!' he spat in her face. Looking real mean, he hissed at her, 'I've had a gut full of people tellin' me what not to do...' He landed the first blow. Then beat her like never before. As always, she suffered in silence.

Frankie had turned seventeen just two days before. He was six foot two and insane with rage. I saw him close his eyes and take an almighty swing at his father. Dad had taught him how to box. Frankie had learnt well and didn't hold back, he punched Dad with every bit of his strength. Crying and sobbing, blinded by tears he kept punching Dad again and again.

'FUUUCKING STOP! STOP! YOU'RE KILLING HIM!' we screeched.

Crying and scared, we didn't know what to do. A neighbour called the cops and his sons, Big Ben and Fridge, grabbed Frankie and took him down and put a stranglehold on him. Finally the fight left him. Breathing hard, he eyeballed Dad.

Dad's chest was heaving, crying softly he whispered, 'It's okay, son, it's okay.'

It felt like Dad was trying to tell Frankie that he forgave him. I reckon everyone knows that sort of forgiveness. It's like when your dog snaps cos you touch his bone. He can't help himself, even though he loves you.

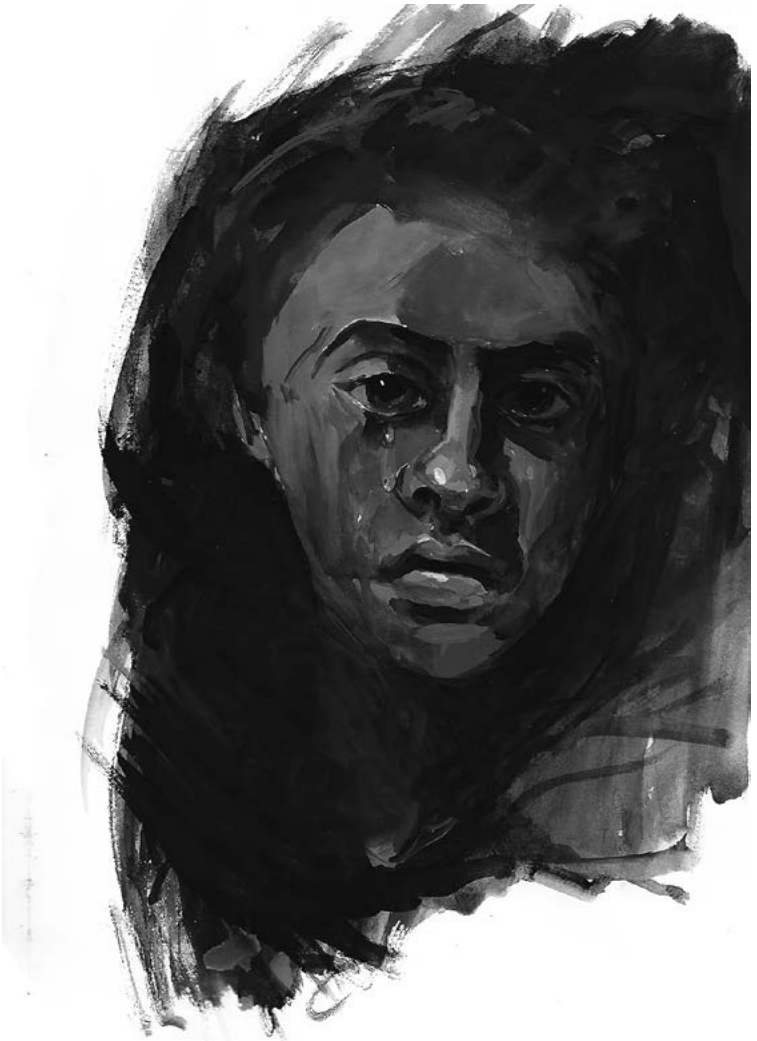
Frankie's survival instinct to fight his way out of every painful situation had kicked in mighty strong and he, like Dad, couldn't help himself.

The cops stormed in all savage-like. No questions asked; they just put the boots into Dad over and over and over again. The thud of metal-toed boot against Dad's head and chest was sickening.

Frankie was shouting, 'STOP! FUCKING STOP! Dad, don't die! I'm sorry. Shit, please STOOOP!'

Wailing loudly, our grief made everything feel unreal. I felt like my soul had left the room and was listening from outside in the yard.

The coppers were in a frenzy. I even heard one fella shout out his wife's name as he sunk another blow. Everyone seemed to be acting out



something from their past, everyone except Dad. They couldn't stop themselves. With Dad's last bit of willpower, he looked at Frankie with love like I'd never seen before. He looked soft. Gentle-like. Compassionate like the Virgin Mary. Nah, I think it was like how his mother's eyes must have looked at him under the water that night when he was stolen and almost drowned. The night he became a 'Lucky-Child'.

Dad tried to speak but he was choking on the blood pouring out of his mouth. He turned his head slightly, and his eyes rolled to the back of his head. He coughed a spurt of blood. His body suddenly looked heavy and strangely still. A blue mist rose out of his chest. It seemed to be attached to a gold thread that broke off and hovered in the air above him as if to say goodbye. I even think 'it' felt sorry for us. And then it was gone. Everyone stood for a minute in deadly silence, even the cops.

The spell was broken and the cops silently dragged Dad's sad, *unlucky* body into the paddy wagon. All the while, Frankie was screaming, 'Oh God! No! No! I killed my dad! I'm sorry, Oh God! No!'

Strangely it sounded like he was screaming into a brown paper bag, with the volume turned down by our grief. The misery of that moment shut out the noises of life. Poor Frankie felt so guilty. He loved Dad so much, maybe even too much. How could he, the favourite child, kill his own dad? How could he live with himself now?

That night he punched his fist through every door and wall in our house. His hands were swollen and bloody and, strangely, his gut instinct was to reach for Dad's healing salve. As he applied the salve it was as if he became Dad that night.

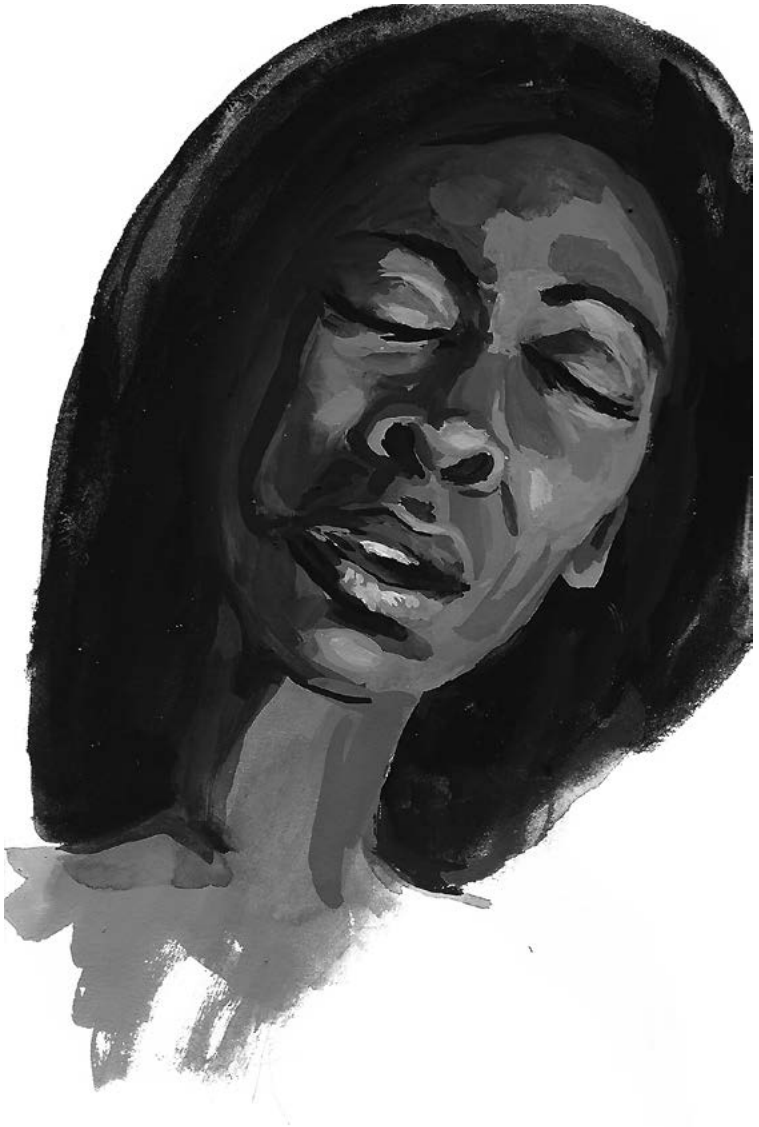
He still keeps up the oiling tradition and carries a photo of himself as a little kid riding bareback with Dad. That photo is like Frankie's relic. It's wrapped multiple times in glad wrap and kept in his left shirt pocket close to his heart. He kisses it for good luck and rubs it gently over his lips when he is worried.

The coppers came back the next day to announce to everyone that, 'Mr Alan Lucky-Child from Beagle Bay died in his cell on the night of the thirteenth of October.'

We all knew differently.

But there was no point protesting about it. What could we say about that night that made us more innocent than them? Dad was *julgia* (broken), and if you're black and *julgia*, you're proper broken and your life won't end up well.

The Elders came to do 'Sorry Business'. Old Mr Rowe, the King of Anne Street, gently placed his hand on Mum's shoulder, turning her around to



look at him, and in a deep, soothing voice, he whispered, 'Hey Mary, my daughter, it's okay. You've had a lot of Sorry Business already.'

A long sound of grief escaped her body, like wind blowing through the gaps in the louvres above my bed. I knew that they were talking about an *old secret,* but I didn't know what. I was lost in that dark space of not knowing when the King started speaking in Language. I listened hard, but I couldn't understand what was being said.

Suddenly that moment was lost to the sound of men clapping sticks and singing, accompanied by women wailing. The singing made the grief become more real, more physical. The air became thicker and we poured out of our little tin house, which felt too small, too rigid, too much like a prison to contain the expanding energy of grief.

Outside, the 'Sorry Business' song led us in a trance down to Town Beach and along past the old jetty to where the rocks left the mangroves. In the setting sun my heart melted. The piercing sound of the sticks beating against each other, and the harsh sounds of the men's song perfectly woven into the women's shrill wailing seemed to vibrate and drag out the pain and loss from every hidden crack in my spirit.

The monotonous, unrelenting sound of the men singing 'Sorry Business' then undoes all the threads that hold you together. You can't think, and the clapping of sticks goes against your heartbeat, setting you adrift like a small boat. And in that sea of sound, deep wounds heal and the emptiness makes you feel free to start over. Finally, you breathe again and it's as if the whole thing was just a dream and it's hard to find where that unbearable pain used to live.

That night I could see my dad walk across the water at Town Beach and step into that setting sun.

Free of life's pain, he was reborn. For me it was like all the bad memories of my angry, misfit father slipped away and were washed in that light, and for the first time I understood that '*this blackfella belong me*'.

Standing in the cool water, little fish darted around my feet. Slowly raising my head, my eyes breathed in deeply the turquoise sea and in that moment, I knew straight away that this salt water girl, Lucy Lucky-Child, knows *where* she's come from and *who* she really is.

The Settler Colonial Farm Novel in Australia

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth

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The relationship of Australian literature to rural hinterlands is generally captured, both within criticism and popular parlance, by reference to the concept of the bush. This slightly amorphous concept is essentially understood in negative terms to encompass everything that is *not* a city. Wilderness and country towns, deserts and mountains, farms and stations, remote Aboriginal communities and peri-urban peripheries are all at times imagined as being (in) the bush. As Don Watson put it: 'The bush is everything from a gum tree to any of the creatures that live in it or shelter beneath it, and it is the womb and inspiration of the national character' (66). The bush is a denominator of sociological, ecological and economic difference, and invoked in debates as diverse as water policy and telecommunications, wind-farms and youth suicide. It occupies the space set aside for 'regions' in other nations and traditions and shares some of the class dimensions that Raymond Williams identified as being central to a 'regional' identity. And in Australia, too, the bush is often a synonym and a metonym of 'the regions' or 'regional Australia'. The fact that a concept can have such a protean and omnivorous application, stretching over much of the continental mass of Australia and transecting debates in national policy, reminds us that the bush has a central and ongoing ideological function within Australia as a settler nation. It operates, in short, as a continuously available and infinitely malleable support to public moral assertions. Somewhat paradoxically, as well as being ubiquitous, the bush is also unique, in the sense that the bush is imagined as being uniquely Australian, and even that which makes Australia unique, 'the source of the nation's idea of itself' (Watson 66). An essence, in other words. The particular status of the bush is not upheld in abstract terms but manifests at every level of national discourse, and is sustained by cultural products from both elite and popular dimensions of social life in Australia. From reality television (*The Crocodile Hunter*, *Farmer Wants a Wife*) to popular rural romance novels written for women ('ru-ro', 'chook-lit'; see Martin), on the one hand, to the most revered movements in painting, literature and cinema, on the other, the bush runs like a grey-green thread through the Australian cultural imaginary.

Certainly, the bush has been a major trope in Australian literature, and perhaps its most sustained field of imaginative investment. In this essay, however, I would like to expand on this to consider the representation of the farm in Australian fiction in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the farm is just one element in the melange of sites and issues that fall within the conceptual umbrella of the bush, it does have a particular valency because of the close association that is formed between the family and the farm. The *family farm* forms an image that is close to the heart of a settler-colonial nation, and the image of this farm is also intimately connected with the concept of the pioneer (Hughes-d'Aeth 'Chronotope'). But farms, as opposed to *stations*, constitute a relatively muted feature in Australian cultural production, and more particularly, in creative literature. In Australia, the farm was typically issued to private individuals in quantities ranging from 160 to 640 acres on a free-hold basis. These farms were owned and run by nuclear families and depended on clearing and cultivating the land for crops or sown pasture. The station, by contrast, was large (10,000 to 20,000 acres or larger) and held under lease from the colony or state, and relied on natural vegetation for stockfeed. A station was run, even when controlled by a family, on a corporate basis in the sense that it depended on a significant workforce of shepherds or stockriders, with a central 'station' and a network of outstations to oversee and muster the very large number of animals being grazed. In the Americas, stations are known as ranches, and the contest between ranch and farm is a prominent feature in the historiography of the American West. A version of this contest is visible in Australia in the popular distinction between *squatters* and *selectors* (also known as 'cockatoos' or 'cockies'). The image of the station was not shaped by the yeoman ideal (Tonts; Waterhouse), but by a nostalgic feudalism, styled on the English country house or manor[1]. Of course, both farms and stations were created on land appropriated from the Indigenous people of Australia, and the seizure of land without recompense or, in truth, any regard for this prior ownership, is a foundational feature of the structure of settler colonialism.

The particular argument in this essay is that while *stations* have been central to the literary representation of rural Australia, the depiction of *farms* has been far less prominent. The main focus of this essay is on the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially novels. Poetry and short fiction offer a slightly different data-set, but the

basic thesis—the predominance of stations over farms—is also discernible in those genres if one looks from the 1850s to the 1920s. The focus on the novel, though, is useful because it serves as a global comparator; in particular, the turn of the last century produced an outpouring of farm novels in the mid-west of the United States and the prairies of Canada, as well as strong traditions in both English and Afrikaans South Africa[2]. Looking comparatively allows one to notice a *relative absence* of farm novels in the corresponding period in Australia. As well as asserting this absence, I am also seeking to offer some explanation for how Australian literature, centred as it was on the ideology of the bush, unfolded in a way that was different to other similar places. The suggestion is that a number of material factors are likely to have influenced the distinct trajectory that Australia took.

The Squatter Novel

One of the effects of the bush mythology is to collapse significant differences that exist in the way that land gets exploited for economic gain in Australia. It allows, for instance, hereditary iron-ore billionaires to claim common cause with FiFo workers, Aboriginal people and small-enterprise farmers against a 'city' that misunderstands their needs and lives parasitically on the wealth that the bush generates. In this sense, the bush is the name for a false consciousness that obfuscates the material structure of Australian rural society. Once the bush exists as *bush*, for instance, it ceases (at least ideologically) to be owned Aboriginal land. Moreover, the totalising effect of the term bush also strips the natural systems of Australia of their ecological specificity because the term operates ambiguously to reference both endemic bushland and the various forms of material exploitation that take place in rural hinterlands—farming, grazing and mining, to take the most prominent examples (Hughes-d'Aeth 'Environment').

If one is searching for the origins of this false consciousness whereby someone who destroys the bush to create a farm remains somehow still 'in' the bush, then the Australian literary tradition is instructive. One of the early and distinct literary forms its colonisers developed was the 'squatter novel'. The squatter novels were romances, and styled themselves in this manner, but they also retained a claim on the articulation of settler-colonial reality. They purported to be insider accounts of colonial life, even when the author had not, as in the case of Samuel Sidney, ever set foot in Australia. In these novels, the *squatter* (the station 'owner', although the land was held by lease or without any formal title) is set forward as the image of ideal colonial being, and the station as a quasi-aristocratic polity of genial adventurers. Henry Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) is probably the best known of the squatter novels. In materialist terms, the squatter novel can be seen as the expression at the literary level of the dominant land interest in Australia, certainly from 1820 to 1860, when the pastoral capitalism was the dominant economic activity and political class in the Australian colonies. In the squatter novel, one can see the beginnings of the fundamental equivalence at the heart of the bush ideology, between acquiring land as property and acquiring the ideal properties of that land.

The squatter novel has been brilliantly described and analysed by Ken Gelder and Rachel Weaver in their study *Colonial Australian Fiction: Character Types, Social Formations and the Colonial Economy*. Gelder and Weaver trace a series of novels from the 1840s to the 1870s that exhibit quite distinctive features and deserve to be regarded as a genre[3]. Broadly speaking the novels were written as historical romances in the mode of Walter Scott and his descendants (particularly James Fenimore Cooper), but they also mixed some of the work-a-day concern that formed the substance of the emigration handbooks that several of these writers also wrote.

> The squatter novel was generally picaresque and episodic, full of stories-within-stories driven by character types like the boundary rider or the bushranger. But it also addressed the economic realities of a squatter's predicament in a direct (but still partisan) way. The price of land, the question of how much land can yield, and the impact of government legislation, were all explicitly laid out for consideration and debate. (31)

Beginning with Thomas McCombie's *Adventures of a Colonist; or Godfrey Arabin, the Settler* (1845) the Australian squatter novel takes in some of the leading English writers of the day, including Samuel Sidney, William Howitt and Anthony Trollope, as well as those who are noted as amongst the first 'Australian' novelists, such as Henry Kingsley and 'Rolf Boldrewood'. Indeed, the squatter novel makes a strong claim to be the dominant novel form of nineteenth-century Australia.

Yet, if the squatter novel was the cultural emanation of the reign of the squatter, what happened at the literary level when that reign began to be seriously challenged in the 1850s and '60s? The short answer, if we keep our eyes on the novel at least, is that not much changed. The squatter novel continued to be produced, not just into the 1870s, where Gelder and Weaver's study closes, but well into the twentieth century. While, by the 1870s, the squatter class had largely lost their absolute predominance in colonial legislatures, at the level of culture the squatter ideal remained a

site of prestige. This is not in itself so surprising, given the lag that often attends cultural change. The signifiers of 'old' money retain a structural advantage over the signifiers of 'new' money, which have had less chance to camouflage their origins. In the United States, despite the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862, and the enmeshment of the yeoman ideal in the Jeffersonian vision, the emergence of farm novels is still by and large a twentieth century phenomenon. But, what is striking in the Australian situation is the persistence of the station ideal in Australian novels well into the twentieth century, in works as diverse as the popular 'Brent of Bin Bin' novels (1928–1956) of Miles Franklin, and the Geraldton novels (1956–1965) of Randolph Stow (Hughes-d'Aeth 'Randolph Stow')[4]. And even today, in the twenty-first century, the station ideal retains its essential prestige in popular works by Di Morrissey, Judy Nunn and Kerry McGinniss, and in self-styled cinematic blockbusters like Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* (2008). In these works, the station continues to function as the *mise-en-scène* and microcosm of the nation itself.

One factor militating against farm novels in Australia was the relatively messy quality of the farm-range frontier, particularly in New South Wales, but also to varying degrees in the other colonies. From the 1860s to the 1890s, there was not the kind of open land frontier in NSW that was seen in the American mid-west and Canadian prairies at this time, or indeed, on a much smaller scale, in South Australia and the Western districts of Victoria. In both NSW and Victoria (and Queensland and Tasmania), there was also the substantial interaction with the gold-rushes, which both drove and impeded the creation of farming districts in those colonies. The historical geographer, J. M. Powell reports that in Victoria:

> Not until the seventies could it be said that there was anything resembling an advancing line of closer settlement, and until then the conflict between settler and selector differed completely from the competition between rancher and nester in the United States. (132)

The *Bulletin* School

The obvious counter-example to the argument that Australian fiction remains captive to the squatter ideal well beyond the dethronement of the squatter as material hegemon, is the emergence of the radical writing group centred on the Sydney *Bulletin*, which began publishing in 1880. The *Bulletin* is rightly treated as *sui generis* in the Australian tradition. The magazine constellated a new sensibility which corresponded to a working-class consciousness that had emerged in both cities and rural areas in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and which had joined the sentiment of popular colonial nationalism. When we call to mind the iconic writers of the *Bulletin* school—A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson, Henry Lawson, Stella Miles Franklin, Joseph Furphy, Barbara Baynton, 'Steele Rudd'—we recall that the forms which made them famous were, in the main, the ballad and the 'sketch' (realist, albeit often comic, short stories). These short forms were clearly suited to the magazine format. Serialised novels were also a staple of journals, including the *Town and Country Journal*, which published Rolfe Boldrewood's squatter novel, *The Squatter's Dream* across a number of issues in 1875[5]. *The Bulletin* did not go down the path of serialisation, although it did begin to publish books around the turn of the century, both novels and short-story collections.

What the *Bulletin* example points to, in relation to Australian novels, is the fact that there are two kinds of material factors that are determining production. The first and more general material determinant was the changing basis of material society in the latter part of the nineteenth century, particularly Australia's industrialisation and the emergence of class-consciousness as a political force. Industrialisation did not just change cities, but countrysides as well, by introducing mechanised farming, rail transport, agro-chemistry, and local mass-markets. The second material determinant of literary production in Australia relates to the copyright laws that existed in Britain's empire in the nineteenth century (Ailwood and Sainsbury). In fact, while we can refer to 'Australian' novels from the nineteenth century, there was not really a book publishing industry in Australia until the twentieth century. Novels—including each of the squatter novels in Gelder and Weaver's study—were either serialised in local journals or, if books, published in Britain. A major reason for this was a discriminatory copyright regime which meant that books produced in British colonies were entitled to copyright only in that colony, whereas a book published in Britain held copyright of it throughout the Empire.

Not wholly divorced from these material factors is a third factor which seems at first blush to come merely from the stylistic history of prose fiction, and that is the advent of realism as a literary mode. Realism is sometimes thought of as an urban form, but its settings were often rural or at least provincial, as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) or George Elliot's *Middlemarch* (1871). In the United States, when they speak about the emergence of the farm novel, what this means is not just that novels start to get written about homestead farms in the Midwest, but that rural realism begins to appear in the form of the novel (Storey). Like Australia, realism in North American fiction appeared initially in the form of 'sketches', as they

were often called; indeed, Bret Harte and Mark Twain, along with Rudyard Kipling, were key influences on the *Bulletin* style of fiction. It was in this way that the *Bulletin* set itself against the historical romance tradition of Walter Scott which provided the basic template—dramatic structure, as well as tone and historicity—for rural novels in Australia until that point. The famous put-down in Furphy's *Such is Life* (1903) of those 'slender-witted, virgin-souled, overgrown schoolboys who fill Henry Kingsley's exceedingly trashy and misleading novel [*The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, 1859] with their insufferable twaddle', encapsulates the disdain of a newly powerful class at the pretensions of its defeated predecessor. In Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901), the narrator (Sybylla) begins the novel by also distancing herself from the romance-novel tradition: 'This is not a romance—I have too often faced the music of life to the tune of hardship to waste time in snivelling and gushing over fancies and dreams; neither is it a novel, but simply a yarn—a *real* yarn' (45). She then adds: 'There is no plot in this story [...] I am one of a class, the individuals of which who have not time for plots in their life, but have all they can do to get their work done without indulging in such a luxury' (45–46).

But what are the classes we are talking about here? This is a particularly thorny subject in Australia due to the significant disparities that exist between the material determinants of class, on the one hand—i.e. where one stands in terms of the mechanisms of wealth—and the way which Australians *identify* with a class, on the other. Indeed, it is common in Australia to assume that one belongs to no class at all; that is, to believe that Australia is classless. The significance of *The Bulletin* was its mobilisation of working-class sentiment, but its rural *mise-en-scène* took it away from a classical proletariat. Moreover, in terms of the modes of rural production that existed in Australia, the pastoral (station) mode and the farming mode, it is actually the farm that was more hostile to the rural working class. The yeoman model, with its family-based farms, private ownership and commitment to liberal principles of self-reliance, was in certain respects inimical to formal rural labour.

The *Bulletin* school (and the society it interpellated) responded to the growth of farming in Australia in different ways. Most directly, there are the famous 'selection' stories of 'Steele Rudd' (Arthur Hoey Davis), which were published in the *Bulletin* magazine before being sold as books. *On Our Selection* (1899), published by the Bulletin Newspaper Co., collected the Steele Rudd stories in a loosely chronological order that gave them the quality of a picaresque novel. These sketches tell the story of a family who select land on the Darling Downs in the 1870s. It was these stories, and their various sequels, along with their countless adaptations as 'Dad and Dave' stage-plays and radio serials that, more than any other literary works, forced the image of the small-scale farmer into the national imaginary. These stories of privation and comic ingenuity located the small farmer clearly on the side of the working-class battler who was the hero of the *Bulletin* universe. But, eventually, the Rudds become wealthy and, though they never lose their bumpkin charm, it is not clear whether, strictly speaking, they remain battlers. After all, the farmer who acquires land through selection is the owner of the means of production. Like the bush, the battler is a highly ideological term, which conceals as much as it names.

The selector is a notable figure not just in the 'Steele Rudd' stories, but in other prominent *Bulletin* writers like Henry Lawson and Barbara Baynton. The Drover and his Wife, in Lawson's 'The Drover's Wife' (1892) are selectors and so too, Squeaker and his Mate, in Baynton's 'Squeaker's Mate' (1902). Both stories reference events some fifteen to twenty years prior to their dates of publication, and in that sense, are each tinged with retrospective colouring. The term of the time, and which remains in use, was 'mixed farming' and designates all the various agricultural pursuits that were taken up by holders of these smaller lots, including the growing of crops, the keeping of animals on pasture, including for dairying, but also pigs, chickens, potatoes and whatever else might either sustain or turn a profit for the farmer. But if we take the example of Lawson, what we see in his stories is not just, or even mainly, the lives of small-holding selectors, but a motley assemblage of workers, chancers, and drifters who are turning their hand to different kinds of rural work or seeking to avoid it. Nor does it turn out that the station has somehow faded into obscurity in Lawson's fictional world. Indeed, in a story like 'Joe Wilson's Courtship', Joe's courting of the servant-girl Mary transpires in the upstairs-downstairs world of the well-to-do station, where Joe is employed as a casual labourer. The station is the setting for the romance and provides it with its prestige and legality, even if the protagonists of the story are situated in the second stratum of that society. Indeed, the iconic figures of rural labour—the drover, the stockman, the boundary rider, the shearer—are drawn, and draw their glamour, from the world of stations rather than farms. Another landmark in the *Bulletin* school, Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life*, published by the Bulletin Newspaper Co. in 1903, shows the particular amalgam of small holdings and stations that characterised Australian settler colonialism. But, as with Lawson, despite the avowed sympathies of the author and the publisher, it is difficult to escape the sensation that it is the stations that constitute the true symbolic architecture of Furphy's great novel—it is their stock that

is being driven, after all—and that the small holdings (farms) are this world's abject remainder. As in South African literature, what seems to be haunting the smaller farms is the spectre of the 'poor white' and the famous humour of the *Bulletin* is a way of exorcising this, at least for settler colonialism, horrifying eventuality.

While in its stories about the life-and-times of the selector (e.g. 'Steele Rudd'), the *Bulletin* incorporated the emergence of the yeoman farmer in Australian settler colonialism on the side of the working class, the example of Lawson and Furphy show the station continued to exist as the symbolic mainstay in the fictive situations that underlay the *Bulletin* school. The split between station and farm emerges with rare clarity in Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, that was published by Blackwood in 1901 (with the assistance of Henry Lawson) when Franklin was still only twenty-two. The founding event of this story is a tragic *fall* from station to farm. Sybylla's narrative is framed by the bitter forfeiture of her status, which had been traded away by her alcoholic father: 'My father was a swell in those days—held Bruggabrong, Bin Bin East, and Bin Bin West, which three stations totalled close on 200,000 acres' (48). But in the now of the narrative, things have changed: 'He gave up Bruggabrong, Bin Bin East and Bin Bin West, bought Possum Gully, a small farm of one thousand acres, and brought us all to live near Goulburn' (51). The reader is left with little doubt about the contrast between these two situations, and the fact that the family had now been demoted from the glamour of an aristocratic station to the tawdry world of the petit bourgeoisie:

> After graphic descriptions of life on big stations outback, and the dashing snake yarns told by our kitchen-folk at Bruggabrong, and the anecdotes of African hunting, travel, and society life which had often formed our guests' subject of conversation, this endless *fiddle-faddle* of the price of farm produce and the state of crops was very fatuous. (53)

Indeed, the family falls still further when her father's plan to make money through the buying and selling of stock fritters away the proceeds of the station sale and they are forced, like all their neighbours, to earn money by dairying cows and selling milk and butter at a pittance to the town of Goulburn.

Early Farm Novels

In many respects, *My Brilliant Career* can be considered as a kind of anti-farm novel. While it does indeed depict farm life with close attention to the work involved, what is missing is the sense of historical mission that is the hallmark of the North American farm novels of the Midwest. Two relatively obscure novels that are contemporary to the *Bulletin* stories and the novels of Furphy and Franklin are Benjamin Cozens' *Princess of the Mallee* (1903) and James Green's *The Selector: A Romance of an Immigrant* (1907). Both novels were written by protestant preachers. Cozens was born at Oxley near Wangaratta in 1877 and became a Congregational minister, while Green was born at Newcastle upon Tyne in 1864 and migrated to New South Wales in 1889, where he became a minister in the Primitive Methodist church. Cozens' book, as the title suggests, is set in the Victorian Mallee. The mallee country in the north-western corner of Victoria became a land-frontier in the 1890s. Green's novel is set in New England, near the Namoi River, on land that had long been in use as pastoral country. These novels, although they are markedly inferior works of fiction to those of Furphy and Franklin, do nevertheless signal the emergence of a new material mandate for grain farming in the semi-arid zones of Australia. Both books contain dedications to the farmer pioneers that are notionally celebrated in the novels:

> To the heroic Mothers, Wives and Daughters of the Mallee—whose indomitable courage and unfaltering persistency in the execution of duty, whose unswerving loyalty to their husbands, fathers and brothers in that region where all their latent qualities have been put to the severest test on the rack of human endurance, and for the remembrance of many kindnesses shown to the author during his sojourn amongst them—this story is graciously dedicated.
> B. Cozens, Melbourne, December 1903.

Green, for his part, declares that, '[t]his story is an effort to portray the life of the North and North-Western wheat districts' and is dedicated 'TO THE PIONEERS OF THE NORTH-WEST'. Furthermore, at regular points the novel's narrator turns to address the reader to proclaim the virtues of 'the people who do the real work of the country':

> Those who, with splendid hopefulness and rare courage, are taming the wilds, building our townships, and rearing for themselves ever more beautiful homes in the hearts of plains and valleys [...] Gentle Reader, go anywhere in New South Wales, talk and live with the settlers, compare the humble and rough beginnings with the life of to-day, listen to their aspirations for the future, and you will learn that there is both progress and poetry in the bush. (127–128)

The Princess of the Mallee tells the story of retired squatter Thomas Elphington, the son of a Baronet whose ancestral estate had fallen on hard times. Thomas leaves England in the 1860s and makes his fortunes in the colonies, first by striking it rich in the Victorian goldfields, then by acquiring squatting runs in Victoria and South Australia. Having accumulated sufficient wealth, he sells up his properties and moves to Portland (fictionalised as 'Pointland' in the novel) with his wife and three daughters Beatrice, Laura, and May. But then disaster strikes. First, his wife dies in a rail accident while on holiday in Italy; then, his investments fail and the family is left all but destitute. Faced with financial ruin, the ageing Elphington decides to take up his lot in the Victorian Mallee which was then (in the 1890s) being developed as a farming region by the Victorian government and land was being offered on relatively easy terms. He leases (i.e. doesn't buy) a 640-acre block with a view to farming it for a few seasons and getting back on his feet financially.

James Green's *The Selector* follows the travails of Edward Woolham in the early 1900s. Woolham had been enticed to NSW by advertisements spruiking cheap land in the Agent-General's office in London, but had found the reality on the ground rather different. In particular, he found obtaining land through government land-releases to be far from straightforward. The novel begins with Woolham's latest disappointment, a land-release in the town of Munilla, a fictionalisation of Manilla in New England, where the author was a circuit preacher. The land being released was part of an exchange scheme, where the NSW government obtained pastoral land near townships and compensated leaseholders with land further afield. Like many such schemes before, this one is rigged, so that entrenched interests managed to expand their own property, but this time on a freehold basis. Thus, in the novel, while the land was meant to settle 120 families, in the end only twenty-one new farmers find their way into the allocated property, with the rest going to augment the land of those already settled in the region—and Woolham misses out once again. But in the end the land-agent takes pity on him and finds Woolham 900 acres of poor land left over from a previous release which Woolham is able to apply for. While he waits to hear whether his application is successful, Woolham goes to work for the local squatter, John Stuart, as a Jackeroo, hoping to learn the ropes of working the land in this district. It turns out, however, that the 900 acres that Woolham selects is on land that was once within Stuart's run and to which the squatter still felt he had a *de facto* right. When Stuart finds out, he turns upon his employee:

> 'Is that what you came here for, to ferret out my land? And I, like a fool, had begun to trust you. But, by Heaven, I've not done with you yet! You'll curse the day you ever came selecting on Ringari!'
> [...]
> 'What crime have I committed? Is it not natural for a young man to seek to obtain land of his own?
> 'But not on my run!' roared the old squatter.
> 'But, sir,' replied Woolham, 'it is not your land, and, what is more, you could never obtain it, for it is only available for selection.'

By the 1890s, agricultural advances (mechanisation, fertilisers, new crop varieties) had made possible close settlement (through cropping) on land that had once had been fit only for the large and loose colonisation of pastoralism. But faced with the task of dramatising this venture, the authors of both *Princess of the Mallee* and *The Selector* found themselves falling back on the traditional framework of the squatter romance, as the posh names and upper-crust trappings of their respective heroes (Thomas Elphington, Edward Woolham) suggest. This leads to a certain abortive quality in the attempts made by each novel to endow the farm with a symbolic status in its own right—that is, rather than by its metonymic appeal to hereditary privilege. In the case of *The Princess of the Mallee*, the property they acquire is always-already transient, somewhere between a hobby and a get-rich-quick scheme. The Elphingtons do not intend to stay more than a couple of seasons, and in fact they do not, leaving at the earliest opportunity some two years later. In James Green's *The Selector*, we have something more like an American farm novel in the sense that Edward Woolham does found a farm and becomes himself part of the fabric of the emerging farm district. In other words, he actualises the settler-colonial *telos* of the farm novel. Where it falls down is in the qualitative differences given to Woolham that make it clear that while he is a farmer, he is not actually a farmer. When, for instance, Woolham goes to work as a boundary rider-cum-jackeroo for John Stuart, the novel is at pains to draw attention to the fact that Woolham was not quite either of these two types, but something in between:

> He was hardly a 'jackeroo'—that is, a young man of means living as a guest, to get experience of sheep-farming before setting up for himself as a grazier—and yet he was more than an ordinary boundary-rider on wages.
> [...]

> The Stuarts recognised he was an educated man who had probably been brought up a gentleman, and they were inclined to treat him with a respect not accorded to the usual sort of employee. (23)

Of course, it goes without saying that Bessie, Stuart's charming and virtuous daughter, falls immediately in love with this 'well-set-up and muscular young man who happens to have the frame of an athlete and the manners of a gentleman' (23–24).

In *The Princess of the Mallee*, the main plot is also a chivalric romance between quasi-aristocratic would-be farmers. Elphington's daughter Beatrice—the 'Princess'—falls in love with an Australian-born, Oxford-educated farmer-settler, Stanley Henderson. Like the Elphingtons, the Hendersons were once wealthy squatters, but had fallen on lean times:

> The Mallee is noted for its variety of inhabitants. The majority belong to the farming class, but a number dropped down there who had emerged from quite different spheres, forced out of their own congenial surroundings by the blasts of financial disaster, like boulders hurled from a volcanic eruption and deposited here, there and anywhere. Many of these families had been educated and seen better days, but when the catastrophe came and they were put to their wits' end to know what move to make next, the cry, 'To the Mallee!' suddenly burst upon them, whither they journeyed with small idea of the hardships ahead. Such a family was the Elphingtons, and to such belonged Stanley Henderson. (58–59)

So, neither *The Selector* nor *The Princess of the Mallee* are really about farmers but about would-be squatters who have been forced, as if by some bureaucratic mistake, to live the life of a farmer for a period before they can reclaim their natural place in the aristocratic order.

In the case of *Princess of the Mallee* and *The Selector*, both novels gesture, as they approach the end of their narratives, to the completion of the settler-colonial dream of tidy villages dotted through a landscape of bountiful fields and happy farming families. Thus, in *The Selector* we are told that:

> As you leave the village in the twilight you will look back at the pretty gardens, white fences, and red-tiled roofs under a soft haze of circling grey chimney smoke, blending all into an ensemble both beautiful and restful; and when you return to the city, that picture will often reflect upon the canvas of your memory as the ideal bush township of the mother State. From such townships her best citizens must come, and when worn out in the battle of life, they will instinctively turn for rest and inspiration to the bush again—to the old flower-embowered homesteads, the rippling creeks, and the great wheat paddocks carved out of the hills. (245–246)

A similar image is presented at the end of *Princess of the Mallee*:

> On all sides might be seen evidences of prosperity, and when that is so the residents of the Mallee are not slow to show their appreciation. That are all happy and hearty, full of hope and enterprise. After paying their debts they set to work to improve their homesteads. Their houses are enlarged, and their paddocks subdivided. The two-roomed mud hut no longer holds sway as the most pretentious structure on the farm. A new four-roomed weatherboard house goes up, and the faithful and lovable old hut now becomes the kitchen. (194)

But what neither novel is able to do is to develop a narrative that corresponds to the image; that is, to plausibly dramatise the creation of this world of farms. When these districts emerge fully formed in the visions given above, it is as if they have been clipped awkwardly onto narratives that belong to another world—which they do, the world of the squatter. Indeed, as will be evident from the description of the plots, these novels retain the basic formal properties and class sensibilities of the squatter novel that emerged in the 1840s, even interpolating blatant anachronisms like gold-strikes and bushrangers[6].

Later History of the Farm Novel

It remains to suggest something of the later history of the farm novel in Australia and whether the form ever really took hold or had its moment in the sun. By the 1920s one can detect a kind of synchronicity in the global farm novel, with the different traditions in Australasia, North America and southern Africa starting to exhibit similarities. In this period, one finds a new psychologisation of farming experience in novels, led by Willa Cather in the United States, Frederick Philip Grove in Canada, Pauline Smith in Anglophone South Africa and C. M. Van den Heever in Afrikaans South Africa[7]. This kind of writing, in which the farm becomes the site for working out deeper psychological or generational issues, is not something that really emerges in Australia. There is, for instance, no real equivalent to Ole Edvart Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* (1927) in Australia,

though one can perhaps point to minor writers like James Pollard, who set his Bushland series in the Western Australian wheatbelt in the 1920s, and Jonathan Truran's novels *Green Mallee* (1932) set in the Victorian Mallee, and *Where the Plains Begin* (1933) set in NSW, as indicative of this global trend.

Another candidate for an early farm novel in Australia is Katharine Susannah Prichard's *The Pioneers* (1915). Even though it is cast as a historical novel taking place in the middle of the previous century, it does certainly bring a degree of realism to the depiction of the settler colonial farm and points ahead to Prichard's concern for the value of rural work in, for instance, *Working Bullocks* (1926). Nevertheless, the central action in *The Pioneers* is bound unashamedly together with a romance plot that would have made Sybylla fume. One can draw a sharp contrast, for instance, between Prichard's *The Pioneers* and Willa Cather's first novel *O Pioneers!* (1913) published two years earlier[8]. Apart from a very similar title, and the fact that each is depicting the creation of a farm and a farming district, the two works seem to belong to different centuries and different worlds. Indeed, the more prominent rural novels in twentieth-century Australian fiction either take place on stations (Prichard's *Coonardoo*, 1929; Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, 1938) or follow the lives of itinerant workers (Kylie Tenant's *The Battlers*, Eve Langley's *The Pea Pickers*). For her part, Miles Franklin's later popular novels, written under the pseudonym 'Brent of Bin Bin', return directly to the prelapsarian world of stations that had been lost in *My Brilliant Career*.

The situation does begin to change in the years after the Second World War. In Western Australia, one can point for instance to the social realist wheatbelt saga written by J. K. Ewers, *Men Against the Earth* (1946) and its sequel, *For Heroes to Live In* (1948). But it was modernism that led to the most memorable farm novels in the Australian context. Again, Western Australia was prominent, particularly with the work of Peter Cowan, who became most noted as a writer of short fiction, but whose novella 'The Unploughed Land' begins to bring the kind of interiority to farm experience that Cather and Grove had brought to the farm novel in the United States and Canada. Then, there were Randolph Stow's early novels, *The Haunted Land* (1956) and *The Bystander* (1957), and a little later *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965), set in the farming districts around his native Geraldton (Hughes-d'Aeth 'Randolph Stow'). Much like Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Care*er, each of these novels by Stow was about, or at least shadowed by, the decline of stations into farms. Yet, while Sybylla's father had simply sold out of his station and bought a farm, in Stow's novels the stations had themselves fallen victim to what is felt to be a kind of historical entropy. They have succumbed to the pressure of close settlement and, through the parcelling out of their once grand estates, slowly metamorphosed into farms. Like Franklin's novel, this process is depicted as a fall from grace. On the other side of the country, Patrick White's *Tree of Man* (1955), redrew the possibilities of the farm novel in Australia with a sensuous lyricism that seemed almost obscene in a sphere of Australian life that had been defined by its determined materialism—what Sybylla called the 'endless *fiddle-faddle* of the price of farm produce and the state of crops'. It is worth mentioning, however, that both Stow and White still did not quite have the same sharp-eyed grasp of settler power dynamics that was on display in Doris Lessing's South Rhodesian farm novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) or Christine van der Mark's Manitoba farm novel, *In Due Season* (1947), or even in Australian station novels like Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929) and Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938).

The account of the farm novel in this essay has been at pains to delineate a particular tendency that typifies the genre's chequered history in the Australian context. The tendency, I have argued, has been to retain the image of the station even when the novel has set out to depict a farm. But even if this tendency is granted, the question might naturally arise as to why this is of more than passing interest. Does it really matter if in Australia the station retained its imaginative appeal in ways that are slightly or even significantly different than North America or South Africa? To answer this, I would return to the initial framing of my task in terms of the continuing ideological importance of the bush in Australia, whose complex resonances and encrypted colonialism bear some resemblance to the concept of the West in the imaginary of the United States. In this respect, I suggest that by remaining as clear-eyed as possible about the material basis for rural fiction, the critic contributes to the ongoing work of demystifying the bush, a concept whose *raison d'être* is mystification, and whose effects lead to significant misrecognitions and misunderstandings in Australian life. Thus, though it seems from the perspective of Indigenous people to matter little whether their land is stolen by station owners or farmers, the particular differences in these colonial modes of appropriation do lead to different effects (Silverstein). That is not a matter that has been tackled in this essay, but hopefully the essay does provide a foundation for work of this kind and other work that seeks to draw on Australian imaginative literature to understand the interior dramas and fantasies that provided an ineradicable complement to the spread of the settler state in this continent.

Notes

1 The appeal of hunting as an equestrian sport was part of this ideal, as Gelder and Weaver have argued in their paper delivered to the InASA Conference in 2018, 'The Colonial Kangaroo Hunt as Sport'.

2 For South Africa, see Coetzee (1988), Devarenne (2009) and Olivier (2012). For the United States, see Meyer (1965), Thacker (1989), Conlogue (2001), Cella (2010) and Freitag (2013). For Canada, see Calder and Wardhaugh (2005). New Zealand, like Australia, does not really have a strong farm novel tradition, but for considerations of the relationship between literature and settlement, see Stafford and Williams (2006) and Calder (2011).

3 McCombie (1845); Sidney (1854); Howitt (1856); Kingsley (1859 and 1865); Trollope (1872–1874); Boldrewood (1875).

4 Miles Franklin wrote six novels under the pseudonym, 'Brent of Bin Bin', beginning with *Up the Country* (1928).

5 Katherine Bode and Carol Hetherington have created a database of serialised fiction in Australia.

6 Although in *The Selector*, interestingly, the bushranging episode is clearly based on the Jimmy and Joe Governor escapade, and subsequent moral panic, from 1900.

7 I discuss this aspect in greater detail in my essay on Frederick Philip Grove's novel *Settlers of the Marsh* (Hughes-d'Aeth 'Settlers').

8 For a comparison of these two novels, along with James Fenimore Cooper's earlier novel *The Pioneers* (1823), see Hughes-d'Aeth ('Chronotope').

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The Bird in the Door

Mel Hall

Mel Hall is a writer and musician. Originally from the Wheatbelt town of Northam, she currently lives in Fremantle, and considers her home the distance between these two places.

The van was yellow, with red stripes and white horses painted down the side. Metal letters on the back said NISSAN DATSUN. A big Red Nose Day nose was stuck to the front.

Inside the back, the brown vinyl lining had come off the sliding door. This meant you could see inside; bits of metal, a squeaking noise and a big black abyss.

'What's that sound?' I asked Dad.

'That's the bird who lives in the door.'

I looked into the black. I could see the bird. Its body contorted, feathers crinkled, a squashed living mass amongst metal rods and cogs.

I worried. I looked up at my dad; the tall man, the tall beard at the steering wheel. How could he let a bird suffer like this?

It wasn't just the inside of the door that was broken. The outside had a big dent, so the sliding door didn't properly close. Every time we jumped in, from the gravel driveway, up onto the brown, eternally sandy step, we had to latch the door with an occy strap. Usually my brother, king of kings, 'inventor' of the games Cowboys and Indians, and Cops and Robbers, would do up the strap. He threaded it around the door handle, then back around a grey metal bar that ran behind Mum and Dad's seats.

'You have to be careful with occy straps,' said my brother. 'They can fling up and kill you.'

'Another car backed into us at the Coles carpark,' Mum used to say.

The guy didn't have any insurance, or any money. Dad told him not to worry. But we didn't have any money or insurance either. And that's how the dent happened, and that's how the door never closed properly again.

'Your dad's too nice,' said the frown, said the serious pencilled eyebrows behind the big round glasses.

I thought of the bird. How could Dad be too nice if he kept a bird trapped in the door?

The boot was broken too. You'd press the button, lift the door, there'd be that hissing noise, you'd look in at all the white plastic bags full of groceries. Then Mum, holding the door up with one hand, would reach for the mop with her other hand. Using the mop, she propped the door open, like when you prop up a matchbox with matchstick in the yard; a little shelter for insects.

Every time my sister Rachel visited her friend Sophie, she asked, 'Where's your mop?'

Their boot stayed magically open. But they were the Sleights. They had a real piano, a pool and a tennis court. A mop-less boot was just another thing we could only dream of.

The van was an eight-seater; bench seat across the front, two in the middle row, then three across the back. The seat covers were milk coffee brown. In summer our legs got badly stuck to seats. It wasn't so bad if the journey was just a Playschool, but if it was a Sesame Street, or worse, a Sesame Street and a Playschool, it felt like a thousand icy-poles had melted and stuck to the vinyl, then stuck to you. The stickiness was savoury, not sweet, but it still tasted quite good, if you're one to lick a sweaty thigh.

In the front, the seat between Mum and Dad was very narrow. Here you'd sit and gaze at the radio dial, with it's hyper green line that shifted and made fuzz every time you turned the knob. This was the seat for Serious Conversations, like whether we could have a friend sleepover (What friend?), a new puppy (No), or continue work painting the cubby house (We'll see).

This is where I was sitting, golden light driving home from the pool, when I asked if I *had* to believe in God. Mum and Dad looked over my head at each other.

Dad said, 'You know what we believe. And well, we'd like it if you believed. But you don't have to. It's up to you.'

Look at the birds in the sky. They do not worry. Three times the rooster crows. Pelicans are unclean animals.

What else does the bible say about the care of birds?

The engine was a drumroll. Arms folded across my chest, squinting eyes, legs dangling above the floor, I considered everything.

'Well I think I believe. But Dad, what about the bird?'

'What bird?'

'The bird in the door. Why won't you let it out?'

Dad laughed and looked at Mum again.

'Well, some miracles aren't so easy to execute.'

I didn't understand. Why would Dad want to kill magic?

'Your dad is not too nice.'

Maybe that's what Mum really said. Maybe I misheard.

The back of the car was more a place for dreaming. Here the floor was sandpaper glued to corrugated cardboard. Maybe the bumps in the floor were the indents of hoses and pipes; things that mechanics see when they slide under on skateboards, greasy faces a souvenir from the other world. I didn't know anything about the underworlds of cars. (Maybe the dogs knew, they sat under there a lot on hot days.) I just know that the surface of the floor wasn't even.

Above the back seat, along the yellow ceiling was a row of black holes. There were about ten the size of twenty-cent pieces. I liked to rest my head back and look up at these holes. I thought they were cockroach hideouts. I tried to look in, wondering what it was like on the other side. But if I looked for too long, I knew they'd come. Hundreds and hundreds crawling from the black. Like they did (one or two might), from the plughole in our bathroom sometimes, if you forgot to put the plug in.

I was always sitting in one of these backseats in the dream. It's that dream where the camera pans across the car; starting at my Dad, asleep at the wheel, across to my Mum, head thrown back, snoring, moving to my two sisters in the middle back seats, asleep, then to my brother; even his prowess in Cops and Robbers couldn't keep him awake in this dream scenario.

I was only ever tiny, small as a toddler in this dream, the car bumping along an empty road. Red dirt and blue sky, two halves of a flag. It was my job to undo my seatbelt, climb across all my sleeping family members, climb onto Dad's lap, and take the wheel. And I could only just see over it, the great mess of winding bitumen.

I had the dream again and again. Why did my dad keep going to sleep like this? Was it the bird punishing him, keeping him under a spell?

In my mind the bird became a giant figure, capable of slipping out of the door, onto the roof of the car, spreading its wings, stamping it's reptilian feet, and dancing a spell over my dad. The thought of the giant bird frightened me, even though I know I had imagined it. The bird wasn't on the roof. The bird was in the door.

I thought, I need to hatch a plan to get that bird out.

When it was dark outside, it's like the van was part of a whole other universe. Or maybe we were travelling through the mysterious grey and black pathways, from one universe to another.

One night, I remember everyone falling asleep. Except this time my dad stayed awake at the wheel. He probably thought I was asleep too. I was watching the moon, the big yellow face, rushing to keep close company with us, the big yellow van. There were powerlines and the big forms my Mum called The Ironmen, as big as ten telephone poles all stacked up with wires. The Ironmen did awkward dances across the landscape. I remember the bush all around, sprays and splats of black scrub. The night air smelt fresher, like the land was wet with dew, or rain and new activity; things that happen when we are meant to be sleeping.

We were on our way down south, to our grandparents' farm. We drove through sharp black jagged forms; card cut with scissors, stuck together to make a night mountainside scene. We were driving through the cardboard picture, right through the middle, and it was like we were driving straight into the big, black mouth of a giant shark. I looked around at everyone sleeping. We drove down, down, deeper within.

I don't remember arriving at my grandparents'. I can only recall the next morning. My grandma was washing up after breakfast. Clanks, submerged forks colliding, sea-creatures scraped with egg and baked beans. Grandma showed me a key in the drawer. She said it unlocked the family peanut farm.

I wondered why you would need a key for a farm. Grandma looked out the window while I inspected the key.

'There's a big magic bus out there.'

'What? Where?'

She placed another plate noisily in the rack. It was like she wasn't surprised, like she saw magic buses all the time.

She nodded at the window, 'Just out there.'

The magic bus would be covered in gizzards. It had recently shrunk down and traversed the inside of a human body. It came out through the digestive tract, children wide-eyed at pink soft places. I had just read a book about it.

She lifted me up. I could only see the van.

'Where?'

'There!'

She pointed straight at the van.

I thought perhaps the magic bus was still shrunken, and Grandma had very good eyesight, much better than mine at least.

I ran outside. There was a stream of hyper-blue Omo fluid. It looked like glowing water, running from Grandma's washing machine to her flower patch. I looked around the ground. Shirts and pants waved on the line, wind rushing into my ears. The wind made it seem like there were no other sounds in the world. And that's when I saw it.

The van door was open. Grandpa, with his gumnut-baby hair and soft golf-hat, serious skin-cancer face and box of tools, was looking inside the door.

Dad was leaning against a rock. Talking to Grandpa, he called it. Debating, Mum called it. Arguing, Grandpa called it. Dad's nose was pointy and eyes squinting like mine. The sun didn't seem bright, but it really hurt my eyes.

'I just needed some help from Grandpa. He knows about things like this.'

Grandpa smiled at me. He put his arm round my shoulder. We looked up at the bird.

It was a little blue wren, perched up on top of the yellow. It looked down on our squinting faces. I think I saw it nod, like a little smile. He was saying *thank you.*

Grandpa began checking the door, sliding it on the runner.

'Grandpa is a very practical man,' said Dad.

I heard my name being called from the house. The wind rose again, and the bird flew off into the trees.

Premise, Promise

Joyce Parkes

Joyce Parkes is published in literary magazines, journals and anthologies in Australia and in nine other countries.

Revisiting the country of rice
paddies and window-sills,
she recalls the toil to maintain
a paddy field, the solitude
proffered by a windowsill.

The sound of rain and reign
right and write, site and
sight, was identical to her ears
in the language she was
hearing. She remembers

the sweep of tamarind and
oak trees, the bloom
of melati and tulips,
as a language of cathexis
and the senses on

the terraces, plateaux and
peaks of her first,
second and third language,
the premise and promise
of options and consanguinity.

No need to always buy

Rose van Son

Rose van Son's writing has appeared in many journals. She was a guest of Perth Poetry Festival 2015; Corrugated Lines, Broome, 2015; and New Norcia Writers Festival 2018. In 2018 she judged the Ros Spencer Poetry Prize.

she tells me
they come from Iran
knew each other back home
        speaks into my eyes
passes on her recipe
for making yoghurt
says, *it's easy*
        we have always made it
just make sure to cover it well
an old jumper will do—
        sit until it warms and thickens

The Whiter the Socks

Liana Skrzypczak

Liana Skrzypczak is an Australian writer, adopted from Korea into a Polish-migrant family. In 2018, she received a grant to travel to Poland to research a collection of short stories based on her family heritage. She was the South Australian Hachette Mentoring Program recipient. Her stories have appeared in *Meanjin Quarterly*, *Island* magazine and *The Big Issue*. She is the 2019 Kat Muscat Fellow.

To Babcia—thank you for sharing your story.

Babcia has sun-splotched hands, with skin that stays peaked after it's pinched. She says it's because she's old and the skin has lost its spring. I think it's because she carries too many secrets around and they've made her hands heavy.

Today her hands are wrapped around a cappuccino. We are seated at a quaint artisan coffee shop on the German-settled main street, Hahndorf, in the Adelaide Hills. They do great coffee and even better pączki doughnuts. It's a horrible day—cold, wet, grey. The kind that makes you want to wrap yourself in a blanket and sit beside a wood fire reminiscing.

Babcia faces the window, tracking couples, families and locals as they meander past with a look on her face that says she's doing just that—reminiscing. When I ask her about her week, she plays with the rim of her coffee cup and says, 'Lianka, when I was young, living in Kraków, you know, before five, I wanted to play piano...'

I smile to hide my astonishment. Not for the fact that her unsteady hands were once deft. But for the fact that she rarely talks about her childhood.

She uses my silence to go on, 'We had big, brown... what do you call, with the thing that you turn, and the holes, and you wind?'

'A pianola?'

She nods. 'A pianola. I listen to song. One for children. You wouldn't know. "Tak pan jedzie po obiedzie..." about a horse. And sometime my mother, your great babcia, hum while she clean—' Her voice wobbles as her story picks up momentum. '—and my brother, your great uncle, like too. We make horse jumping in living room. With carpet was hard, and bare feet with socks. Because our mother always tell us, "You catch a death in winter."' She wiggles her finger.

I lean forward in my chair. I know the song. She used to sing it to me when I was small enough to bounce on her knee like I was riding a horse. She also used to tell me off for running around barefoot in the house, shouting, 'You'll catch a death!' But I don't mention that now. I don't want to miss a word.

'Anyhow, I wanted lessons. So my mother use little money to buy piano lesson down road. That teacher was very grumpy old woman. You think I am grumpy, well, she would hit with a... what do you call it?'

'A ruler?'

'No. A stick which you measure the things.'

'A ruler.'

'Oh, yes. I was thinking of something else. Anyhow, I remember riding my bike home from my piano lesson on this day. My mother was at work. I remember a German army truck out the front of our apartment. I think, there must be something very bad. When I get closer, they put me on truck with many other Polish people. They say, "Two German officers were shot. So we kill ten Polish for every German." They take us to train station and put us on train...'

Her voice trails off. I'm holding my breath. She's never told me this version of the story. When I was younger, she'd outlined a few plot points—manipulated her limited English to bend and curve around specific detail. But now...

I wait for her to continue but she's lost in thought again, watching a small girl with pigtails across the street who's shaking her bag of Killer Pythons from the lolly shop and yelling for more. So, I prompt gently, 'Where was the train going, Babcia?'

She glances at me, then back at the girl, pursing her lips. 'I don't know. I was only eight or nine. I remember it was a train to carry... not people but maybe for animals?'

'Animals?'

She nods dismissively. 'Anyhow, all I could see was out a tiny slit at top to the sky.'

I try to imagine her as an eight-year-old, peering through a gap in a livestock train. Scared. Alone. For the first time in my life, I experience complete failure of imagination. It's hard to believe my babcia was as young as the Killer Python girl when this happened.

'Lucky I know German—I learn at school. I was very good. I told them I feel sick in the stomach. You know when you want to...' She closes her eyes as though searching for the word behind her eyelids.

'Vomit?'

'Yes and if I get off at train stop I feel better. I thought, you know, to escape. But that German officer stood by me to watch. So I tricked him. Pointed my finger over there and say, "Look at those people! What are they doing?!"' She points past my head.

Although I know she's not pointing to anyone or anything in particular, I turn my head. 'That worked?'

'It did.' She smiles. 'And I run so fast to the next train. Oh, Lianka, I run so fast my shoes get caught in the tracks and come off! I think I must look like crazy person. Running with no shoes and very dirty socks.'

'Did the officer catch you?'

'Lucky some Polish people hide me on the next train. It was going to some work camps—farms—in Germany. But when I get off with them, another German officer see me and say, "Shoot her." Because I was too small to go work. They think, what is she doing on this train? She is too young to do the work. But I said, "I can work. I am small but I am strong. You give me chance." I was lucky because there was another officer who was higher in charge who walk past. He say, "You can not shoot her with so many people around." So they send me to work. I was lucky. But it was hard.'

My coffee loses steam on the table. I barely notice. I don't look up when the waitress appears beside me and says, 'Can I get you anything else?' Instead, I stiffen with annoyance. I want to shoo her away, berate her for interrupting our conversation. But Babcia just smiles at the girl and says, 'No thank you, darling. We are okay.'

The waitress walks off. I glance back at Babcia and quickly ask, 'Did your mother know what had happened to you? After you were taken away?'

Babcia makes a waving motion with her hand and for a second my stomach drops, thinking she might not go on. Then her voice hardens. 'I did not see my mother for two years. She did not know what happened to me. She went to the Red Cross and they got us together again at Hohenfels Stalag 383. You see, the Americans came and the war ended.'

'Hohenfels?'

'A camp for people with no place to live.'

I whip out my phone. She waits while I look up Hohenfels and find that it was a US Army Training Garrison in 1946—and a displacement camp after World War II.

'You were at a displacement camp? I didn't know—'

'Never mind that.' She shoots my phone a disapproving glare and I place it face down on the table. She nods. 'Anyhow, that is where I saw the cow in socks. Did I tell you that story?'

I nod. She told it to me once when I was in primary school. I remember clearly. She'd just picked me up and we were in the car on the way home. I was complaining about my day—friends, teachers, rules, the usual. She scolded me for being ungrateful and lectured me with the story of the cow in socks.

She's not scolding me now. I decide I want to hear the story again. 'Remind me?'

She smiles, 'It is a very funny story,' and settles back in her seat. 'I was living with my mother in the camp. It was like apartment buildings with whole families, you know, in tiny little rooms. We did not have much food. Everything was in rations. Just think, one tiny little square of butter for to last the whole week!'

'I use one square of butter on one piece of bread!'

'Oh, yes, my dear kochana. You would be shocked. And you see, because there was not much food, people had to do what they could to live. So I never forget the cow in socks.'

• • •

The cow stood, body long to the wind, nose twitching. Dusk fell over the valley and a white frost crept up each blade of grass until the rolling green became rolling white. In the distance, a garrison of great pines stood like a woolly jumper against the worst of the incoming gale. She turned her gaze northwards to her usual night-time resting place, body yearning for the rigid comfort of the corrugated iron windbreak with a view of the open sky and stars. But something to her east had also caught her attention—a shadow moving in the dense, frost-tipped evergreen forest.

She strained to see the source of the shadow and made out the long, lanky contours of a young lad. He held a bale. There was a rope slung around his neck and his tongue made cheery whickering noises against his teeth. The cow swished her tail. She was used to bales and lads. As she watched him approach, she merely blinked. As he reached out to stroke her neck, her winter-thickened skin barely twitched.

The lad's touch was practiced despite his youth—his calloused fingers travelled from her pale neck to dark brown hide and back again, returning to the softer, fawn coloured hairs behind her ears and the itch that had been bothering her all evening. She relaxed her weight forward and bent her forehead to the bale.

The rope, worn slack, was sodden against her skin and the feel of it made her shift her weight from hoof to hoof. Still, she did not startle. The bale was good—fine, young and full of flavour. Besides, she was used to ropes.

Soon, she was walking, the rope pulling taut around her neck. Though she agitated from left to right, the lad's lead was firm, his whickering

insistent and soon she fell into an easy rhythm, her mind taken wholly by navigating the spongy path of pine needles.

As they reached the edge of the forest where the trees gave way to smaller deciduous varieties, she sensed the lad's pace become uneven, cautious. She dug her resistance into the uneven ground until the lad slowed to a stop.

'Is that you, Lech?'

There, in a break in the trees, where a fence line found a gate, was the silhouette of a stocky, grey-haired man. He rubbed his palms together and stamped his feet to keep warm. His expression was shielded by the peak of a tweed winter cap. His breath came out in white puffs as he spoke. 'Maciej,' he said, kicking at something with the toe of his boot. It made a clang. 'I brought a bucket.'

'She doesn't have much milk.'

'Anything's better than nothing.'

'It'll be heavy. And messy.'

'Leave it here until morning. In this weather, it will keep.'

The two men swapped places—the older taking the cow's rope in his teeth and bending to draw milk from her udder. The milk made a pissing noise against the metal bucket.

The younger rubbed his hands and stamped his feet to keep warm. 'Did you check what time they're changing the guards? The main road's being watched ever since those idiots left entrails at the fence of that farm.'

Nodding. 'Careless... I think we can get her through the back way. But here, just in case.' The older man wiped his hand on his overalls, which were splattered in places with dry blood, and pulled out a bundle of material from the back pocket.

The young lad raised his eyebrows as the older man tossed cloth into his hands. 'What are these?'

'Socks. To keep her hooves quiet.'

'The cow?'

'Yes. Haven't you ever put socks on a cow before?'

• • •

The moon cast a wet streak along the salt-melted, worn-to-dust road. Apartment blocks rose on both sides, perpendicular concrete anomalies against the vast wind-rolled farmland. The two men had become one, hunched together as if to make their bodies smaller. The taller lad walked with a limp. The shorter, stockier man held a rag to his cheek, packed tight with ice from the side of the road. The cow had not taken well to the socks.

Hot white vapour bloomed from the cow's nostrils. She walked with hooves high, as though still navigating pine needles. Her feet felt tight, as though bound in clay and spongy, like she'd stepped in a fresh patch of wild mushroom maszlakis that appear after the first rains in autumn. Her heart beat faster and her eyes darted left to right. Still, being led was better than roaming the forest alone.

Suddenly, a window shutter flung open and clattered against the cement wall to their right. The sound echoed down the street before dispersing on a gust of wind. The men flattened themselves against the wall, shying from the light and for a few, tense seconds, they didn't move. But there was nothing to decipher behind the window except the gleaming emptiness of glass enclosing a dark room. So they resumed their walking, faster now, keeping their heads bowed. As they did, the shadow of a face appeared, a slender neck, the ghost of a hand.

They passed more identical buildings and a garrison of unserviced army tanks dusted with snow. The roads were empty. In fact, the camp might've seemed deserted to an unknowing traveller—the people tucked so deep within the surrounding buildings to keep as far away from the biting cold as possible. By the time they reached the centre of the camp, a light, feathery snow had begun to fall, obscuring the road ahead. The men had stopped rubbing and whickering to the cow. Instead, they used rough hands and brute strength to keep her moving.

Finally, after what seemed like a very long pilgrimage, they stopped beside a building and peered at the number nailed into the wall. The older man clapped the lad on the back, to a plume of powdery snow. They began pulling off their gloves and kicking their soles together.

The girl was round of face, with feather-lashed blue eyes red-ringed from lack of sleep and her fair hair fanned in a wispy array about her face as she burst from the main entrance of the building and crashed into the two men and the cow. The cow stumbled, losing a sock, its hoof making a hollow *clunk* on the compact road. Both men bit down exclamations of surprise and panic while the girl played hot potato with the smoking pot in her hands, still sticky with the blackened residue of a failed meal.

'What are you doing, girl? Get back inside!' the older man exclaimed, hand inadvertently rising to shield his newly bruised cheekbone, while the lad helped him to control the now-bucking cow.

The girl dropped the pot into the snow and stood straight to take in the two men—her tired eyes now alert and wide, her gaze coming to rest on the cow's hooves adorned with mud-clogged wool.

The older man glanced down the road, then back at the girl. 'Did you hear me? Get back inside.'

The lad grabbed his companion's arm and shook his head. Then he turned to the girl, 'You'll catch a death,' he said in a softer tone. 'The storm's coming in thick and fast.'

Still the girl didn't move, and neither did her gaze, which was still fixed on the cow. 'I burnt the kopytka dough,' she finally said. 'I used up all the potatoes, and the stock for gravy. Mama will be mad.'

'What do you want us to do about it?' the older man grunted.

The lad took a deep breath. 'Your mother wouldn't want you out on the road at this time of night. Go back inside before the military police come to check on us.'

The girl glanced at the soiled pot at her feet, which had stopped smoking and was now only letting off a slight acrid scent. She hesitated on the step, then her eyes widened and she stuck out her chin, collarbones jutting as she tried to make herself tall. 'I won't tell the MPs about the cow if you save me some meat.'

The two men glanced at each other, weighing the girl's threat.

'To make new stock,' she added, as though the men hadn't heard her before.

The older man began a string of profanities to which the lad cut him off. 'Lech, it's just a girl and her mother. What harm can it do?'

The older man threw his arms in the air. 'There's only so much cow in a cow.'

The lad nodded and considered the girl again. 'We'll do a trade.'

The girl picked up the pot, and held it out in offering. 'It's a good pot. It can be cleaned.'

The lad frowned. 'That *is* a fine pot. It can be cleaned. You should not trade the lasting for a single meal.' He glanced at Lech and shrugged. 'Laundry room. Tomorrow afternoon. Bring newspaper.'

The older man spluttered, but was cut off by the girl's exclamation of thanks. 'Ah, gękuje bardzo, *Pan*. Gękuje.'

'Nie ma za co,' the older man said gruffly, embarrassed at the respectful point of address. 'Now go. Quick.'

The girl opened her mouth as though to say something more, then closed it. Taking the steps two at a time, her pot cradled in her arms. She climbed to the landing, leaned all her weight and strength on the door to pull it open and slipped inside. The door made a fluted sound against the wind as it closed. The smell of char faded with her.

The storm broke, as though it had been waiting for the men to reach their destination and a gale-force wind ripped down the road, howling along the building fronts and rattling windows. The cow flattened her ears against the bitter chill and nosed the lad's arm in search of the bale. The lad ignored her and bent his own head to the wind, speaking loudly into a cupped hand to be heard by his companion. 'Do you think she'll keep her mouth shut?'

'What choice do we have but to trust that she does?' the older man replied, thumping the cow's hide to start her up the steps. It was dark inside, the narrow hallway lit by a single, yellow light bulb screwed into a hole in the ceiling. The air smelled like too many people exhaling at once. But at least it was out of the biting wind.

From there, they walked in silence up a winding set of stairs, down another corridor and towards a door marked 'laundry'. The older man paused before the door and said in a low voice, 'Next time, Maciej, ask for something more useful than newspaper.'

The lad frowned. 'Like what?'

The older man tossed a bundle of material at the lad who fumbled and caught it mid air. It was the threadbare sock that had come off the cow.

• • •

'So, I will never forget the cow in socks,' Babcia says, sliding her empty coffee cup to the centre of the table and folding her napkin on the edge of the rim. She does the same with my cold, leftover latte. 'It was like, you know, a dream. You blink and it is not real...' She trails off.

I suddenly become aware of the clatter of plates, the low murmur of conversation around us. I glance at Babcia. Her cheeks are pink. She seems tired, but warm. Eventually, I say, 'The poor cow.'

She smiles. 'That is the thing, Lianka. We had good meat next day. And for many days after. When you live on plain food with no flavour for so long, fresh meat taste so good, you would not believe. I made into soup with some small amount vegetables.'

I must've made a face then, because it made Babcia chuckle. 'Life is a funny thing, Lianka,' she says. 'I lost my shoes when I run from the Germans. My socks were very dirty. I sometime think, the whiter your socks, the much lucky you be.'

The waitress clears our table. A Clydesdale clip clops down the main street, its wagon heavy with tourists returning to the Hahndorf Inn.

Outback Bowser, 1970

Rose Lucas

Rose Lucas is a Melbourne poet and academic. Her first collection, *Even in the Dark* (UWAP 2013), won the Mary Gilmore Award; her second collection, *Unexpected Clearing*, was also published by UWAP in 2016. She is currently completing her third collection, *This Shuttered Eye*.

At the petrol bowser,
the dusty afternoon vibrating
in rippling ridges of heat,
he moves away as though
(lounging with lemonade and cross-words)
we were no longer his cherished cargo,
his responsibility to transport;

I can see his check shirt
billowing in hot air,
the sinews of his suntanned arms
passing money to a petrol attendant,
his black-rimmed glasses when
turning
he looks
back
smiling into our car:

when the window is wound down and
time
like a heart beat
is speeding up.

Cockburn Power Station

Veronica Lake

Veronica Lake was a teacher of Literature for many years. She collates and edits the annual student poetry journal *Primo Lux*. She is a Churchill Fellow (2010), awarded for the study of Shakespeare. Her poems have been published in several Australian journals.

A bloated carcass, abandoned to crows,
hulk hunkered down square and lonely;
left to settle, squatting beside the sea.
She is sightless, each blank eyed window
shattered, with splintered remnants of glass
grinning in a grimace of broken teeth.
Over time her interior has been picked clean,
leaving an empty cage of ribs, daubed with
vulgarities, tagged with violent words.
Her humming warmth forever silenced.
The only sound, the fluttering mutter of roosting birds.

Sometimes she wakens to night-time revelry.
Young people come to dance in ecstatic frenzy;
their music pulsing through emptiness,
their bodies heaving, tightly enmeshed,
entranced by the beat, by the heat
by the douf-douf of bass compelling their feet.
Night's vault is lit by flickering glow lights
banishing darker shadows. For the moment she lives.

Come morning, the sea sighs its morning sigh.
Hazy sunlight pours in revealing fresh graffiti on her walls.

Flight Path

Julie Twohig

Julie Twohig's short stories and creative non-fiction have been published in *Award Winning Australian Writing*, the SALA Short Story Collection, Stringybark Anthology, *page seventeen*, *The Victorian Writer*, Leader Newspapers. Julie has won or been shortlisted in many competitions.

The instant the wheels hit the runway Helen reaches for her carry-on luggage, despite the air steward flapping his hands. The seatbelt sign is still on. Seated, she unzips the bag. Good. The lid is on tight. For the entire flight she imagined having to shake her father's ashes from a week of unwashed clothes.

Joining the throng of people filing towards the exit, pressed against her ribs is the outline of the urn. To stave off a bruise—or a welt—she relaxes her arm. He had that effect, her father. If he taught her anything it was that you pick your battles. From early on she learned to look the other way, especially when he was at fault, like that day he killed her chicken. She knew it was him, straight away. She'd brought the chirping fuzz-ball home from school one day and in no time the bird was taller than Helen's ruler, iridescent black with a dark red comb. It shocked them all, when its motley greeting notched up to a full-blown bugle call. *It's a damned rooster*, her father yelled, all flushed in the face. *What's the point of it? Can't even lay a bloody egg.* Next morning Helen found the rooster in the corner of the backyard, tongue dangling from its mouth, blood pooling in the corner of its staring eye. When her father appeared, his towering form blocked sunlight from gleaming on the limp bird's feathers. *Bloody neighbours. Come on. We're taking your mum shopping.* Helen scooped some feathers and hid them up her sleeve, and that night tucked them under her pillow, wishing she had wings to fly.

Thank God Richard is nothing like her father. Rarely a day will pass that Helen isn't grateful. Four rounds of IVF, putting up with a wife besieged by daily hits of hormones, his wrenching grief every time her body rejects another implant. The miracle required.

Again, she pictures their miracle baby cocooned in its gender-neutral organic cotton sling—one of many items she has collected from Babyworld. The three of them strolling in the local park. Down-track, their toddler at the zoo; summer days at the beach; hanging out the window of a steam train laughing and wiping soot from their eyes. Their precious child snuggled between them in their bed as they read to her.

At the luggage carousel, Helen recalls their first appointment at the fertility clinic, the consultant's words: *It's extremely unlikely you'll fall pregnant naturally*—as if it was an everyday thing to announce to a woman. *Your best bet is IVF.* Noting Richard's stricken face, Helen knew she would need to be the strong one. And although she still holds hope that her traitorous body will surprise her, and she'll be like other women—a fecund goddess—it's a challenge given that more and more she sees the frustration in her husband's eyes. It's in his lack lustre, his loss of faith in her. In *them*. Gone, the days he'd slide his hands up the backs of her legs as she stood at the kitchen sink. Now whenever she initiates intimacy she feels predatory, as if she is somehow violating him. She tries hard not to think about it. Once they've hit the jackpot, IVF will be a distant memory, and Richard's joy will be boundless when he finally gets to cradle their child.

Helen peers into the mirror in the airport bathroom. Nothing has changed, regardless of her newly orphaned status. The usual frown lines. Her hair is still dark—she keeps it short to balance an elongated face, courtesy of her father. Blue eyes stare back at her, their youthful sparkle long-gone. Eyes reminiscent of an overcast day when the sun tries in earnest to shine.

Her ovaries twang to the point of torture. Today is Ovulation Day. Reflected in the mirror, her unwomanliness, her useless womb, a face etched with resentment. It's not just Richard who misses their spontaneous lovemaking of old.

The lonely space Helen increasingly inhabits these days brings to mind the kindness of strangers—one in particular, the real-estate agent she enlisted to sell the family home. She recognised the elderly gentleman from her father's funeral two days before.

'I always loved this cottage,' his hands clasped at his back as he meandered through the rooms.

'Thank you. My father built it.'

'You don't find craftsmanship like that these days. I knew him, you know. Your father and I were interned together.'

'Really? Dad rarely talked about the war.'

'None of us do. We saw too much… which means we weren't always the best of fathers,' as if hinting at the origins of Helen's father's rage, this stranger who seemed to know her own father better than she ever did.

At his suggestion to cull, Helen ferried carloads of junk to the op-shop. Some items she couldn't part with—foolish keepsakes really—like the tiny figurines from her childhood bedroom. She'd loved them all, once. During that solitary week, she flicked layers of dust from the porcelain puppies, the horses and kittens and the sweet little girls, wrapped each one in bubble wrap, then laid them inside the battered suitcase she had retrieved from the attic. Carried the laden suitcase to the stairwell, slipped it inside along with the boxes waiting to be shipped to Melbourne once the house is sold. By the seventh day with sunlight streaming through freshly laundered lace curtains, Helen wandered through the cottage her father had built by hand so many years ago, and stood beneath the wooden chandelier he'd imported from his Austrian homeland, the twelve empty sockets begging for candles.

She pressed her palm to a pretty window shutter—poked her fingers through the little hearts her father once carved into the borders. When she was a little girl and if the shutters were still closed, the morning light would beam tiny hearts around the room and Helen would jump to catch the dust motes. If her father was in a good mood he'd spin her around while chuckling with delight; at other times, send her to her room. At some point in the evening Helen's mum would tuck her into bed, whisper that it wasn't her father's fault. It was the war. He'd lost so many people.

While sorting through the clutter in the back of a drawer, Helen had found the three-inch porcelain rooster her father gave her the day he murdered the rooster, recalled the discomfort as he watched her unwrap it, then as if the rooster had burnt her palm, she flung it on the couch and fled outside. Having discovered the porcelain bird again, an outrageous thought had popped into place. If her father had killed the rooster, why give her such a token? After all these years was Helen admitting he might not have done it? She put the rooster on the window sill in her old bedroom then foolishly imagined it puffing its little chest and crowing at the top of its blessed lungs: *Cock-a-doodle-do!*

Then she picked up the corner of her old mattress, dense and floppy, and found the rooster's feathers exactly where she'd left them, still iridescent, barely faded at all. Layered the feathers inside a small paper bag then popped it in her handbag. She would keep them close.

It's not good to be maudlin, not on Ovulation Day. She must elevate her thoughts. If the powers-that-be deem her to be a loving daughter, she might yet be blessed with children in the time-honoured way. Even one would do. A little girl who would cherish Helen's childhood knick-knacks. And if they don't fall pregnant naturally over the next few days, a fifth implant has been scheduled for next month. One of her six frozen embryos is sure to be a girl, a daughter who'll always know she is loved. Will never feel the cut of a hand. If it's a boy, he'll be just like Richard.

In the queue for a taxi, Helen imagines Richard's face when her keepsakes finally arrive. It's not as if any of it is valuable. As far as he knows she wanted nothing to do with her past. When he offered to accompany her to New Zealand, Helen declined. They were never close, Richard and her father, and given the fragility of her marriage the risk of token sympathy was too great.

Two nights ago, Helen phoned Richard from New Zealand. 'God knows how I survived in this house. So many memories.'

'Hang in there. When are you coming home?'

'Wednesday. A 9am flight.' She didn't mention she'd be home in time for Ovulation Day. He didn't need to be reminded of her obsession with the thermometer; the kitchen calendar, 'OD' circled in red on every page.

'Wow,' he said. 'It'll be ready to go on the market by then?'

'You know me… Speedy Gonzales.'

'Miss Efficient.'

Not efficient enough or we'd have a child by now.

'What time will you be home?' she asked. But they'd lost the connection.

Although not an overly long flight between Auckland and Melbourne, door to door is nine hours and Helen is exhausted. When she gets home she will nap, then make a special dinner, light the candles, try to get Richard in the mood.

In the apartment she notes the echo of her footsteps, the acoustics ramped up by the steel and glass design, its lack of adornment—a barren contrast to her father's house. Since her mother passed, her father hadn't changed a thing in the family home. Helen would have assumed he'd have relished the chance to declutter; her mother had been such a hoarder. Perhaps he missed her more than Helen realised. Either that, or just plain lazy. Since fleeing the family home Helen's solution to her mother's claustrophobic muddle has been to embrace minimalism. She never imagined minimalism would include the viability of her eggs.

On a brighter note, her week-long absence will have given Richard a reprieve from the relentless reminders of Ovulation Day. Recently he asked how long they should keep trying. She'd looked up from the dishwasher, coffee mugs sprouting from both hands. 'Until we're pregnant, you goose. You still want this… don't you?'

'Very much,' he'd said. 'I'm just not sure it's worth it.'

'What does that mean?'

'Just saying.' He put his hands in the air as if steadying a spooked horse.

Now, before climbing into bed, Helen remembers her father's urn. It can't stay in her bag. She wanders around the apartment looking for a spot, the reduction of her father pressed to her chest, his remains burnt to a crisp. That's how he liked his chops. *And* toast. He never listened, no matter how many times she warned him charcoal is carcinogenic. *Bullshit!* he'd say, *Charcoal's good for your teeth*—despite being toothless in his later years.

The mantelpiece above the fake-wood fire catches Helen's eye. Her father would like it there. Liked being the centre of attention. *Look at me when I speak!* his catch-cry when Helen was small, his enormous fists jiggling the cutlery whenever he thumped the table. *Respect your elders!* Another favourite.

In the centre of the mantelpiece is the framed photo, the 'selfie' Helen gleefully snapped during her honeymoon, their ecstatic grins. A lot can go down in five years.

She places the urn behind the photo, pauses to consider how she feels. But all she registers is her impending stress at Richard's despair when his gusto wanes, both left gutted like monumental failures. To maximise their chances, she really must rest.

The doona cover has been changed. She lifts a corner and finds the sheets changed, too. Such a lovely welcome home. Has he remembered it's ovulation day after all, and the loss of her father softened him?

Heartened, Helen dispenses with a nap. Instead she will paint her nails, apply a face mask, find something alluring to wear, then whip up a feast.

She checks the freezer. Takes out a nice eye-fillet. Richard loves her flamed peppered steaks.

There is a set of fresh towels in the bathroom, the apple-green pair. She smiles. It's the small things that count. Slips off her shoes and feels something soft beneath her foot. Bending, she spots a white hair-tie, almost invisible against the floor tiles.

Pinched between two fingers, Helen stares at the single blonde hair threaded through the hair-tie, goose-flesh prickling her forearms.

She beelines for the laundry and yanks the unwashed crumpled navy sheets and pillow slips from the washing machine. Stretches them out, a waft of perfume in the air. Hints of frangipani. Helen never wears perfume. Infertile *and* perfume-less.

The doona cover and towels are bunched inside the dryer, still damp. Trust Richard to overload it. She drags the washing from the dryer, reaches inside and removes the lint screen. Curled into a 'C' and choked in fluff, a second blonde hair.

She stretches it alongside the culprit twisted in the hair-tie. The perfect match. Twin hairs, their DNA no doubt fertile.

Shuddering in breathless aching sobs, Helen slumps to the ground, presses her cheek against the cold wall tiles.

Helen places the honeymoon photo face-up on the floor in front of the fake-wood fire. Tips her father's ashes into a zip-lock bag, puts it aside. Wraps her used airline ticket around the empty urn, slides the elastic with the blonde hair over the urn until it is dead-centre. Tucks in the twin hair, both vivid against the ticket's red border. Shielding her face, she smashes the urn onto the glass-frame of the photo. Positions the urn upright onto the shattered glass. Retrieves from her handbag the little paper bag, then upends the rooster's feathers, watches them glide and settle onto the pile of debris.

She stashes the zip-lock bag with her father's ashes inside her handbag—perhaps her mum would like him with her after all. In the bedroom, Helen zips up the green linen dress Richard bought for her in Tuscany fourteen months ago. They'd hoped to conceive there, a romantic love story for their first-born.

In the bland hotel room Helen lies starfish across the queen-size bed, this room that could be anywhere in the world. It has nothing to distinguish it. Much like Helen's life in this accursed city, her adopted town. A life in tatters. *I'll never be unfaithful* Richard had said to her soon after they met, a promise spurred by Helen confessing she'd been cheated on more than once. More fool her to think Richard would be different.

She flips the pillow for a dry spot.

It's dark by the time Helen rouses herself. There are five voice messages and numerous texts, all from Richard. She deletes the lot. Slides her hands down her flat childless belly, again imagines a pregnant dome. She can do this. She will do it alone.

She speed-dials #7.

'I'd like to make an appointment for an implant, today, if possible? Yep, hormones up to date. Everything signed off. Good to go.'

The receptionist tells Helen she's in luck. They have a spot at 5.15. A cancellation.

'I'll take it,' says Helen, her heart flipping cartwheels as she pictures her tiny embryo, the cloud of dry-ice cooling her in a steel cylinder. The lab

techs selecting the one they deem most 'attractive' before beginning the thaw. Compared to all the scientific jargon 'attractive' is such a delightful term: Helen's beautiful daughter about to blossom into flesh and blood. Fingers and toes will sprout. She'll have a little turned-up nose. A heart-shaped face like Helen's mother.

Waiting for the taxi outside her hotel Helen makes a mental note to discuss the transfer of her remaining five embryos to a clinic in New Zealand. If today's implant is successful, she wants the option of siblings for her daughter. If not, she will keep trying.

At 7pm, curled on her side in the hotel bed in this city that is now alien to her, Helen cups her hand over her belly: *Hello, little one. I'll keep you safe. I promise. Please stay.*

She fires up her laptop, books a flight to New Zealand, then dials the real-estate agent.

'I hope it's not too late to call… I've decided to take the house off the market.'

'But you just—'

'Don't worry. I'll cover—'

'No need.'

'Really?' Helen had expected resistance.

'You're within the grace period. And it's your prerogative. It's your childhood home, after all.'

'Oh, right,' she says. It is a generous 'grace period'. It's been fifteen years since Helen first left home. 'I'm going to live there. I'm coming home.' The word *home* spins inside her skull, bounces off its bony walls until the spinning slows, and the notion of home takes up cautious lodging.

'Good for you, young lady. Especially now you've restored the house to its former glory. What will you do for work?'

'I'm lucky in that way,' she says, relaxing; the comfort of a stranger. 'My consultancy business is quite portable.'

'Your father would be delighted you're coming home, may he rest in peace.'

From the dresser, Helen picks up the plastic clip-bag, the little pouch of her father's ashes weighs no more than five hundred grams. Half a kilo. The weight of a life.

A tear splashes her hand, and the winged creatures inside her ribcage threaten to lift her off the ground. What sort of parent will *she* be? A sole-parent certainly—but will her moods be erratic like her father's?

'Anyway,' the agent says, 'make sure you come and have a cuppa with me and the wife. So we can welcome you back to the neighbourhood. Once you're settled in. Okay?'

'Thank you, I'd like that very much.' It will be lovely to be welcomed. And by getting to know this man, Helen might learn more about her father.

And suddenly it's as if her childhood home has been waiting for her all along, this offer of refuge. A recalibration, a trick of the light.

Her hands clasping her belly, Helen presses her soles and heels into the floor, anchors herself.

Look Away
Angela Gardner

Angela Gardner's poems are published/forthcoming in *Blackbox Manifold*, *The Long Poem*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Prole* (UK); *Axon*, *Hecate*, *Rabbit*, *Cordite*, *Southerly* (Australia); *West Branch* and *Yale Review* (USA). *Some Sketchy Notes on Matter* (shortlisted Dorothy Hewett Award 2018) will be published in 2019.

All around people move in their corridors. A livestream
of constant movement along designated pathways
attention a hard focus followspot into total darkness.
The 'edgelessness' that is so frightening when we reach it
with parts of vision missing. In the visual field
objects move, objects disappear and reappear at different
scales. Occasional shadow, or a technician visible
sometimes without moonlight in the high mountains of memory.
Those objects may be other people in their own corridors.
Tracking shot, technicolour fit, I dream myself soft-bodied
intact in all the working parts. The dream gliding on its tracking
dolly in a continual process of encounter. How overnight
an entry point opens: grazing, tentacles waving. It's a shock,
a false coin of blue light as if it shifts across a seafloor
in a far distant ocean.

WA Writers United

Westerly is part of WA Writers United, a collaboration of literary organisations in Perth. *Westerly* subscribers will benefit from member discounts on tickets for all the following events—just mention WA Writers United when you book!

July

11th KSP holiday hub: Young Writer Event, 9.30am–5pm.

20th WA Poets Inc.: 'In a cornfield with your pants around your ankles: writing poems based on historical material' with Carol Milner, 10am–12pm. Queens Building, 97 William St, Perth.

20th KSP Workshop: Supporting Your 'Real Life' Stories, 1–4pm.

26th WA Poets Inc.: Creative Connections Poetry and Art Exhibition. Moores building, 46 Henry St, Fremantle (until 11th August).

27th PCWC Workshop: 'Capturing Character and Doing Dialogue' with Brooke Dunnell, 1.30–4.30pm.

28th FAWWA Workshop: 'Writing for Self-Discovery' with Andrew Levett, Mattie Furphy House, 1–4pm.

29th Voicebox Poetry Reading, from 6.30pm. Guests from WA Poets Inc. Emerging Poets Programme. Check Voicebox website for venue.

August

9th–18th WA Poets Inc.: Perth Poetry Festival. Queens Building, 97 William St, Perth.

10th PCWC Workshop: 'Drafting and Editing Prose for Publication' with Josephine Taylor, 1.30–4.30pm.

17th KSP Short Course: Supporting Your 'Self-Publishing Journey': Session One: Polishing & Proofreading, 1–5pm.

24th KSP Social Event: Spooky Stories Night, 6–9pm.

26th Voicebox Poetry Reading, from 6.30pm. Guests: Tony London, Dennis Haskell & Daphne Milne. Check Voicebox website for venue.

30th KSP Social Event: Sundowner Session Author Talk, from 6.30pm. (On the last Friday of each month August–November.)

September

7th PCWC Workshop: 'Tomato Writing' with Hannah van Didden, 1.30–4.30pm.

14th KSP Short Course: Supporting Your 'Self-Publishing Journey': Session Two: Finalising & Typesetting, 1–5pm.

21st WA Poets Inc. Workshop: 'Noongar Poetry' with Matiland Schnaars (TBC), 10am–12pm. Queens Building, 97 William St, Perth.

21st OOTA: Workshop presented by Andrew Levitt, 1.30–4pm. Glyde-In Community Centre, Glyde Street, East Fremantle.

23rd Voicebox Poetry Reading, from 6.30pm. Guests: Yvonne Paterson, Carolyn Abbs & Tim Edwards. Check Voicebox website for venue.

October

1st FAWWA Tom Collins Poetry Prize opens for submissions—see: www.fawwa.org/writing-competitions. Closes December 15th.

6th KSP Special Event: The Colours of Katharine—50th Anniversary Commemoration of KSP, 10am–4pm.

12th KSP Short Course: Supporting Your 'Self-Publishing Journey': Session Three: Preparing to Print & Sell, 1–5pm.

12th PCWC Workshop: 'Editing Your Short Stories' with Shane McCauley, 1.30–4.30pm.

22nd FAWWA Writers Retreat—Vancouver Arts Centre Albany (22nd–28th).

28th Voicebox Poetry Reading, from 6.30pm. Guests: Giri Mazzella, Jo Clarke & Coral Carter. Check Voicebox website for venue.

November

2nd PCWC Workshop: 'Who Speaks' with Susan Midalia, 1.30–4.30pm.

9th KSP Workshop: Supporting Your 'Memoir' Stories, 1–4pm.

11th KSP Social Event: Thanks for the Memories Literary Dinner, from 6pm.

14th KSP Short Course: Supporting Your 'Self-Publishing Journey': Session Four: Publishing & Promotion, 1–5pm.

16th WA Poets Inc. Workshop: 'Writing Haiku' with Rose van Son (TBC), 10am–12pm. Queens Building, 97 William St, Perth.

25th Voicebox Poetry Reading, from 6.30pm. Guests TBC. Check Voicebox website for venue.

December

1st KSP Social Event: Katharine's Birthday & Awards Ceremony, from 11am.

7th PCWC Workshop: 'Trouble is Our Business' with Guy Salvidge, 1.30–4.30pm.

Ongoing

The Fellowship of Writers WA will be running a number of events across the year, dates TBC. They also offer residencies. See their website for details.

OOTA Prose classes with SJ Finch and Poetry classes with Shane McCauley are ongoing, on alternate Fridays.

WA Poets Inc. host a variety of poetry events throughout the year. Visit their website for updates.

KSP Writers Centre offers three private cabins for writers to retreat, with substantial discounts for members, plus ten different writing groups meeting on a regular basis.

Peter Cowan Writers' Centre (PCWC) supports novice, emerging and established creative writers, offering a range of workshops and writing groups.

For more information on any of these events, please contact the host organisation.

Peter Cowan Writers Centre: www.pcwc.org.au
KSP Writers' Centre: www.kspwriterscentre.com
WA Poets Inc: www.wapoets.wordpress.com
Voicebox: www.voiceboxpoets.com
OOTA: www.ootawriters.com
FAWWA: www.fawwa.org
Westerly Magazine: www.westerlymag.com.au

Westerly Submissions

Westerly publishes fiction and poetry as well as articles. We aim to generate interest in the literature and culture of Australia and its neighbouring regions. *Westerly* is published biannually in July and November. Previously unpublished submissions are invited from new and established writers living in Australia and overseas.

Submission deadline for July edition: 31 March
Submission deadline for November edition: 31 August

Submissions may be sent via post or submitted online. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned. All manuscripts must show the name and address of the sender and should be typed (double-spaced) on one side of the paper only. While every care is taken of manuscripts, the editors can take no final responsibility for their return; contributors are consequently urged to retain copies of all work submitted.

Poetry: maximum of 5 poems no longer than 50 lines each.
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Minimum rates paid to contributors:
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email: westerly@uwa.edu.au
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Online submissions at westerlymag.com.au should be attached as PDF or Word documents. Please include a brief biographical note and postal address in the submission form.

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Oliver Mills, *Walking On Air*, 2014, acrylic paint & texture gel on canvas, 40.5cm × 50.5cm (h, w). Creative Enabler, Hans Kreiner. Photographer, Shannon Sullivan.

'Listening to the Stories Woven Around Us'
Brooke Collins-Gearing

We all have our own stories. Yet the one thing we all have in common is the land we live on. We wake up every day in a land that, since the beginning of time, has embodied all the knowledge that is needed to nourish and sustain every animate and inanimate being that rests on it. This knowledge has been kept, protected and nurtured by its custodians and some of it, the layer that is available to all, has been shared, is being shared. It only requires us to listen.

With writing and ideas from
Ambelin Kwaymullina, Melinda Smith, Brett Dionysius, Anne Poelina, Simone Lazaroo, Donna Mazza, Chelinay Gates, Barbara Holloway, Robyn Ferrell, Jennifer Rutherford, Cassie Lynch, Christopher Konrad, Shey Marque, Jill Jones, Anne Elvey, Josephine Clarke, Rose Van Son, Veronica Lake, Rose Lucas, Andrew Lynch, and many others...

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