65.1

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

In this Issue
Felicity Plunkett
Nardi Simpson
Nicholas Jose
Tracy Ryan
Kevin Brophy

Westerly

‘Angel Buddha Temple’
Brigid Lowry

It is never just an ordinary day.
It is a never-before and never-again
moment, a day of particles moving
through space, arranging and
rearranging themselves in ways
mysterious, terrifying and miraculous.

Westerly
Volume 65 Number 1, 2020

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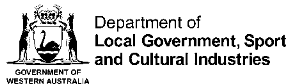

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65.1 | **New Writing from Western Australia**
Fiction
Creative Non-Fiction
Poetry
Essays

Westerly

From the Editor **8**

Poetry

Felicity Plunkett
One for sorrow **10**

Virginia Boudreau
Oyster Shell **16**

Josephine Clarke
The Belt **21**

Brenda Saunders
Echidna Chasm **58**

Gabriel Furshong
Winter Flight **59**

Jackson
For perspective **60**

Anna Jacobson
Row F Seat 10 **61**

Aidan Coleman
Circuit, an Elegy **107**

Tamara Holmes
ectopic **108**

Eric Roy
Chequered Like a Flag Our Past **118**

Jen Webb
At the end of everything **120**

Marite Norris
The Queen of Death **128**

Tracy Ryan
Release **130**

Paul Hetherington
Ship in a Bottle **140**

Ross Jackson
The Red Dingo **141**

Julie Watts
Waking at Night **148**

Ella Fox-Martens
Womanhood **150**

Chris Arnold
love in the time of covid19 **151**

Aileen Walsh
White blankets **178**

Chloe Hosking
midwest october **181**

Jazz Money
False gods **182**

Matt Hall and Sophie Finlay
Mass death: murray cod, bream, golden perch **184**

Isabel Prior
The Crayfish **194**

Andrew Lansdown
Dip **195**

Anne Elvey
hail **222**

Jonathan Dunk
(f)or this **223**

Megan Kaminski
A thing we ask entirely too much of **224**

Fiction

Nardi Simpson
Song of the Crocodile **12**

James Turvey
Telepathy, Smoke and Violence **18**

Donna Mazza
The Last of Its Kind **62**

Ben Mason
The Tyranny of History **109**

Alex Philp
Spectre **121**

Laurie Steed
The Crazy and the Brave **132**

Chris Fleming
Lion **152**

Bryn Dodson
Whitby, August **215**

Essays

Nicholas Jose
The Story of the Moon-Bone **22**

Jessica Stewart
Exploring Attributes of a Successful Author–Editor Relationship in Creative Writing **85**

Kevin Brophy
Waves, Mountains, Wings and Sails: on Lorri Whiting, an expatriate woman artist (Part Two) **196**

Writers' Development Program

Kaya Ortiz Lattimore
On Wednesdays we play [   ] **70**

Riley Faulds
Significant Tree Register **72**

Mia Kelly
Thinking Banksias in Words **75**

Thomas Simpson
Rubbish in Waiting **84**

Creative Non-Fiction

Linda Martin
I Went Looking for Mr Facey, Dad **100**

Carly Stone
Touching as Feeling as Touching Again **142**

Brigid Lowry
Angel Buddha Temple **186**

Black Summer

Nellie Le Beau
Domestic Violence **154**

Alan Fyfe
A Hill Outside Yanchep **155**

Julieanne Lamond
Reading Crisis: the politics of fire in Amanda Lohrey's *The Reading Group* and *Vertigo* **156**

Adele Aria
V for Vulnerable **171**

Submissions **226**

Subscriptions **227**

PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing
the winner of the annual Patricia Hackett Prize
for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2019, to

CASSIE LYNCH

For her poetry,
'*Five Haiku*'

Published in *Westerly* 64:1, 2019

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Entries open late 2020

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From the Editor

Scarborough, Perth
June 2020

Dear all,

I am, somewhat ironically, not much of a letter writer. I tend to come off as facetious (or self-conscious), and I am not diligent enough to make a good correspondent. It is hard, though, in this time of pandemic crisis, not to feel the need to connect through small gestures.

So I am writing now in the hope that you will feel this as my reaching out to you, sincerely. I hope you, your family and loved ones are all well, and that you have not lost anyone dear to you, though I am conscious many have. I hope that you have not lost your livelihood, though again I am conscious that many have. Whatever adverse effects you have suffered, I hope that you have support around you, and that you find a way through. I hope that you are coping, and that you are taking care of yourself.

The sensation of facetiousness is one that frightens me. It seems to sit alongside an ignorant form of privilege, making light of a situation or circumstances in the assumption that it holds no sincere risk. There is a touch of this in the current, common refrain of using time in isolation to be creative: gain a new skill, take up a new hobby, produce a masterwork… This message assumes that this is possible—that we all have the time, the financial security, and the health (mental as well as physical) to dedicate ourselves to creative effort. At the same time, it undersells the rigour required in artistic endeavour.

There is an irony here. At the same moment that we are exhorted to turn to the arts for entertainment and relief, the arts are simultaneously undervalued. Funding for the arts from our federal government is minimal. Anecdotally, many in the arts seem to find it difficult to meet the conditions for COVID-19 relief. The Australia Council for the Arts and other funding bodies should be commended for their efforts to support arts workers with relief funding, but they are woefully under-resourced in doing so. This devalues not only the importance of the arts to our daily lives, but also the importance of the industry to the economy at a moment of economic crisis. The scope and scale of the creative arts as an industry continues to be underestimated: for example, a recent survey from the Australian Institute showed that only seven per cent of respondents answered correctly that the arts employs greater numbers of people than coalmining, while sixty-eight per cent of respondents assumed that mining is the larger employer ('Most Australians Want Government Lifeline for the Creative Industries', 23 May 2020).

Underestimating the arts comes with a risk to the richness of the cultural life of any society. Art offers clarity, sincerity, emotion. It calls out facetiousness and turns us towards empathy. This is an experience which I hope you will find in the work herein. Much of the writing submitted to this issue circled around the nature of the crisis we are facing, calling for feeling in response, or opening up new worlds for contemplation. We met with trauma and, in some works, the reclamation of self. In other moments, we read warmth, curiosity and joy.

The world has been irrevocably altered by the events of the last six months. In the midst of this chaos, I am hugely grateful to the energy and effort of all the people who contributed to the production of this issue. Transitioning to working externally, the *Westerly* team (Josephine Taylor, Chris Arnold and Daniel Juckes, with interns Melissa Kruger and Tim Brockhoff) have gone above and beyond in supporting this release. Our external editors, our consultants, our production team have all offered their time and labour at a moment when that comes dear. This dedication shows the passion of people in supporting the arts. I cannot say how thankful I am to you all.

To everyone reading this, I hope you enjoy this issue, and that you stay safe.

Sincerely yours,

Catherine Noske, editor

One for sorrow
Felicity Plunkett

Felicity is a poet and critic. Her books are *A Kinder Sea* (UQP), *Vanishing Point* (UQP) and the chapbook *Seastrands* (Vagabond). Felicity was University of Queensland Press Poetry Editor and edited *Thirty Australian Poets* (UQP). She has a PhD from Sydney University and was *Australian Book Review*'s 2019 Patrons' Fellow.

Beside
me, the lone tern's composure shows
a foam-legged way forward. The sea draws
back its jostle and rush. Long
division—

space
between past and next. Each step
flossed and washed, I pace myself to walk
with you, fold my hunger small. I'm beyond
retreating—

beneath
the thought. Double-summering, the Arctic
tern crests long days' light, more
than we imagine in these dim hours,
yours—

alone
though I post pockets of song, packets
of tea, letters of hope: migratory,
achy, pecked at by our uncertain
tern.

Brace
myself. Stay, stacking words in the wrong
order—scale of lost notes, low
key—trying all the locks, love's
furious

tenacity—
like the sea's one yacht—a dot. You're on its storm
-sloshed deck. Can't stand alone, so have to
crawl, clamber each waveturn's
jolt—

upright
shore-staggering through sea's hustle
and shush. Disturbance swells and breaks
all night, its lullaby the hand
still—

there
beside our cribbed and swaddled selves,
humming *Still, there*. Stumble,
get up, maintain this modest pace, face
skywards.

High
along the ridge-road fields fizz green, sun
turns, flexing towards spring. Frith
and blaze announce the sudden second beside
our tern—

two for joy.

Song of the Crocodile
Nardi Simpson

Nardi Simpson is a Yuwaalaraay writer, musician, composer and educator from north-west NSW freshwater plains. A founding member of Indigenous folk duo Stiff Gins, Nardi has been performing nationally and internationally for twenty years. Her debut novel, *Song of the Crocodile*, was a 2018 winner of a black&write! Fellowship, and will be released by Hachette later this year.

The sign at the entrance of town is neither informative nor welcoming. To see it emerge, crystallise from the heat of the horizon is to have travelled a measureless distance over infinite time.

The journey always begins prettily. The glory of a new dawn shines light around bends of peaceful ranges, pink and orange dazzling as it rises, warming your back, sending you on your way. Curves of rock sway then twist and you dance on hips and belly, shoulders and neck of the sleeping mountain-woman beneath. As you continue, a ridge line crests then opens. You tiptoe along it, tyres ticking her spine until a steep descent to cleared, encouraged green of paddock and field, the land at her base rocky and rich, both signs of fortune and luck.

Knife-sharp ranges and distant hills beckon. You continue towards them until eventually they dissolve into hints of ripple and crease. Finally, you hit the flat. And scrub. And flat and scrub it continues to be—bland and harsh and unforgiving. Wide. Bare earth, spare space, forgotten land. Black dirt meets red earth and turns metal hard. Hot springs and dried lakes hide motionless, waiting for reason to wake and flow. But this you cannot see; the scrub hides her secrets well.

You travel on and on and on further still, numbed by endless coolabahs and tufts of grass and itchy blue blanket sky. Only when boredom, exhaustion and blindness take hold does life rise from the plains: a sign. *Darnmoor, The Gateway to Happiness*. You feel some sense of achievement; that you have reached a destination in the very least. Yet, as the sign states, Darnmoor is merely the measure, a mark, a point on the road you begin to move closer to where you really want to be. Darnmoor itself is nothing.

The town is a hash of ordered streets and neat houses, each home toeing a line of drab grey concrete, lawns folding out towards flowerbeds and vines. Rhododendron, agapanthus, lily of the valley and bougainvillea grow in perverse abundance. Tomatoes and roses wilt in the shade of the stubborn citrus trees that grow against the wooden or weatherboard or cement-sheeted homes, only ever cream or dirty butter or stone blue in colour. Huddling close, these squares line the way to the singularly important Grace Street, the sole route to, from and through the gateway.

The petrol station heralds the commercial beginnings of the town. Next to it stands Filtch's Fishing and Farming Supplies and then the National, a picture theatre-*cum*-meeting space. A happy coincidence sees the Great Inland Bank next to Darnmoor's oldest building, the Colonial Public House and Bar. And it is here that the town offers up its most prominent crossroads—the first of its many internal divides. On the eastern side of the intersection are a ladieswear, butcher shop and the quaintly rendered white facade of the Darnmoor Country Women's Collective stand, as well as the hive of activity that is Lehmann's General Store, an establishment from which you can purchase almost anything you should need on the dirt-dry plains. All in all, it is a satisfactory strip, this side of the street; inoffensive, modest and calm.

Across the road is Hartford's Grocery. Beside it, are the paper shop, barber and chemist, pouring into Antonio's milk bar, cool, dark and low-ceilinged, with a bar that runs the entire length of its side wall. Antonio's smells perpetually of sugar and malt, an aroma that in searing heat curdles and becomes rancid.

On the other side of the intersection are the Darnmoor Soldiers' Club, the town hall and council chambers, and the Drover's Rest Motel, the only accommodation in town. Woodley's Garage stands adjacent to the Drover's. Beyond these are hobby houses and work sheds, gradually giving way to lots with tractors, trucks and other farming equipment for sale or repair in their front yards.

Bisecting Grace is Hope Street, its significance as the second-most important street in town seen in the old brick buildings of courthouse, police station and post office. A scattering of churches completes the centre of town, their small spires lending a sense of height and grandeur to the settlement, their simple construction and modest windows making them barely distinguishable from each other. Indeed, it is not unheard of for parishioners in Darnmoor to attend a rival service once in a while, the wish for slightly softer pews or a different vocal drone to ease them into their Sunday morning snooze more alluring than the doctrinal particulars.

The remaining places in town of note are the Darnmoor District Hospital, school and sporting grounds.

Most of Darnmoor's residents orient themselves by their proximity to the town centre, and specifically to a notable structure therein. Plunged into the middle of the intersection of Hope is a statue, a grey pillar encased in a roundabout that marks the town's pure centre. Etched upon polished granite are perfectly spaced rows of alphabetised names, the letters of which beam outwards and into the street. Above this a column holds aloft a single, marble figure. A soldier, whitewashed, stands at attention, rifle resting at his side as he peers directly down the length of Grace Street, past Darnmoor and towards the far-off northern horizon. This monument bears the names of Darnmoor's fallen sons. It bestows upon the town a bleeding and dead centre, around which all else revolves.

Cerulean envelops the soldier. It hangs over the streets and streams down upon the town. Its luminescence is blinding. As vast and taut as the ground below, the firmament above is deep. It pushes back into eternity while silently projecting the light of a single, solitary day. If the expanse possessed a seam and the stitching was punctured and torn, it would only reveal an identical coat of piercing blue. Rip that away and it would again reveal the same. The roof of the plains is profound and without end. But to call it just sky would be but a half-truth, for the bleeding blue that shimmers above is also a watercourse, a heavenly highway that holds within and reflects the twists and bends of two great rivers that whisper through the land below. In times of flood, water lies upon the earth in the same manner that stars drift in the firmament. Sky becomes land, water and earth merge, and all things shimmer in cobalt brilliance. The complexion of country is the rarest of colours, the dreams of the plains are blue.

A wild bush track snakes away from the town's eastern edge and winds its way into the scrub. The thoroughfare is known by most as the road to the tip. Here was a perfect place to establish a dumping ground—an already flattened and cleared patch of dirt with an established track to and from. Strangely scratched gums were bulldozed for further access and the garbage mounds quickly grew, the bora and its circles consumed by trash, rubbish, the town's scraps. The pathway was given the name of Old Black Road.

A natural progression past the end of the road will lead you into the bush, eventually hitting the banks of the great Mangamanga. Hemmed by thousand-year-old river red gums, the Mangamanga River is known by some as the wide-bodied, liquid boss of the plains. A sweet watered sister flow, Malugali ran to Darnmoor's north, the two watercourses joining in a quiet patch of dirt, to the north-east of town. A mile upstream of Mangamanga, a settlement scrabbles a living, appearing at the end of a remnant cluster of purple potato flowers. The Campgrounds lean lopsided along the river's edge, at the end of Old Black Road and within walking distance of the tip, the odour emanating from the old ceremony grounds revealing the true gateway and the darker edge of town.

Song of the Crocodile by Nardi Simpson is out 29 September 2020 from Hachette Australia, RRP $32.99.

Oyster Shell
Virginia Boudreau

Virginia Boudreau is a retired teacher living on the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada. Her poetry and prose have been published in a wide variety of literary magazines and anthologies, both in print and online.

This oyster shell the size of my palm is a spill: clotted cream,
  poured
and pleated in the white porcelain saucer where the cat wets
  her whiskers

Its petrified eyelet, a skeletal flounce, torn and mussed, from
  the threadbare
hem of a wedding gown, seed pearls hanging by loose threads,
  ivory and ecru.

It's Grandma's cheek, soft as the frayed list in my pocket,
  smudged ink
the washed blue of her eye, or my own, winking from creased
  parchment

This oyster shell is concentric rings blooming on the backyard
  pond, reed-rimmed
and still in malingering sun. Its eye bold and violet as
  Grandma's pansy gaze, and deep

woods, where salamander stripes, joyful tangerine and freckles
  burnished, dart
from hinted light. And this oyster shell contained in my palm is
  a ruffle circling

a crinoline of fungi, attached to decaying spruce lopsided and
  frail near fading
forest trail, and it's the brooding eye of a hurricane, breathing
  in peeling

scales of a white-fleshed fish, exhaling sadness, a beluga
  beached on frozen
Frobisher shore, her snowy sheath tattooed with a frenzy of
  wild salt roses.

This oyster shell, the size of my own palm is an open pit mine,
  ruptured
landscapes, a monochrome scar and a bird's eye view. It's a
  volcano rising lumpy

opaque lava rims and all-seeing glare trained on the
  determined folly of progress
and my own padlocked evasion. It is calloused leaving, all whiff
  and tang and no more

than a wave-buffered womb, coddled in the currents, a placenta
  collapsing round grit,
the gleaming seed and the smooth lustred trail: new pearls in
  my palm. It is an eye,

lazy lidded and skimmed with cloud-smoke cataracts, a sensing
  eye, a sunken eye,
clairvoyant, its socket pocked with the plumb lines buttoning
  my grandmother's

face on my palm, holding between the lines two thousand eyes
  staring from a thousand
lace faces in a roadside field by the shimmed rock wall rimming
  her house in Arcadia,

dormers lit by setting suns, scathing light trapped in rings
  around an all-seeing pupil,
concentric life-lines and stories mapped on a crinkled silk face,
  in petrified lace,

the shell of my own palm contained in a palm, my life a lace
  gown dropped in a box,
lowered to hallowed ground where a plucked pansy eye peers
  up, mocking my inertia.

It settles like clotted cream in the saucer of her backyard pond,
  reed-rimmed and singing.

Telepathy, Smoke and Violence

James Turvey

James Turvey is a writer, zine maker and skateboarder from Newcastle, Australia. He is currently working on his first novel, *Panania*, as part of a PhD programme at The University of Newcastle.

Dad had packed a cone and was hunched over the bong with his thumb on the lighter when I asked if I could write about some of the fights he'd been in. He ignored the question and put the bong to his lips. I watched the weed glow red-hot and pull through the cone. The chamber filled with smoke and when he released his thumb from the shotty it disappeared up the neck of the bong and into his lungs. He leant back in his chair, took a moment to consider something and then exhaled.

'Do you want one?' he asked.

'No, I don't smoke anymore, it makes me anxious,' I replied.

'It used to make me anxious too, then one day I just sat there and punched cone after cone.'

'What happened?'

'I realised that the world doesn't change when you're stoned, just the way you see it.'

'That's true,' I agreed.

'Weed never made me anxious after that,' he said.

There was a pile of DVDs on top of the television. Dad sorted through them and decided on *The FJ Holden*. It opened with a quote that said 'Old Holdens never die… they just go faster'. I wondered if the same could be said about the men in our family.

The film was set in Bankstown in the mid-seventies; two suburbs and four decades away from where we sat. It was also the same time and place where most of Dad's fight stories took place. I couldn't tell if he'd chosen the movie for that very reason, or if the effects of the second-hand smoke were making me overanalyse the situation.

The setting sun slipped between the neighbouring houses and illuminated the room through the sliding glass doors at the back of the house. Dad pulled another cone and finished a can of Coke that had been sitting next to his weed bowl since I arrived. The ventilation was poor and the air rife with THC. I closed my eyes and floated away, momentarily forgetting where I was.

His voice broke through the void.

'One time,' he said, 'your mother and I were watching *Sixty Minutes*. You were there, but you were just a baby. Out of nowhere a voice in my head told me to go to my mum's.'

'Grandma's house?'

'Yeah, at first I ignored it, but then a sign flashed before my eyes. In white letters it said, "Go to Mum", on a black background, like the title of an old movie or something. It must have made me flinch because your mother asked if I was alright.'

Dad tore the twisted top off a halved cigarette he'd had in his flannelette shirt and emptied it into his bowl alongside a green bud. He worked the scissors until the weed and tobacco were evenly mixed, packed another cone and smoked it. *The FJ Holden* continued to play.

'Anyway, I got in the car and sped off. Must've broken some kind of land speed record getting there. Do you remember that antique poker machine your grandma had in the hallway?'

'Yeah, she used it as a money box for all the kids. I think I got twenty-five cents in the jackpot one time.'

'Some halfwits had seen it from the street and thought it was filled with money. As I walked up the front steps one of them had her cooped up and crying in the corner. He was shouting at her for the key. The other one was trying to prise the pokie open, so neither of them noticed me come through the door. When Mum saw me standing there, she stopped crying and started to smirk. I said, "G'day, Mum," and she replied, "Hello, Love," and then it was on.'

'What do you mean it was on?'

'The first bloke caught my right hand straight to the mouth and his head went back into the poker machine. Split him right open. I grabbed the next guy, the one that had been yelling at Mum, and we tumbled down the front steps. I eye-gouged the fuck out of him and bit the tip of his nose off. I spat it back in his face right there on the front lawn.'

Another cone was packed and then smoked. It was getting hard to see through the haze.

'They were sorry-looking pricks as they hobbled away, I'll tell you that much.'

'Why do you do that stuff, the biting and eye-gouging, why not just punch them?' I asked.

'When I fight, it's like I become an animal. That's all we are. We're just animals.'

‘Do you think it was telepathy, the message I mean?’

‘Call it telepathy, a psychic experience or whatever you want, but I couldn’t ignore it. It was like a magnet pulling me to save her.’

We watched the rest of *The FJ Holden* without saying much. Dad smoked more cones and more cones. I didn’t know it was possible to smoke that much and still function.

After the film was over he handed me a bag of weed. It was vacuum-sealed into one of those freezer bags you see on the infomercials.

‘I told you I don’t smoke anymore,’ I said.

‘I’m sure you’ve got mates you can sell it to. You’ll make a few hundred bucks.’

I was no drug dealer, but I thanked him anyway.

When it was time to go, he walked me to my car and we hugged. It struck me how small he was, or how much bigger I was than him. His bones were narrower than mine, I could feel that he was light.

As I got in the car, he asked me if I could see the stories in my head when I wrote them. He’d never asked me about writing before.

‘It’s kind of like watching a film in your mind and transcribing it,’ I replied. ‘I don’t know any other writers, but I assume that’s what they do too.’

‘So the good writers are just better at describing what they see?’ he asked.

‘Pretty much.’

‘Are you good at describing what you see?’

‘I don’t know yet.’

‘That story I told earlier, the telepathy one, you can write about that and we’ll go from there,’ he said, leaning in my window.

He stood in the headlights of my car as I reversed out of the driveway and I found it hard to believe that I spent most of my life in fear of him.

• • •

Driving home with a glove box full of weed that I had no idea what to do with, I caught my face in the rear-view mirror. Some time ago, when I lost my boyishness, my face had become his face. When I saw that face reflected back at me, I thought about a time when I was a child, maybe six, maybe seven.

I was watching him work under a car in our driveway; his legs and feet the only body parts visible. Grease and sweat had formed a kind of war paint on his cheeks when he dragged himself out to swap tools.

‘Hey, Dad.’

‘Yeah, mate?’ he asked without looking up from his toolbox.

‘I want to be just like you when I grow up.’

‘Don’t be fuckin’ stupid,’ he said, and pulled himself back under the car.

The Belt

Josephine Clarke

Josephine Clarke’s first collection of poetry, *Recipe for Risotto*, will be published by UWA Publishing in June 2020.

Its beginning was skinned
from the calf.
A pragmatic accessory

to his respectable suit, tonight
it is unleashed.
How deftly his thick fingers

unbuckle. His moralising
so wild
after her too tight dress,

unravelling now, after her own
on the dance floor,
under the eyes of the town.

She has seen calves gambol,
loose-headed,
drunk on their mother’s milk.

Across her legs
the calf-skin whips,
cuts where his words fell impotent.

She will tighten herself,
while the tongue of its buckle counts notches
between his heart and groin.

The Story of the Moon-Bone

Nicholas Jose

Nicholas Jose's publications include the novel *Paper Nautilus* and the memoir *Black Sheep: journey to Borroloola*. He is co-editor, with Xianlin Song, of *Everything Changes: Australian Writers and China* (2019). He is an affiliate of Western Sydney University and the University of Adelaide.

I

'Moon and Evening Star', Adelaide, October 2019/Yirrkala, June 2019

Among the glories of Tarnanthi, the Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2019, one work has special significance for me. It is a painting made with earth pigment on stringybark by Buwathay Munyarryun called *Wirrmu ga Djurrpun*, 'Moon and Evening Star' (Figure 1). Powerfully vertical, 225 by 62 cm, on a piece of bark that flares slightly at each end, the composition speaks precisely and with authority. You can feel the care with which the brush has made its marks. Animals, human footprints and birds move up through the panels of downward flowing water on either side to a crowning horizontal band where crescent moon and star appear white against the black sky.

The artist is senior lawman of the Yolŋu Wangurri clan and chair of Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka, the art centre at Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land. Here he is telling an important Wangurri story for the first time in this public visual form. It is part of a commission called *Dhawut (Fly Away)* for the Kluge-Ruge Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia, inspired by Yolŋu elder Djambawa Marawili's wish to bring contemporary Yolŋu art together with the historical bark paintings already there. This is the only showing of Buwathay's painting in Australia before it tours to the United States and joins the permanent collection of the Charlottesville museum.

Buwathay Munyarryun (born 1962) became the custodian of the story following the death of his father in 2015. His father's burial pole stands on ceremonial ground beside the airstrip at Dhälinybuy, where Buwathay lives. It is topped by a sculpted crescent moon and star with the same pathway of spirit beings moving upwards and tells the same Wangurri

Figure 1: Buwathay Munyarryun, Yolŋu people, Northern Territory. (Born Miwatj Region, 1962.) *Wirrmu ga Djurrpun* 2018, Yirrkala, Northern Territory, earth pigments on stringybark. Reproduced courtesy the artist and Buku-Larrŋgay Mulka Centre.

story of the moon. There is a recording of Buwathay's father singing part of it for a visiting anthropologist in 1952, under the title *Ŋalindi*, another word for moon (Waterman). Buwathay sings it again, late one afternoon, to the accompaniment of yidaki and clap sticks as the moon rises over the river and the stringybarks of his country. He passes a string through his hands. That sacred string pulls the evening star across the sky.

Buwathay explains the Yolŋu concept of *gurruṯu* as 'the string that ties us all together':

> My line of string comes in to me at Dhälinybuy, my country. […] It is a very long line of string, linking many other Yolŋu people to the Wangurri clan and their country… It links them to the place itself, to the water, earth, trees and grass there… and these links are also expressed through the songlines that we perform in ceremony, through song and dance, through painted designs, through […] rhythms […] that is how *gurruṯu* works […] it embraces everything. […]
>
> But we are also linked by the songlines that go from here right to those distant places. Evening star and morning star and moon start from here and finish up there. This tells us there are family that way too… (Munyarryun, 'The String that Ties Us All Together' 32)

I sit on a mat on the sand at Dhälinybuy while Buwathay sings. With each repeat of the word *wirrmu* (moon), the song becomes more insistent until it seems to lift my head off.

Yesterday Buwathay showed me his painting at Yirrkala, two hours' drive away. Today he wanted to take me to the place where the moon story actually happens, past, present and future, the place of the clay pan, 'of the Dugong', the mud flat where salt and fresh water meet with the tidal flow and life renews: the country of the moon manikay or song that belongs to Wangurri people. But as our Toyota heads through the scattered trees and pandanus the track becomes boggy. We won't make it without a winch. Instead, while Buwathay's wife Rita cuts the pandanus heart for weaving, Buwathay sermonises about the clouds churning darkly overhead, silver-lined against the blue sky. 'And there is Dhuwa and Yirritja in the sky also. As a Yirritja person, I am connected to the evening star, Djurrpun, and to the moon, Wirrmu. When I see a cloud shaped like an anvil, I know that it is… mine…' The biblical cadence in which he explains the moiety befits his standing as Uniting Church minister as well as Yolŋu leader.

The string that has brought me here is another version of Buwathay's manikay, its adaptation into a poem called 'Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone'.

The people at Yirrkala are pleased to hear how widely admired this 'Moon-Bone' has been, even if there are more important things for them in the here and now. They take it as a compliment that this piece of their culture has been shared with the world, even if they have not been properly credited or paid for what is theirs. When it appeared in *The Thunder Mutters: 101 poems for the planet* (2005), an anthology of environmental poetry edited by British poet Alice Oswald for Faber in London, authorship was given as Anonymous. In other reprintings it has been attributed variously to Wangurri with Ronald M. Berndt as translator, sometimes with his wife Catherine H. Berndt. It is a happy coincidence that this moon story in the form of a poem in English is returning at the same time as the first Wangurri version of the story for outsiders in many years has been made in the form of Buwathay's painting.

Buwathay surmises that his grandfather collaborated with the anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt in Yirrkala in 1946–47 in the collection of many Yolŋu stories in visual and written form, including the one published in an article for the anthropology journal *Oceania* in Sydney 1948, 'A Wɔnguri-'Mandʒikai Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone' by Ronald M. Berndt. The language as transliterated in that article reads as archaic to today's Yolŋu speakers. They have difficulty deciphering it. That may reflect gaps of incomplete understanding or guesswork in the initial process. Not all anthropologists have the linguistic expertise they claim. Seventy years on, following Buwathay's painting, there is the potential for Yolŋu linguists to produce a new version of the song in English based on contemporary performance. That would make a powerful comparison.

As 'The Moon-Bone'[1] is repatriated to Country, this essay offers a footnote: footprints in the sand of the present from paper drifts of the past, pointing to a future that can only be imagined. The story has more than one starting point and my various methodological lines of approach are like disjunct fragments or looping digressions before they come together, I hope, by the end. I write as a white male literary scholar for whom the language of a text is an opening to interpretation and critique. The thirteen parts of this essay—my formal nod to the thirteen-part composition of the initial Berndt document—include contextualising the history of production, publication and dissemination of this 'Moon-Bone' and its afterlife, its canonisation as world literature and more problematic standing in Australian poetry, and how it can be evaluated as translation of Aboriginal song. The process involves travel from the literary archive of the sandstone academy back to Country. I am guided here by what Yolŋu and other Indigenous Studies research brings to the sovereign act of reclamation. 'Significant recalibration of knowledge is

arguably impossible in institutional environments that preclude serious and considered reflection on broader questions of sovereignty,' writes Fiona Nicoll in *Courting Blakness* (Foley et al. 9). What further knowledges can 'The Moon-Bone' generate and how can that be shared? This moon song is not my story, nor is Catherine Berndt my story, though she is important to the argument about the work a text can do. My reflection is primarily literary, on language and the possibility for poetry and imagination to create community—across difference, indifference, silence and the unseen.

II
A shell, Perth, April 2017/Yirrkala 1946

'The Moon-Bone' has one beginning with a shell in the collection of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia. On the last day of my research visit there, one of the curators brought this object out of storage, in case I was interested. The Berndt Museum is currently a work in progress, awaiting a customised building for the world heritage collection that the Berndts bequeathed to the University. The collection, including hundreds of rare artefacts, is stored on campus while under-resourced staff contend with ever more insistent access requests. On their deaths in 1990 and 1994 respectively, Ronald and Catherine Berndt put an embargo of thirty years on much of the archival material (Toussaint, 'A Letter to Catherine Berndt' np; Smith et al. np).

The shell in question is a chambered nautilus (*Nautilus pompilius*) (Figure 2), 24 cm across at its widest, its cream exterior marked with characteristic tan-coloured zebra stripes. If it were sliced in two, we would see its pearly chambers winding out in a perfect logarithmic spiral, the *spira mirabilis* ('marvellous spiral') of 17th-century Swiss mathematician Jacob Bernoulli. A catalogue card states that this shell was collected by Ronald Berndt in north-east Arnhem Land in 1946 (Russ 12–13). In Yolŋu Matha, its name is *wirrmu* or *ŋalindi*, words for 'moon'. The card adds: 'The finding of this shell on the beach instigated the telling of the "moon Bone" song cycle to the collector. It was thus a reminder of its mythological meaning', uniquely significant for the Wangurri people of the Arnhem Bay area (R. M. and C. H. Berndt Archive, catalogue card 1786).

What's this shell doing in an archival bunker in Perth? For the collector, it's a souvenir, displaced from where it belongs to somewhere else, part of a horde. For the Wangurri, it belongs inseparably to the song, causing the manikay to be shared through language that turned into English.

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Figure 2: Nautilus shell. Collected north-east Arnhem Land, 1946. 112 x 220 x 172 mm. Gifted by R. M. and C. H. Berndt [Accession no. 1946/0095]. Image courtesy of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology. Photo: the author.

The article published in 1948 under Ronald M. Berndt's name in *Oceania*, the journal edited by his mentor, Sydney University anthropology professor A. P. Elkin, offered an introduction to the songs of north-east Arnhem Land with 'The Moon-Bone' as the prime example. For each of the thirteen parts given, there is a synopsis, a transcription of the source language with interlinear gloss and notes and a verse 'general translation' in English. There is re-composition too, perhaps, recognising that what was made available was part of a more complex whole that might be communicated differently depending on time and place and who was involved (Barwick np). Throughout their writings, the Berndts recognise the holistic nature of Aboriginal creative expression. Written English could offer only a glimpse of a civilisation they felt was under threat. But it was vital to communicate that culture to the extent possible:

> The general translation is the poetic rendering of the songs; and for the purpose of accuracy as well as beauty, the arrangement and formation of ideas have been kept as closely as possible to the original text. [...] Fullest appreciation and enjoyment [...] may only be attained by reading the original, by thinking in the native's own language and seeing things from his own cultural perspective. The majority of us cannot hope to do this. (R. M. Berndt, 'Moon-Bone' 21–22)

Although Ronald is named as sole author, I will show that Catherine's hand in the poetry of the 1948 article is crucial. She gets the benefit of a discreet footnote:

> Field work was carried out in this region [north-east Arnhem Land] by the writer and his wife in 1946–47; this research was under the auspices of the Australian National Research Council and the Department of Anthropology, Sydney University. (R. M. Berndt, 'Moon-Bone' 16)

Elkin had arranged the Berndts' gig at Yirrkala. Catherine and Ronald famously met in the professor's office in the first weeks of graduate study in Sydney in 1940. Catherine Webb had come from New Zealand and Ronald Berndt from Adelaide. Elkin liked the idea of a couple who would work in the field, the man on men's business, the woman on women's. Ronald, then aged twenty-four, and Catherine, two years younger, duly married. Elkin supported their joint careers, but Ronald's mainly (despite acknowledging Catherine as a 'brilliant linguist') as the sexism of academic arrangements in those days determined (Gray, '"anthropological children"' 2). When Ronald took up a position at the University of Western Australia in the late 1950s, Catherine, as his spouse, was prevented from holding a full academic post.

But all that came later. After a difficult start as fieldworking anthropologists, first at Ooldea in South Australia in 1941, which resulted in a controversial co-authored ethnography with a heavy emphasis on sex, and then a troubled time working in sometimes violent conditions for Vesteys, the London-based cattle empire, at Birrundudu in the Northern Territory in 1944, where they felt professionally compromised, the Berndts were pleased to find themselves in Yirrkala. They sailed on the Methodist mission boat, calling around the coast from Darwin on its first trip after return to civilian use after the war. By then Ronald was thirty and Catherine twenty-eight. The time in north-east Arnhem Land would produce some of their best work.

III
Archive Poetics

Control, surveillance and limitation characterise most archives in my experience and arguably define the archive in general. The state's archives contain the documentation of the official management of people. Individual lives are agglomerated there as data for retrieval and analysis. Often the archive holds the only available testimony to the domination and mistreatment of people by the state. Its closed, secretive nature is a means of covering up those crimes. The notorious Stasi archive of the former German Democratic Republic's internal security apparatus became available to scrutiny only when that state itself was dissolved. The opening-up was a powerful symbol of transparency in the interests of truth-telling and reconciliation.

For those whose families were its victims, the archive can be painful to approach. The dehumanising of people into objects of state control is starkly revealed in the seemingly impersonal documents that show the ideology of the administrative regime at work. For Indigenous Australians its procedures—cradle-to-grave files, systematic collation of reports and records—are totalising in their service of white nation-building and power. As Natalie Harkin writes of accessing the South Australian state archive on her grandmother: 'the level of surveillance was overwhelming. Claustrophobic. We needed air and tea.' ('Poetics of (Re)Mapping' 1)

Harkin is a Narungga poet whose work on archival poetics exposes the continuing damage the archive represents and at the same time models how its power can be resisted:

> State acts of surveillance, recording and archiving had the power to place our family stories in the public domain, or obliterate stories within a broader history of erasure; filed away, silent and hidden until bidden. But our bodies too are archives where memories, stories, and lived experiences are stored […]. They ground our creativity in what become personal and political acts of remembering, identity making and speaking back to the State. ('Poetics of (Re)Mapping' 4)

Going forward, Harkin quotes her late friend Fabienne Bayet-Charlton (Bandjalung/Belgian), 'No one can define who we are but ourselves' (Bayet-Charlton 240).

This means critically and creatively unsettling 'knowledge production as it intersects with colonialism' (Harkin, 'Poetics of (Re)Mapping' 5) and includes what Derrida calls 'the violence of the archive' as state agent, its ideology and methods inextricably part of the 'founding order of things' (Harkin, 'Poetics of (Re)Mapping' 10). With other Indigenous Studies theorists, scholars and writers, Harkin allows herself to be entangled with this material, politically and poetically, and it's not easy. In her creative work, *Dirty Words* (2015) and *Archival-Poetics* (2019), she takes apart the archive's procedures by focusing on language, holding written English to account, in a generative creative response. Kate Fagan comments on Harkin's work that the archive's 'compositional logic always resists […] completion' (1–2), making the history it purports to record 'provisional at best', open to being allegorised as a new kind of poetic architecture for shared and 'trans-temporal ways of being' (Fagan 4). The emotional freight that runs through Harkin's work, in tandem with rage, is a yearning for what is missing:

> *yearning for*
> *Mother. Home. Justice.*
> *in every page*
> *yearning.*
> (Harkin, 'Poetics of (Re)Mapping' 2)

Her archival poetics work across time in creative acts of reinterpretation that question the archive, dismantle it, always resisting the 'dominant, violent, colonising narratives of us' that it represents (Harkin, 'Poetics of (Re)Mapping' 3).

In 'Odyssey of the Horizon', Alexis Wright conceives a powerful alternative archive. She reclaims the concept for her ancestors, imagining their own archival response to the invasion of the 'white ghost ships' from Britain:

> This was a library land, its knowledge stored in and created from the country itself through epical stories from ancient times. An almost unimaginable massive archive, cared for by its people through their spiritual connections to various parts of the physical landscape […].
>
> Imagine the ships arriving, and what the Traditional Owners of the country would have known […] from that immense body of knowledge in their law book […]. They would have known how to see the ocean as it had always been seen in its ways and habits, and would have spoken to it often in long song cycles they regularly performed […].
>
> A body always remembers the stories of the chase into silence, of escaping and never going back, of never reaching home again, of what it feels like to be enslaved […]. What laws were in the archive that told you how to stop being persecuted and despised like vermin on your own land? (114–117)

Wright's archive is the continuing body of Indigenous knowledge and storytelling across time that exists in opposition to the colonial state's constraining archive of false representation in service of hegemonic dominance, dispossession and cultural extinction.

The Berndt Museum of Anthropology, housed in a sandstone university, is not an archive of state records. Yet the personal archive of two academic anthropologists at its heart, and the related art collection of international significance, is based on research that was funded by the state and carried out within the disciplinary structures of the Western academy. It reflects the Berndts' multiple roles as researchers, teachers, writers, collectors, advisors and advocates. At the same time, in an exercise of unequal power relations, it is a keeping place for Indigenous knowledge in the form of artefacts, information, testimony, photographs, recordings and other documentary accounts, all removed from people and Country, often without permission, recompense or documented collaboration.

Ronald Berndt saw his work as the preservation of cultural heritage. In relation to Yirrkala and the material he and his wife amassed there in 1946–47, he writes:

> The older men were well aware that unless we recorded all aspects of their life, in the form in which we saw it at that particular point in time, it would be irretrievably lost. They recognized that we were, in effect, recording this material

> for future generations. […] It was a mutual undertaking. (*Love Songs* xix)

That makes the Berndt bequest a double archive. There is the research archive left behind by a white anthropologist couple who were astute collectors of art and related ethnographic material, slowly being made available to the kind of archival poetic reinterpretation that Natalie Harkin insists on. Then there is the other archive, in Alexis Wright's sense, of Indigenous law, knowledge, epical stories and song cycles, remembered and passed on by people on Country. That is out of place being locked up here.

The Australian anthropological archive is irredeemably tainted in many ways. At this point in time, sensitive and selective recovery is needed to test how documents from the past respond to the decolonising necessity of today. The archive is a place of death and life, where one generation feeds off the leavings of another, where academics come to build their careers. I approach with care, wearing black gloves.

IV
The Argonaut

The habitat of chambered nautilus is the deep coral reef slopes of northern Australia and the south-west Pacific as far as the Philippines. The species is sometimes confused with paper nautilus (*Argonauta argo*), a more widely distributed surface swimmer known as the Argonaut. The shell in the Berndt collection has proved to be an argonaut too, though, voyaging around the world in the form of the song cycle it is associated with.

The chambered nautilus has been prized for centuries. In the 16th century, when the name 'nautilus' was first used, the shell travelled along trade routes from the east to Europe. According to one zoologist

> the nautilus shell was one of the three great natural treasures of that time, along with the ostrich egg and the coconut. These curios were often turned into ornate chalices; many exquisite pieces constructed around nautilus shells are known from this period. (Ward 23)

Shells from the Dutch East Indies were treasures for 17th-century Dutch artists. One of Rembrandt's best drawings is of a tropical marine snail shell (*Conus marmoreus*). A painting by Willem Claesz Heda in the Mauritshuis at The Hague called *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* (1640) shows a nautilus shell on an ornate silver stand with its pearl lining exposed. By the 19th century nautilus were being retrieved from British colonies and carved to celebrate the British nation, as a specimen in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich shows. They remained popular with collectors throughout the 20th century to the point where so many thousands were souvenired each year in a lucrative trade that stocks became depleted. In 2018, *Nautilus pompilius*, one of the most ancient species on the planet, joined the threatened list (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration): 'its reign of nearly unrivalled persistence in a largely stable state undone not by some fatal flaw in its evolutionary design but by the short-term ambitions and endeavours of humankind' (Hoffman 9), as Julian Hoffman writes.

The Yolŋu have known the nautilus a long time too. Further north, in the islands of Vanuatu and north-eastern Papua New Guinea, including Manus Island, it is actively fished, in large nets, from its deep-water habitat. It is edible, lobster-like, but dies when the water is too warm. When it drifts in on the tide on the Arnhem Land coast, it is already moribund, a gorgeous shell rather than a living animal. The Yolŋu don't eat it. In the story they tell, the nautilus shell, white on the outside, pearlescent on the inside, is the moon's bone, dropped into the sea as the moon dies. That waning crescent moon dives into the sea 'and loses his bone—now the nautilus shell' which is 'eventually washed up on the beach' (R. M. Berndt, 'Moon-Bone' 43, 45).

The Wangurri song cycle associated with the shell is shown in the 1948 Berndt article to be an art work of 'exceptional beauty and poetic quality' too. Berndt notes that his colleague T. G. H. Strehlow has previously recorded a 'song cycle' from Central Australia, the classification recalling the cycles of *lieder* that were the high point of the two men's shared German cultural background. The Berndts liked to sing *lieder* at home (Brittlebank, 'Two People' 17). But the claim here for the sublime artistic value of north-east Arnhem Land song goes further. It is underwritten by the 'general translation' into English verse given in the article.

By 1950 in *Art in Arnhem Land*, compiled by Elkin with the Berndts, this poetic 'Moon-Bone' is being reproduced as a supreme example of Aboriginal song. Elkin quotes the climactic twelfth part of the cycle in his section on poetry in the 1954 edition of his influential *The Australian Aborigines*, referencing the Berndt article while supplying his own summary of the myth (Elkin 262–263). Ronald and Catherine Berndt later quote the same lines in their co-authored bestseller *The World of the First Australians* (1964). That nautilus shell on the beach was the vessel for a song that has been travelling ever since.

In 1966, stripped of anthropological apparatus, all thirteen parts of 'The Moon-Bone' appeared in *The Unwritten Song*, a prestigious two-volume anthology published in New York by Willard R. Trask, the translator of such heavyweight works as *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach (1953), *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* by E. R. Curtius (1953) and *The Sacred and Profane* (1959) by Mircea Eliade, (not to mention Casanova's raunchy memoirs). *The Unwritten Song* gathers 'poetry of the primitive and traditional peoples of the world' (Trask iii), defined as oral rather than written, as Trask explains, in an approach that derives ultimately from the Romantic philosopher J. G. Herder, who coined the term 'folk song' for a German collection published in 1815 (Trask iii).

The 'Australia' section that concludes volume one of *The Unwritten Song* is skilfully curated, drawing on the slender and scattered range of Aboriginal Australian song poetry available in English translation at the time. Trask is a connoisseur. He prints the 'Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone' for the first time as a continuous poem sequence, with authorship credited to the 'Wonguri-Mandjikai (Northeastern Arnhem Land)', and Ronald Berndt and Elkin briefly acknowledged in a note. Language words that are italicised in the *Oceania* article appear in the same font as the rest, unexplained. The reader is invited to experience the de-contextualised 'Moon-Bone' as pure poetry. This is a claim, by way of translation, for the universality of the work's artistic expression. One unnamed reviewer hailed it as 'a panoramic hymn to the night, [that] even suggests something of Whitmanesque enumerations' ('Unwritten' 964). David Malouf reviewed *The Unwritten Song* favourably on ABC radio when it was published in Australia in 1969. He would later rank 'The Moon-Bone' as one of his ten favourite poems (Coleman np).

If Trask's anthology took 'The Moon-Bone' to the world as poetry in English, Jerome Rothenberg's inclusion of it in a more radical anthology two years later ensured an even greater impact. Still active today in his late eighties, Rothenberg is an experimental poet and translator—one of the first translators into English of Paul Celan and Günter Grass, for example. *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968), republished most recently in 2017, brought the poetry of the non-West, much of it oral, into the orbit of poetry in English for the '60s generation. As editor, Rothenberg experiments with the multiple possibilities of translation in his project. Moderns and contemporaries—Pound, Stevens, Gertrude Stein, Tristan Tzara, Gary Snyder, Denise Levertov and Ian Hamilton Finlay among others— are interleaved with classical Chinese and Biblical texts, William Blake and more, as well as translations of oral expression both ancient and living (particularly from American First Nations). *Technicians of the Sacred* shows how 'the avant-garde's "secret allies" are anthropologists and archaeologists' (Mottram 233). In this company 'The Moon-Bone' takes on a new life. The editor's commentary summarises material from the Berndt article, noting that the '"general" (i.e., "free") translation is reproduced in its entirety' (Rothenberg 512). It appears in the 'Oceania' section of the anthology with no author given and the title shortened to 'The Moon-Bone Cycle'. The poet in Rothenberg knows that the last two parts, in which the moon and his bone appear for the first time, make a great stand-alone poem. He runs them together to produce a twelve-part sequence.

A Chicago connection suggests how both Trask and Rothenberg found 'The Moon-Bone'. Mircea Eliade, whose works Trask translated, was professor of religion at the University of Chicago from 1956, where Lloyd Warner, a patron of the Berndts, was professor of anthropology and sociology from 1935 to 1959. Warner had done fieldwork in Australia from 1926 to 1929. His study of the people of north-east Arnhem Land, published in 1937, included a short prose version of a comparable moon myth, 'The Moon and the Parrot Fish' (Warner 523–524). Warner inscribed a copy of his book 'to Mr and Mrs R Berndt' in Chicago in 1955. He had worked at Harvard with Australian social psychologist Elton Mayo, whom he knew years before in Australia. Warner was a resident expert on matters Australian. His shaming book, provocatively titled *A Black Civilisation* at a time when even 'American civilisation' was not yet a current term, contrasts the 'complete and well-organised society' (Warner 3) of the Yolŋu with the 'melancholy and profitless' (Warner 10) white civilisation he saw implanting itself in Australia.

The life of 'The Moon-Bone' goes on. A comic book called *Myths of this World* by Dave Crane has a response to it. There are translations into other languages. It appeared in Spanish in Argentina in 2017 in the *Antología intima* of poetry selected by J. M. Coetzee, who first encountered the work years before in Rothenberg's anthology while he was drafting *Waiting for the Barbarians* (*Coetzee Papers*, 25 December 1977). The AustLit database lists fifteen anthologies of Australian poetry that include all or part of it, from *The Jindyworobaks* (1979) edited by Brian Elliott and published by UQP; to *The Puncher and Wattmann Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2009) edited by John Leonard; and Geoffrey Lehmann and Robert Gray's *Australian Poetry since 1788* (2011). Les Murray included it in his *New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (1986), having already produced his homage in 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' (*Ethnic Radio*, 1977) and an accompanying essay. For Rodney Hall in his bicentennial anthology for Collins, Australian poetry begins with 'The Moon-Bone'.

V
Whose voice is heard?

But 'The Moon-Bone' has also been questioned. It was not included in *Paperbark* (1990), the anthology of Indigenous Australian writing where authorial authority can be properly established, nor was it included in the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* (2009, of which I was general editor), published internationally by Norton as *The Literature of Australia*, nor the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Australian Literature* and its international version, all of which have other collaboratively translated song poetry, such as 'The Star-Tribes' (1960), by Fred Biggs and Roland Robinson, or Frank Malkorda's 'Ngalalak/White Cockatoo' in a bilingual version with English by Margaret Clunies Ross (1987/90). One reason for this is that amidst all the anthropological information provided in the Berndt article there is little detail of how and with whom the transactions happened that produced 'The Moon-Bone'. That makes the status of the text uncertain. Perhaps the issue will be clarified when the embargo on the Berndts' field notes is lifted. For now it is only possible to speculate.

Translations of song poetry since the Berndts have become more transparent, often presented with a transcription of a source and an acknowledgement of Indigenous ownership. Examples include Stephen Muecke's work with Paddy Roe in *Gularabulu: stories from the West Kimberley* (1983) and John Bradley's with Yanuwa in *Little Eva at Moonlight Creek and Other Aboriginal Song Poems*, edited by Martin Duwell and R. M. W. Dixon (1994). There is a surprising paucity of such material, however, and little literary discussion of it. An exception is Barry Hill, whose book *Broken Song* (2002) gives an extended analysis of T. G. H. Strehlow's struggle with the 'writing down' of Aranda songs for his monumental *Songs of Central Australia*, eventually published in 1971 (Hill 457). Strehlow notes ruefully at one point: 'The two languages do not "cover" each other very well' (Hill 452). But it was more than that. Hill concludes that 'deep down the poet in [Strehlow] was lacking or lay buried' (451). His translations, for all their worth and interest, read as 'laborious and tone deaf in his English' (Hill 450); they lack *persona*, a voice that gives poetic authority to the language itself (Hill 451). That is not true of 'The Moon-Bone', where the poetry speaks—in English. But whose voice or voices are we hearing?

Richard Martin has called on literary scholars to rethink intercultural translation, arguing that it has suffered from undue fetishisation of the ethnographic (Martin 2013). Stuart Cooke offers an alternative model by reading song-poems transcribed into English 'as performances *in themselves* […] in which both settler and indigenous peoples have played crucial roles' (*Speaking the Earth's Languages* 142). Following Rothenberg, Cooke foregrounds the 'multiple elements' that generate interpretation while also maintaining the necessary opacity that keeps meaning elusive and partial (*Speaking the Earth's Languages* 141). Introducing *The Bulu Line*, he returns to the question of 'The Songpoem as a Verse-in-Translation', classifying Berndt as an 'Author and Translator [who] retains the ultimate authority to open or close pathways of interpretation' (Cooke, *George Dyuŋgayan's Bulu Line* 18–19). That's one way of reading. But looked at from a decolonising perspective, the limits of that authorship become apparent and what lies beyond comes into view.

Introducing the first survey of this subject, *Songs of Aboriginal Australia*, published as late as 1987, Margaret Clunies Ross hoped for the development of 'the holistic approach that Aboriginal singers and dancers bring to their art' (Clunies Ross et al. 10). This aligns with the Berndts' understanding, as argued in the lengthy 'Art and Aesthetic Expression' section of *The World of the First Australians* (R. M. and C. H. Berndt 367–452), that all the various artistic practices of a community are interconnected through a purpose that is larger than aesthetic expression. Nowadays that holistic approach can be experienced in so much First Nations art making which carries on ancient storytelling in contemporary ways and is always political. The translation is done by the writers themselves, who use English on their own terms. That was not the case for 'The Moon-Bone'.

VI
Knowledge transfer

Senior Yolŋu man Mawalan Marika and his son Wandjuk became the Berndts' collaborators in Yirrkala. 'Ronald Berndt was there', Wandjuk remembers, 'and he tried to find the man who speak English to translate the Yolgnu story. So, I was translate to him for the different clan including my own story, from my father, for Professor Berndt.' (Marika 56) Mawalan had encouraged his son's proficiency in English as well as Yolŋu dialects and, in the missionary context of Yirrkala, Wandjuk was a good-enough linguist to be translating the Bible. The Berndts were on a mission too, hoping to save culture rather than souls[2].

Wandjuk explains that Mawalan took him to Wangurri Country at Arnhem Bay when he was a child and later taught him Wangurri culture. He

has a role interpreting stories from other groups, part of a duty entrusted by his father to pass on culture selectively to the researcher. In the end Wandjuk's contribution to the Berndts' work was so considerable that he quipped, 'If he is a professor then I am Vice Chancellor […] but nobody give me salary' (Marika 80). Jennifer Isaacs notes that Wandjuk 'felt he was due acknowledgement and payment for the use of his "knowledge" (or intellectual property) contained in anthropological writings such as the Berndts'' (Marika 80).

There was an unequal exchange of valuable verbal and visual material, a considered transaction in which 'the artists were explaining their world and their world view to outsiders', as Cara Pinchbeck writes in her introduction to *Yirrkala Drawings*, the exhibition of some of the 365 crayon drawings that Yolŋu artists, including Mawalan and Wandjuk, made for the Berndts: 'an unrivalled document of Yolngu knowledge and law' (Pinchbeck 14–15), told visually with accompanying verbal translation. John Stanton, the Berndts' colleague and executor, calls the drawings that were given to them at the time, held for many years in their Perth home, 'the crown jewels' of their collection (Pinchbeck 14).

Contemporary Yolŋu elder Wäka Mununggurr puts it positively:

> When you look at this art, it is not just a thing of beauty—it discusses the environment and nature, the secret areas for Yolngu. When the treasure hunters came—and this is what I think the anthropologists were—they were digging into people's minds. […] But nowadays, Yolngu art is public. I think the Old People decided to share these secret things so that people could know who we are. (Pinchbeck 13)

The Yolŋu have extensive experience of engagement with outsiders, going back to Ming-dynasty Macassan visits and before. It had reached a new level with the war in the Pacific and its aftermath, when the Berndts arrived. To tell these researchers the story of the moon was knowledge transfer with a purpose. Like the Yirrkala crayon drawings; like the church panels of 1962–63 that 'crystallised […] [Yolŋu] awareness of the ontological dimension to life' (Wells 60), according to Edgar Wells, the mission superintendent who walked with Yolŋu as their true friend in that difficult time; and like the related 1963 bark petition that protested the alienation of Yolŋu land for bauxite mining without consultation, and the later bark paintings made for the native title sea claim in 1996, including *Wanguri Gapu* by Gän̲d̲a Munyarryun from Arnhem Bay that depicts the same Yolŋu *marki* as in part nine of 'The Moon-Bone' (prawn or freshwater crayfish or yabby)—these instances of knowledge transfer

are diplomacy of a high order, involving esoteric and abstract meanings and requiring 'undertakings […] concerning security of the intellectual property' before it could be revealed (*Saltwater* 110).

In the *Oceania* article, Berndt introduces 'The Moon-Bone' by telling the myth, in which the Moon and his sister the Dugong argue about whether to be mortal or immortal. She remains mortal, with lily roots in her stomach, while he decides to become immortal, growing thin and dying into the sea, his bones washing up as nautilus shell. Then after three days he comes back to life, growing round again, rising into the sky. The narrative is elliptically present in 'The Moon-Bone', emerging only at the end. Like the shell, the song-poem is part of something beyond itself.

Will Stubbs, coordinator at Buku, writes that 'an act of beauty can be activism too' (Stubbs np). Wandjuk Marika and Buwathay's grandfather were young men together in Yirrkala after the war. Maybe Buwathay's grandfather passed on his Wangurri story of the moon to the Berndts with Wandjuk's help. Buwathay's new painting, *Moon and Evening Star*, continues that act of beautiful activism, celebrating Wangurri ownership through sharing the song.

VII
Up close

The general translation of 'The Moon-Bone' has a poetic beauty that many readers recognise. It's what those distinguished poet editors have appreciated. My own literary training prompts me to approach a poem on the page through close reading. When I do that here I cannot help but feel its pulse. The poetry is recursive, reiterative and rhythmical, full of movement and transformation. It curves round, changes focus, shifts from distant to close-up, making connections through images. It has immediacy, something is happening now, yet there is also recurrence, conveying continuous interrelationship. All is one, an aura of totality that can only be communicated in part.

As water fills the clay pan, reflecting the moon's light like another sort of moon, creatures come to feed and breed—birds, rats, ducks, leeches, prawns, tortoise, the mortal dugong and the immortal moon, in stately sequence. So do the human actors on this Country, living the renewal: 'The old Moon dies to grow new again, to rise up out of the sea' (12: 23)[3].

Summoned with a rollcall of names, 'the people' are making camp near the clay pan: 'the Arnhem Bay Creek man', 'the Rock Cod man' and others

(1: 1, 12, 13). By part two they are resting in rows, merging with images of white paperbarks: 'people of the clouds' (2: 5). Part three calls them to 'the place of the Dugong' to look for lily roots (3: 1). Birds watch and join in. 'We saw the people!' the cockatoos cry (4: 9). 'There is the Shag woman, and there her clan…' (4: 11). Things become animated as people eat 'the soft round roots' (4: 12). Part five brings rats, male and female with young, running everywhere, leaving the 'roads of the rats' marked on the clay (5: 14). Part six increases this sense of fertility with a duck who 'comes swooping down to the Moonlight Clay Pan' carrying 'eggs, eggs, eggs' (6: 1, 5). The effect is cumulative.

In part seven, the focus returns to the people as they plunge into the mud. Water creatures follow as the clay pan floods with an incoming tide. In part eight, the leech (water worm) catches hold of 'those *'Mandjikai* Sandfly people' (8: 10). In part nine there's the prawn. In part ten the tortoise is closely evoked:

> This tortoise carrying her young, in the clay pan, at the place of the Dugong…
>
> Carrying eggs about, in the clay pan, at the place of the Dugong…
>
> Her entrails twisting with eggs…
>
> This creature with the short arms, swimming and moving her shell… (10: 4, 7–8, 13)

The emphasis is on movement and fecundity: 'Vine plants and roots and jointed limbs, with berry food, spreading over the water.' (11: 10) Then at last the new moon appears in long recuperative lines:

> Now the New Moon is hanging, having cast away his bone:
>
> Gradually he grows larger, taking on new bone and flesh.
>
> Over there, far away, he has shed his bone: he shines on the place of the Lotus Root, and the place of the Dugong,
>
> On the place of the Evening Star, of the Dugong's Tail, of the Moonlight Clay Pan…
>
> His old bone gone, now the New Moon grows larger… (12: 1–5)

The exultant finale pans across the sky as 'up and up soars the Evening Star', which is also the Lotus, before descending on the specific place and people whose myth this is:

> The Evening Star is going down, the Lotus Flower on its stalk…
>
> Going down among all those western clans…
>
> It sinks into the place of the white gum trees, at Milingimbi. (13: 1, 17–18, 23)

The eternal returns peacefully as the cosmos and its creatures are one.

This is poetry in an English idiom that is renewed and enlarged for the purpose. Images are coined as needed, with some awkwardness: 'the place of the […] Tree-Limbs-Rubbing-Together' (4: 6), the title phrase 'Moon-Bone' itself. The language carries reminders that it comes from somewhere else. The demonstrative 'that' in the opening line—'in that country at Arnhem Bay' (1: 1)—places us in the scene and signals Aboriginal English. A few words remain untranslated, including animal names like the 'short-armed '*Mararlpa* tortoise' (10: 5) and, importantly, *'bukəlili* (9: 6).

VIII
Catherine's hand

The curator in the archive brings me a folder with 'Moon-Bone' written in pencil on the front. It contains the handwritten draft of the *Oceania* article, revealing two hands at work, one doing the primary drafting, the other revising. Comparison with the handwriting of husband and wife in other sole-authored MS material reveals Catherine's as the hand that makes the changes. They are especially evident in the general translation, the final part of the process of transcription. Subtle adjustments of word order enhance the rhythmic beat, adding impact to the repetitions. The lineation becomes more regularly rhythmic, reinforced by greater alliteration. Catherine's changes improve the translation—notwithstanding the disclaimer that no attempt at poetry has been made.

Ronald's draft of the passage in part six where the duck swoops down reads:

> Its feathers are down, its claws ready for coming to rest on the water; and as it skims, it pulls the lily foliage for food.

This is prose. In Catherine's revision it is compressed into two powerful lines of iambic pentameter:

> She *preens* her *feathers*, and *pulls* at the lily *foliage*,
>
> *Drags* at the lily leaves with her claws for food. (R. M. and C. H. Berndt Archive, box 696, 'Moon-Bone' folder; my italics)

The stresses with caesura breaks at midpoint mark a sequence of strong, alliterative verbs and nouns to achieve a unity of action and image that is vivid and memorable. That's how it was published (6: 6–7).

Catherine Berndt knew this style of poetry from her reading in youth, going back to Old English, the Psalms and Shakespeare, and myth-making 19th-century authors such as Tennyson and Swinburne, and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.* The Whitman of *Leaves of Grass* is here too—and I wonder if she knew Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem 'The Chambered Nautilus' (1858). This is an imperial English literary idiom that came with the civilising mission of colonisation, now stretched to encompass 'The Moon-Bone'. It can read as anachronistic today, and it was anachronistic in its time too, bold and modern in one view, yet out of time in another, reaching for ancient spirit voices, touching the time immemorial of its source. A decolonising reading reveals the impossible balancing act in which Catherine Berndt was implicated, invoking a poetry that might transcend the historical moment and the anthropological project she was engaged in: something Natalie Harkin calls 'both visceral-reality and created-imagined fantasy' (Harkin, 'The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives' 4).

Rodney Hall suggests that the language of 'The Moon-Bone' was created in answer to the problem of the need for 'a sense of ritual and sacredness' (Hall 444). Adam Shoemaker agrees, believing that 'the greatness which does shine through resides primarily in the original oral version' (Shoemaker 88). One of the most important of Catherine Berndt's changes is to gender the language, enhancing the generative energy of the world that is evoked:

> Swimming along under the water, as bubbles rise to the surface, the tortoise moves in the swamp grass.
>
> Swimming among the lily leaves and the grasses, catching them as she moves…
>
> Pushing them with her short arms. Her shell is marked with designs.
>
> This tortoise carrying her young, in the clay pan, at the place of the Dugong… (10: 1–4)

Bearing eggs, seeking food, nurturing and protecting a new brood: the theme of reproduction is evoked with tender sympathy in the behaviour of this female being. The gendering crosses cultural boundaries, nowhere more potently than in relation to the moon, who becomes masculine,

giving the swelling bone a sexual energy that increases with the iambic beat:

> His old bone gone, now the New Moon grows larger;
>
> Gradually growing, his new bone growing as well.
>
> Over there, the horns of the old receding Moon bent down, sank into the place of the Dugong:
>
> His horns were pointing towards the place of the Dugong.
>
> Now the New Moon swells to fullness, his bone grown larger.
>
> He looks on the water, hanging above it, at the place of the Lotus. (12: 5–10)

The manuscript shows how these lines evolved; for example, from:

> Most, its bone seen in outline as it grows

to:

> First the sickle Moon on the old Moon's shadow; slowly he grows… (R. M. and C. H. Berndt Archive, box 696, 'Moon-Bone' folder [figure 3]; 12: 19)

The poetic field drawn on is time-honoured. Its rhetoric and imagery excite the senses, including a trace memory of the haunting image from 'Sir Patrick Spens', the anonymous Scottish border ballad that was once a textbook poem for literature students:

> I saw the new moon late yestere'en /
>
> With the old moon in her arm;
>
> And if we go to sea, master,
>
> I fear we'll come to harm. (Untermeyer 15)

Here the doom-laden meaning is turned round. This too is Catherine's work.

In her later retelling of the moon myth in *Land of the Rainbow Snake*, Catherine Berndt explains that 'mostly in Aboriginal Australia [the moon] is a man, not a woman […] in nearly all of these stories the Moon promises to come alive again, with a new body, three days after he dies' (C. H. Berndt, *Land of the Rainbow Snake* 15–16). The analogy with Christ may be another reason why Yolŋu shared 'The Moon-Bone' story in the first place in those mission days. It is a poem of resurrection in which human beings sing the moon for its power to renew life.

~~phenomena~~, ~~& the substantiation of traditional belief in relation to mythology. The principle strength of native poetic (expression) [illegible] in the quick of the song cycle: an attempt is made to consolidate concepts and focus attention on the more important features and bring into relief its main thesis.~~ 39.

Now The New Moon is hanging, having cast his bone away:
Gradually he grows larger, taking on new flesh & bones)
Over there, far away, ~~in the distance~~, he has shed his bone: shining ~~near at~~ on the Place of the Lotus Root, and he places of the Dugongs,
On the Place of the Evening Star, of the Dugong's Tail,
of the Moon Big Joley pan . . . . .
His old bone gone, now the new Moon grows larger;
Growing Gradually, his new bone growing as well ~~cast away into the sea.~~
Over there, the horns ~~ends~~ of the old receding Moon bent down ~~bend down~~; sank into the Place of the Dugong: // his horns ~~ends~~ pointing towards the Place of the Dugong.
Now the New Moon ~~growing~~ swells to fullness, ~~its~~ his bone grown larger x // he looks on the water,
Hanging above ~~the water~~, at the Place of the Lotus x
There, he comes into sight, ~~[illegible]~~, hanging above the sea, growing larger ~~the bone thrown away~~ . . . . .
far away he has come back, Hanging ~~above~~ over these Clans near Milingimbi . . . .
Hanging there in the sky, above those Clans . . . . . .
"~~Because~~ Now I am becoming a big Moon, ~~gradually~~ slowly regaining my ~~fullness~~ roundness." a . . . . . .
~~From~~ In the far distance the horns of the moon bend down,
~~Hanging~~ above Milingimbi,
~~There~~, Hanging a long way off ~~away & at his~~ above Milingimbi
[illegible] . . . .

40.
~~Gradually~~ Slowly the Moon Bone is growing, ~~becoming larger~~, hanging there ~~at that Place~~. far away.
The bone shining of the ~~new Moon's~~ horns of the moon bending down.
~~There, its bone seen in outline as it~~ first the sickle moon on the old moon's shadow . . . grows;
// shining and he hanging there at the Place of the Evening Star . . .
Then far away ~~it is going~~ he goes sinking down, to loses ~~its~~ his bone in the sea;
Diving towards the water, he gently ~~going~~ down out of sight ~~into the sea~~.
~~For~~ The old moon dies to grow ~~become~~ new again; to rise up out of the sea
~~diving down that Moon Bone~~.

a The Moon speaks about himself.

Figure 3: Pages 39–40 of the draft version of the 1948 *Oceania* article showing revisions. Image courtesy of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology.

Women dance while the moon is sung by men to yidaki and clap sticks. It is an old life-giving power, male and female, expressed across many cultures. In our time the Palestinian Arabic poet Marmoud Darwish calls poetry 'our ladder to the moon' (Darwish 99). 'O Anat, why remain in the underworld?' he calls to the ancient goddess:

> Come back to nature!
>
> Come back to us! [...]
>
> streams and rivers ran dry when you died... (Darwish 99–100)

The health of the community and the environment alike depend on poetry.

IX
Prof and Catherine[4]

Catherine Berndt was an aspiring writer. Her notebooks from the late 1940s contain drafts of stories that she will assemble into a novel provisionally titled *Nigger on the Woodheap*, where she works through the trauma of the time at Vesteys when she and her husband were powerless to stop the sexual abuse of young Aboriginal girls by white overseers. Elkin was nervous about the prospect of its publication. It was a trouble-making work and remains unpublished still.

Another draft story called 'Shadowed Days' is set in a 'room in Carrington St' like the one where Catherine and Ronald lived for a time in Adelaide. It has an epigraph from *Lamentations*, from the King James Bible:

> The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.
>
> The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. (R. M. and C. H. Berndt Archive, C. H. Berndt notebook, 'Shadowed Days')

These sorrowing lines point to the difficult things that Catherine Berndt was confronting in her late twenties. They indicate the pain of closeness to people who are being dispossessed and whose world is under threat, in a society that seemed alien to her too.

One notebook draft, '"Yeller-feller" by Kate', has an epigraph misremembered from Tennyson's gloomy poem 'Locksley Hall':

> Mated with a lowly savage...
>
> I, the heir of all the ages,
>
> In the foremost files of time. (R. M. and C. H. Berndt Archive, C. Berndt notebook 2)[5]

'Locksley Hall' is about the impossibility of escaping from one world into another at the furthest reaches of empire.

Catherine Webb was born in Auckland in 1918. Her parents were New Zealand-born, of English, Irish, Scottish, and Maori descent (Toussaint, 'Catherine Helen Berndt' np). Her great-great-grandmother was a daughter of Maori chief Hori Pokai. His portrait by Charles Goldie can be seen in the University of Auckland art collection, called *Planning Revenge* (1921). When her parents divorced, a stigma in those days, Catherine moved around with her mother, taking refuge in a love of reading, especially the literature of 'exotic and distant places' (Stanton, 'Catherine Helen Berndt' 93).

Perhaps Australia offered a way out. She later said of her marriage: 'Then I married Ron, or Ron married me, whichever way you like to put it' (in Toussaint, 'Catherine Helen Berndt' np). Her literary interests continued, with a division of labour with her husband, whose 'interests lay particularly with visual and material culture, [while] Catherine was drawn to mythology and oral texts, with her primary focus on the lives of Aboriginal women and children' (Brittlebank, 'Two People' 4). A book-length biography of Ronald and Catherine Berndt, drawing on their archive, is something to anticipate. For now, Geoffrey Gray's forensic research is very useful. He shows us the Berndts' working relationship when they were at Yirrkala. 'Ronald spoke with informants while Catherine, who had her own fieldwork, also attended to correspondence, housekeeping and other domestic matters.' (Gray, '"anthropological children"' 93) She was excited about the songs she heard there, recognising their value at once: 'Actually the [...] people have the most picturesque songs we've met so far [...] There are long song-series [...] all very interesting.' (Gray, '"anthropological children"' 93)[6]

In 'Expressions of Grief among Aboriginal Women' (1950), Catherine asks: 'Apart from her role in the more or less stereotyped ritual which accompanies such social crises as initiation or a death, has a woman any opportunity for what may be loosely termed "self-expression," where her personal feelings are affected?' (286) Is she thinking of herself? She had close relationships with her Aboriginal women friends and occasionally pushed back against the gendered structures of the white academic world. If 'tape recorders and films had been made available to Mondalmi',

her 'first and special friend at Goulburn Island', as they were provided by her husband to Mondalmi's brother, 'what a record of Maung culture could have been documented even then!', she is quoted as saying (Eve Chaloupka in Stanton ed., *Little Paintings* 14–15).

Elkin called the Berndts his 'anthropological children' (Gray, '"anthropological children"' 2), his 'spiritual children' (Gray, '"anthropological children"' 25). Catherine and Ronald would have no children of their own. Once they got to the University of Western Australia, in Gray's blunt estimate, 'Catherine was faced [...] with an intellectual death' (Gray, '"He has not followed"' 80). But from another perspective, the co-dependency of the Berndts' relationship resulted in a remarkable creative collaboration. Kate Brittlebank, who interviewed people close to them, writes of the couple as 'two people—one life'. Stanton tells us that 'together, their life's work would run in tandem [...] So, too, their public life was mirrored by an intensely private world', as they 'jealously guarded both their privacy and [...] their [...] art collection', much of which remained at home behind drawn curtains, 'packed away, out of sight' (Stanton, *Relocate and Rediscover* 14–15). They could appear secretive and embattled, with a tendency to manipulate and fantasise (Gray, '"He has not followed"' 82–87). Brittlebank finds the passion of their marriage reflected in the eroticism of their prized Asian art collection (Brittlebank, 'Two People' 16–17). The poetry that Catherine contributes to their published work reflects a larger poetry in their relationship: an intimate psycho-sexual space veiled from scrutiny. What emotions did Catherine Berndt experience in Yirrkala, when she sensed what lay ahead? Does the intensity of 'The Moon-Bone' have a source there?

Catherine's correspondence with her friend Isabel Houison in Sydney gives us a picture of her at the time. As assistant secretary to the Australian National Research Council, Houison sent the Berndts their grant money. The two women enjoyed a lively exchange of letters and Catherine emerges as an entertaining commentator on life in the Top End. She writes sketches of characters and incidents at Yirrkala, often at the expense of the resident Fijian missionary, Kolinio Saukuru (Catherine Berndt to Isabel Houison, 24 March, 23 April 1947; McMillan 141). There is little personal about her husband, except how hard he works. Catherine shares her worries about their health on the limited available diet. 'Most of my clothes are almost worn out', she complains (11 March 1946). When it is time to leave, she admits that 'we shall be glad to be away from here' (6 July 1947).

'What about the novel?' Houison asks (20 July 1948). Catherine replies that they sent it 'to U.S. It was received very favourably, and they want us to elaborate it [...] This we will do as soon as we get some time to

Figure 4: Portrait shot of Catherine Berndt during 1949–1950 Survey, Western Arnhem Land, 1950. Photographed by Ronald Berndt, P23372. Image courtesy of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology.

ourselves' (29 July 1948). It is the perennial writer's hope, but from then on Catherine Berndt would write creatively only in the interstices of a different sort of life. Yet her literary skill is evident in everything she signs her name to. Not long before her husband's death she wrote:

> People always use the past selectively, whether it is their own past or someone else's. Even reasonably well substantiated 'facts' can never be seen in their total context, and 'the whole truth' is an elusive and largely relative concept. [...] Continuities, dislocations, changing emphases, even definition of such terms as 'tradition, traditional', belong within this dimension. So does the question of knowledge, or information, about the past. (C. H. Berndt, 'Retrospect' 7)

It is an eloquent utterance.

X
The longed-for fusion?

Les Murray said of 'The Moon-Bone' that 'it may well be the greatest poem ever composed in Australia' (Murray, 'Human-Hair' 565). The claim is made in his strange, self-serving essay, 'The Human-Hair Thread', published in *Meanjin* in 1977, where he argues for his own Aboriginality by tracing 'the black thread as it runs through [his] work' (Murray, 'Human-Hair' 552). He does so to justify his appropriation of 'The Moon-Bone' for 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' and his intention to enact 'a longed-for fusion' of 'all three main Australian cultures, Aboriginal, rural and urban', with 'the senior culture setting the tone' (Murray, 'Human-Hair' 566). Like 'The Moon-Bone', Murray's sequence, also in thirteen parts, represents the customary activity of 'the people', invoking 'the country of', 'the place of', in an act of formal mimicry (Murray, *Ethnic Radio* np) 'One of the triumphs of Berndt's translation is that it renders the Aboriginal poetry into a language deeply in tune with the best Australian vernacular speech, and reveals affinities', he writes (Murray, 'Human-Hair' 565–566). He blurs the question of how, by whom, 'The Moon-Bone' was composed. For him 'The Moon-Bone' comes to stand for Aboriginal poetry at large. And if, for Murray, 'The Moon-Bone' becomes a cipher for Aboriginal poetry in general, his own fusion song cycle effectively displaces that tradition by supplanting it.

'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' occupies a place of honour in Les Murray's oeuvre. Shortly before the poet's death, Nam Le wrote:

> Never have I read an Australian poetry that so naturally, easefully, unselfconsciously and unironically builds the condition of myth. As long as we're making grand claims, here's mine: 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' is the seminal poem of modern Australia. (Le np)

If that is so, what of its source in 'The Moon-Bone', and the source of that source? Murray's poem is a multiple surrogate. It invites us to celebrate its genial overwriting of what came before. Jonathan Dunk concludes that the poem is 'uncomplicatedly evil. [...] It illustrates an Australian culture of successful genocide, one which has completely absorbed the signifiers of the culture it destroyed.' (Dunk np) The string of responses shows how contentious these issues are. The intermediary role of 'The Moon-Bone' needs to be interpolated into this understanding to avoid Murray's anxiety of influence smothering the work he so lavishly praises.

XI
The cricket cage

A copy of Arthur Waley's *Chinese Poems* from the Berndts' library sits in the archive, perhaps acquired when it was reprinted in 1948. Poems about the moon are everywhere in Chinese tradition, including in Waley, and some have affinities with 'The Moon-Bone', such as 'Flowers and Moonlight on the Spring River', from the 7th century BCE:

> The evening river is level and motionless—
> The spring colours just open to their full.
> Suddenly a wave carries the moon away
> And the tidal water comes with its freight of stars. (Waley 71)

Years later Catherine Berndt wrote a poem of her own about a blue and white Chinese cricket cage that was a gift from her husband in 1984 and one of her favourite things. Called 'The Sad Song of Summer', it is a poem about confinement, predation and death:

> Sing, sweet cicada,
> Sipping summer sap
> In searing sunshine.

Don't you realise
The cruel danger that waits hidden among the flowers
To trap you in your summer flight
And still your song forever?
(Or, reckless optimist, perhaps you think
The peril is for others, not for you?)

Sing, sweet cicada,
Sipping summer sap,
In searing sunshine! (Stanton, *Relocate and Rediscover* 29)[7]

Like 'The Moon-Bone', the poem works through alliteration, rhythm and repetition to catch the symbolic meaning of a non-human life.

Catherine changed an important sentence in the introduction to the 1948 article where 'The Moon-Bone' first appeared to read 'for the collective […] well-being of the whole community' (R. M. and C. H. Berndt, Archive, box 696, 'Moon-bone' folder; R. M. Berndt, 'Moon-Bone' 17). The change introduces the powerful notion of a relationship between song and community wellbeing. This flourishing was at the heart of the belief in cultural survival that she shared with her husband.

XII
Invocation

One word is not translated. 'Calling the bone bukalili, the catfish bukalili, the frog bukalili, the sacred tree bukalili' (Trask's version, unitalicised, which Oswald follows, 206; 9: 6). A note in the Berndt article explains: ''*Bukəlili* are "power" names called out […] to invoke the spirits of that particular ritual or song cycle' (R. M. Berndt, 'Moon-Bone' 38–39). Rothenberg gives a version of this note, as does Murray: '*bukalili* means sacred epithet, power name' (Murray, *New Oxford Book* 243). Hall, followed by Lehmann and Gray, replaces *'bukəlili* with 'invocation' each time the word occurs, taking a step further into translation, arguably a step too far. For power in this power name comes from its untranslatability. Left as it is, *bukalili* stands as acknowledgement of the translator's limits. It invokes the possibility of moving between cultures, as a yearning call for the power to pass from one language world to another.

The translation is synoptic, outside and inside at the same time. Its mode is continuous present plural—'are making', 'are thinking', 'are sitting'—and present participle: 'swimming', 'shining'. The language mediates like a chorus that entwines multiple voices, dimensions and times. It affords transparency, if we are open to it, a flow that goes in more than one direction. If the iconoclastic destruction of Aboriginal culture was a constituent of the Enlightenment project of colonisation and conversion in Australia, 'The Moon-Bone' refuses this ecstatically. It imagines a comprehensive recuperation through the transcendent summoning of poetry[8].

'The Moon-Bone' spirals back into Country, its words inseparable from the people, place and language they come from. Movingly transformed under Catherine Berndt's hand, the English translation achieves an expression of oneness with human and non-human beings alike as part of a world-making that is continuous with the Yolŋu world. It returns here through reinterpretative understandings activated by multiple archives. A song that starts from a shell joins Buwathay's magnificent painting in a people's act of making that soars.

XIII
The string that ties us all together

I acknowledge and thank the Wangurri clan of the Yolŋu people of north-east Arnhem Land and Wangurri leader Buwathay Munyarryun for permission to discuss their moon story here. I thank Will Stubbs and his colleagues at the Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre at Yirrkala for help with this research. I thank the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia for permission to reproduce material from its archive and director Dr Vanessa Russ and her staff, especially Sarah Ridhuan, for their invaluable assistance. I also thank the special collections librarians at the Barr Smith Library, The University of Adelaide; Catherine Noske, editor of *Westerly*, and her reviewers; and many other interlocutors along the way, including Kent Anderson, Stuart Cooke, Geoff Gray and Christine Winter, Jo Holder and Phil Boulten, Tony Hughes-d'Aeth, Jo Lennan, Kade McDonald, Meredith McKinney, David Malouf, Peter Minter, Stephen Muecke, John Stanton, Toly Sawenko, Martin Thomas, Wukun Wanambi and Alexis Wright.

Notes

1 I use the short title 'The Moon-Bone' to refer specifically to the verse translation published by R. M. Berndt in 1948 and variously reprinted as poetry in English, as distinct from the broader song cycle (manikay, songline, story) to which it belongs.

2 Isabel Hofmeyr describes 'a field of strategic misreading that enabled a form of translation to become possible' in 'mission locations' in Africa, which has parallels in Australia. Cf. *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of* The Pilgrim's Progress, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 17.
3 All quotations from 'The Moon-Bone' are from the 'general translation' as it appears in R. M. Berndt 'The Moon-Bone', 22–50. Numbers in brackets after each quote identify the song or part and the lines quoted.
4 John Stanton uses this phrase in his obituary of Ronald Berndt.
5 'Lowly' replaces 'squalid' in the original.
6 Gray quotes the Berndts' letter to E. W. P. Chinnery, Commonwealth Advisor on Native Affairs and Director of the Northern Territory Branch of Native Affairs, 15 September 1947. I take Catherine to be the writer here.
7 The danger is the spider webs in the garden that might trap the beloved cicada. According to Stanton, Catherine could never bring herself to put a cicada in the fine porcelain cage.
8 Enlightenment iconoclasm, which we inherit, 'separated sacred images from the web of practices and religious beliefs from which images had derived their meaning', writes James Simpson in *Under the Hammer* (116).

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Echidna Chasm
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Only her Dreaming remains
her Gidgi-Djaru name lost, blown away
with the blight of conquest
on Purnululu.

She leads us through a narrow cleft
sheer walls scraped clean
with her spiny back, a gorge, red hot
bounces from white light to shadow
the sky a blue slit above.

Rounded sockets mark her journey
the ball of a heel, a trail left behind
as she rushes through mud, shaping
Bungle Bungle Country.

Year after year she lays her giant eggs
in the chamber, bone white
glazed by time, tossed free
with the rush of water,
by the unstoppable river in flood.

Mystery lingers, silent echoes
fill this tight ravine, great marbles
spilling at the mouth
onto a plain bright with sunshine.

Winter Flight
Gabriel Furshong

Gabriel Furshong writes from Helena, Montana, USA. A correspondent at *Montana Quarterly*, his prose has appeared in *The Nation*, *Yes! Magazine*, *High Country News*, and elsewhere. His poetry has been published by *Dialogist*, *Into the Void*, *Crannóg*, and other journals.

Flying north

clouds break above
dark signals below

Black roads
rigid and checked

black rivers
runic and weathered

carved across
white field and hill

Passage after passage
to worry or wonder

what meaning glosses
between one language

angling
compulsive
destined

and the other

coursing
deviant
unbound

For perspective
Jackson

Jackson's four full-length collections include ***A coat of ashes*** **(Recent Work Press, 2019) and** ***The emptied bridge*** **(Mulla Mulla Press, 2019).** ***The Fremantle Press Anthology of Western Australian Poetry*** **includes her work. She has a PhD in Writing from Edith Cowan University.**

On a pale green wall
in electric sunlight
three china ducks
fly up and away

For perspective the leader
has been made small,
the last in line made large

They work their brown wings,
orange feet tucked,
blue faces stretched out
on white-ringed necks

Though they fly all day
and half the night
they stay in our murky sky

Row F Seat 10
Anna Jacobson

Anna Jacobson is a Brisbane poet and artist. ***Amnesia Findings*** **(UQP, 2019) is her first full-length poetry collection. In 2018 she won the Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize.**

I was a theatre usher—could seat two hundred people

CC 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 CC

through my door in the time it took to eat an ice cream.

BB 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 BB

I remembered each face, features vanishing afterwards

AA 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 AA

like my handful of ticket stubs. One stayed, caught

A 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 A

in the lining of my pocket: a woman, hands trembling

B 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 B

as though her ticket might rewrite itself to announce

C 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 C

the wrong day. I remembered her because time

D 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 D

had torn: I was both usher and this woman.

E 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 E

Reassuring a version of myself.

F 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 F

The Last of Its Kind

Donna Mazza

Donna Mazza writes fiction and poetry. She lectures at Edith Cowan University and is author of *Fauna* (2020, Allen & Unwin) and *The Albanian* (2007, Fremantle Press), a T. A. G. Hungerford Award winner.

Heat is spinning off the highway, drawing up in a twist of sand and dead grass, bending like a wave. Unpredictable as shattered glass.

From the cargo, a rumble of hoof or claw or whatever. The truck, at least, is chilled and impenetrable: heat can't get in and they can't get out.

The willy-willy turns across the crop stubble, twirling out to agitate stony mounds of sheep in the distance. Further from the city, trees grow bare-trunked and pale, caps of leaves on low, savannah eucalypts. The undergrowth less verdant.

Uncle Eddy doesn't recommend taking the most direct route down to the Park, just in case, so the truck slips along narrow roads unlikely to be on anyone's radar. Long, straight stretches, tattered at the edge, with towns marked out despite the lack of population. Names strange as mythology. Yilliminning, Dongolocking. Things rarely uttered. Rabbits mashed into the bitumen.

The iced coffee isn't cold anymore and Jack turns off the music. Besides road noise and the occasional scuffle in the back, Amy's stomach gurgling is quite loud.

'I really need to go.' They take a wide bend, a dry creek swirls through cut wheat. Jack keeps driving, just to stir her up. 'Really though, don't be such a fuckwit, Jack. Just pull over in the bush.'

A brown sign shows they'll soon pass a historic site and the truck whines down through the gears and hisses to a stop in the gravel side road.

'Quick sticks,' and Jack jumps down, cigarette firm between his lips. Leans against the truck watching the road. Scratches at his ratty hair.

Through the prickly undergrowth she slips a little on the grainy soil, hops uncertainly in elastic-sided boots. There's a large granite stone to mark the site of a school which opened in 1927 and closed in 1940. This place, full of short-lived episodes that leave not-much behind. Not a sign of the struggle of the kids who grew up in that boom-and-bust place. What they had to do to survive. Just wide tracts of cleared land growing steadily saltier. The truck offers a privacy screen that the scanty bush doesn't but just as Amy stands, a ute slides into the gravel behind it. Heart racing, she hauls up her jeans and drops the fuel receipt. Quick sticks, she folds it carefully and shoves it in her bra. Stomps back to the truck. A kid hops past her, headed for the bush. His chunky mum slams her door, phone held high in the air. He crosses Amy's path, grins at her with big, new teeth that don't fit his skin.

'Got any reception?' the mum shouts at Jack, who crushes his half-cigarette quickly with his boot. Tries to appear calm. Too quick and she'd suspect something, so he grabs his phone from the cab. She comes closer to the truck.

'Nuh,' he's holding it high. 'Nothink, sorry.'

She curses and calls the kid at the top of her lungs. Amy slams the door, clips the seatbelt and makes eye contact with Jack. Mouths 'fuck me'. He visibly perspires. From the back, the cargo clatters and something sounds off a loud braying, triggering other calls and moans. A chorus of sound. Jack hops up into the cab and belts the door shut, looks back at the kid's mum with her wide, red forehead creasing at him in full sun.

'There's something alive in there.' She calls it out through the closed window.

Jack cracks the window, gives her the thumbs up, 'All good.' And tears up two strips in the gravel as he hauls the truck back onto the road.

The government makes a lot of money out of waste disposal since the boom busted. Dump it in the ground somewhere out of sight. As long as it's away from them, nobody gives a shit. There aren't enough votes out here anymore that it matters. Live lab waste is a bit different but Uncle Eddy got in at the right time and won a sweet contract. 'Keep you kids in jobs and you'll stick around,' he always says. 'Don't want you lot leaving me out here to die alone.'

At the driveway, Amy jumps out and punches in the code, dragging the wide steel gate across loose stones and back again, securing the lock. Double check.

It's been a big drive, hours, and Jack struggles to line the back of the truck up against the cattle-yard gate. On the third try he starts swearing so Amy jumps out to leave him to it.

Uncle Eddy leans on the fence, 'He's losing his shit.' Big man, knows it all.

'It was a long trip.' Just saying it makes her sag with weariness. 'We fuelled up before we went to collect the load and he hasn't stopped all day.'

'You must be tired too love,' Eddy pats her shoulder like she's still a kid. 'Everything okay in there? No idea what we got this time.' He takes it as it comes, unpredictable loads of 'by-products'. Herbivores, carnivores, whatever it is needs water and something to eat. A tree to stand under in the heat or the rain.

The engine of the truck shudders and stops. Inland-night chills the air sharply as the sun drops. Eddy sets up barricades around the back of the truck and opens the gate into the cattle yard, which leads into a small feed paddock, ringed by a high-voltage electric fence. Empty and waiting. Jack cracks the handle on the tailgate, which screeches around, and pops the seal on the cooler truck. The scent of shit and fear hurls at him.

'Jesus, fuck,' he holds his elbow over his mouth and nose. 'Never get used to that stink.'

'Shit's shit, doesn't matter what it comes out of.' Uncle Eddy leans on the clean side of the fence, eager as a kid at the circus to see what's inside.

'Such a fucken philosopher, Ed.' Under his breath, 'Cunt.'

'I'm a hyoomanitarian philosopher mate and don't you forget it,' Eddy laughs, filthy T-shirt jiggling around his gut.

Nothing moves in the truck, there's shocked silence, but after a few minutes, the light wakes them up and it's clear by red trails on the floor that there have been fatalities. Amy draws in her breath sharply.

'Bound to happen to some of them love, don't overthink it,' says Ed. And he hops the fence, climbing into the back of the truck like Christmas to slide out the crates with a blue X, some stacked on top of each other. Jack operates the lift, lowering the first crate into the yard. There's a bony shank poking out through the gaps in the crate, the hairy knuckle trapped between the palings. He grabs hold of it and shoves it roughly back, taking off a bit of hair and skin. The creature lifts itself from the sticky churn of shit on the floor. A tall thing, something like a moose or a deer but with an obvious deformity around the hips. It struggles to walk so he boots its back-end into the maze of the cattle yard. It stumbles.

'Lay off, Jack,' Amy shouts. He gives her the finger but lifts the next crates more gently. One with large birds, which they save for later, and another with smaller mammals—something fox-like and a couple of things with attractive fur. Sometimes, while she's doing the books, Amy looks online to see if she can work out what they're crossed between or what kind of extinct thing they might have been made from. There are rarely two the same and if there were, under no circumstances were they allowed to breed. Sometimes they recognise things, but usually there's something not right so they'll die anyway.

The crates sprayed with a red X are the dangerous ones. Carnivorous or horned things that might bust you open or get violent with each other. Eddy's favourites, they make the most money. There's something dead in one of them but not much left. That one and another like it stay in the truck while they unload the rest.

Ed hauls out a small, bony creature which looks immature and gangly. Its eyes are tight shut, pink tongue poked out between its teeth. 'Keep that for feed.' He hurls it back in with the red X crates. It lolls, mostly dead. They team up to shift the gates and barricades so they can unload the rest before dark. The herbivores and smaller animals have all wandered to the water trough, shaking themselves off. Stunned.

The carnivores smell sharper and Jack climbs on top of the crate as it lowers on the lift, prying it open with a crowbar. A big cat bolts out, blood and gore stuck to the fur on its legs and feet. Ed tosses the half-dead creature into the yard and the big cat lunges at it, snarling and rippling with pent-up fury. There's another similar one, with bigger teeth. It's clear at the start they won't be friends.

Amy shudders, 'Scary.' She calls across to Jack, one hand around her ponytail.

'Yeah, let's hope we get someone in who's a crack shot, I don't want them bastards roaming around here too long. Look like trouble to me.' Ed wheezes with the exertion, coughs in the chill air. Amy twists her ponytail.

At the very back, another blue X on a crate that fills the space in the truck. They scramble in the growing dark, altering the path of the barricades to move them away from the carnivores. These ones are more placid and look like baby elephants. Two of them.

There's a plastic sleeve with a delivery docket stuck to the crate and Jack takes it out, reads it and reports, 'It's just the quantities and weight and shit, but there's a note someone writ on the bottom about these things. *Two patchy-derms females. Might grow very big. No photos or other records allowed. Chipped.*'

'Fuck,' says Ed. 'What the absolute fuck am I sposed to tell the hunters. No photos or souvenirs. Fuck. We'll never get rid of the cunts.' He kicks the crate and the pachyderms skitter into each other. 'These'll send us broke. They'll need a lot of fucking feed to get up to a decent size to hunt.' He rants about the chip, tracking the animals to make sure they don't go offsite. He drags at the large crate. It's heavy and Jack hops up to give him a hand.

'You'll get big bucks for a full-size thing like this but,' Jack grunts and they haul it onto the lift, both tired.

'More if they could stuff it and ship it home.' Ed holds his lower back, dirty T-shirt lifting to show his hairy skin. The lift whirs down, juddering

with the weight and Jack hops on the top of the crate, prises open the front, which thumps on the dirt. The pachyderms are slow and cautious. Amber fuzz on them glows bright in the late sun.

Amy sees right away, 'They're mammoths. Plain as day those two are a mammoth.'

'Bullshit,' says Ed. 'They wouldn't send us anythink worth keeping. Them two aren't proper mammoths. They got something gone wrong with 'em or they wouldn't fucken be here.'

'Betcha.' She zips up her jacket and they close the gate for the night.

'So what, anyway,' he says. The crate of birds forgotten on the other side of the truck.

Early morning, Jack moves the truck to the wash bay and cleans it out for next week. He kicks the crate with the birds, mostly still now, and pretends he hasn't noticed them. Amy or Ed can take care of that one. He does enough.

Yesterday's arrivals look calm, munching away on the silage strewn around the feed paddock. Soaking up the sun. The big cats asleep at opposite ends of their electrified yard. Amy putting out some dog-knob for the smaller animals.

After lunch the aircraft will arrive with a half-dozen rich blokes ready for a hunt, so Jack spends the morning preparing the ammo, guns and troop carrier. It's rough but that's what they expect. Keep it authentic. Amazing how they don't give a shit about a clean car when they get to kill the last of its kind, the only one in existence.

He puts a new bulb in the spotlights on the roof. Bush-bashing through dirt tracks, he could drive in circles all day and they wouldn't have a clue. Fills the beer fridge and cleans the barbecue plate—sometimes they butcher and eat the kill, sometimes they want it laid on. This lot, from America mostly, are mad for it. Been here before and like to stuff their trophies. He throws an esky of cold ones in the front seat of the car for the drive back from the airstrip.

They were lucky to find Vince, a retired taxidermist, who moved down to town for the work. He tried to apprentice Amy but she just didn't have the stomach for it. Finished her accounting course instead. Vince drives out to the Park and gets the business done. Cash job so it doesn't affect his pension. Jack sends him a text so he can get himself organised. All set.

The birds are in the sun now, and Amy cracks open the crate as soon as she sees it, cursing under her breath the useless shits that are her cousin and uncle. Stinks. Poor things. She's the only one here with any heart. Of

the six only two are still alive, and not very. She picks them out from the forms of stiff birds with hard, yellow legs and open eyes. Shivers. The two survivors are waterbirds and Amy takes one under each arm. Quite big, like a duck but more like a penguin of some sort. The hunters won't want them. This often happens and Uncle Eddy slaughters and dresses them, passes the birds off as bush meat to the hunters. She puts the penguin-things in an aviary and fills a basin of water for them. They sip, feebly. Shake themselves off. They'll probably be okay. Eddy hates birds. They're no good for a chase and the ones that fly are too much trouble so they go straight to the freezer usually.

She sits for a moment and checks her phone, watching the waterbirds. The dark eye meets hers, rimmed by a golden yellow line. It blinks slowly, white-fuzzed eyelid quivering in shock. Disbelief maybe. It was probably extinct once and feels like a zombie might feel. Confused and starving. Angry. It meets her eye and stares for a long moment until something ticks in her, as if the penguin-bird matches the exact shape of an empty place inside her. An invisible thread tethers her strangely to it. She smiles and it opens its beak silently, stretches its leg out, webbed foot like a closed umbrella. Funny thing. Cute.

In her search she finds no extinct waterbirds that look exactly like it, except a couple of penguins. It might be an auk. Doesn't matter anyway, it is what it is. No pets are allowed here. The other bird doesn't revive much, still and eye-shut by the water. It has something deformed about its feet.

The driveway crunches with the chalet trolley and Aunty Rose waves her in. 'Give us a hand with the catering, will you love?'

Amy ferries baking dishes and shopping to the fridge and asks how she is, knowing she will get a list of aches and misery and a sorry tale about 'poor Jack' and all the hard work he does. Rose still has her helmet hairstyle from thirty years ago and goes to church in white trousers not mentioning a word of the vile business that happens out here.

Amy tries to avoid a cuppa-tea but is keen on a break so gives in when there's also chocolate cake. Apple pie for the Americans.

As she tries to listen to the awful story about the dentist, the bird's eye with its slow lid and its dark suffering trickles into her thoughts. Set it free. The words burst in her chest like a gunshot. Here of all places, with nothing but salt lakes, there is no place for it to live.

Her breath is wider in the mid-morning sun, slicing open a new bale of hay and breaking it up. She holds two fistfuls out to the pachyderms who munch slowly. Big dark lashes. One touches her hand with its trunk, looking for more hay. A shudder runs through her and an urge to cry. Set it free. She crouches by the strewn hay, pauses to think. Tries to push it

away but the pachyderm grabs at her ponytail and she reaches up to its warm skin. A plane engine drones over the yard. ‘What are they going to do to you?’ she says to the trunk. The troop carrier pulls out of the yard and she knows what they will do. Some things she can’t change.

She grabs a cardboard box from the back of the kitchen, a couple of water bottles and the plastic lunchbox of chocolate cake. Eddy hates birds anyway and they won’t even notice. The crate of dead ones were just a nuisance to deal with.

She’s quick. Opens the aviary door and takes the warm bird around the wings, straight into the box. Folds the lid. The other is lying on its side, just alive. Nature will take care of it.

On the passenger seat, the bird makes little pip-pip noises so she cracks the lid. Its soft head turns to the side. One eye looking into hers. Dark and certain. She takes off down the driveway and locks the gate behind her before the blokes get back into the yard.

It’s a long drive down to the coast.

Note

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Writers’ Development Program

Westerly presents a selection of writing from the four participants in the 2019 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.

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CULTURAL FUND

On Wednesdays we play [   ]

Kaya Ortiz Lattimore

Kaya Ortiz Lattimore is an emerging writer and poet from the southern islands of Mindanao and Tasmania. She is interested in diaspora, histories, heritage and language. Her poetry has appeared in *Scum*, *Peril* and *Verity La*, among others. Kaya currently lives in Boorloo/Perth.

1. CHICKEN

round one:
face to face with [   ]
and you full-moon towards her /
she surrenders / you win.

round two:
the white-light touch
of lips / quiet
seconds mouthing by /
eyes wide / you win again.

2. TRUTH

one shack, three days, no boys allowed.
you, still brown and shiny as a coin to the nine
white pretty bright-starry tight-skin

kite sky-high girls / who are you crushing on
ever had a boyfriend wish there were
boys here girls but you don't / you don't

3. POKER

no alcohol for drinking
so you strip instead / swallow
hard as bare skin unfolds
her lined stomach

a shoulder blade
the breasts you dare
a glance at / you,
last of all, crowned
queen of the night

4. DARE

the water shimmers in the dark light
from the shack illuminates your naked body
as you follow their glowing fairy-forms into the cold
lake. for a second, here you are: pale and moonlit.
is this what they wanted? then, a rock catches
your foot. you emerge wet and bleeding.

5. MAFIA

Rules:
- The card is marked red.
- You must keep a straight face.
- Truth is the secret under your sleeve,
  silence your age-old lover.
- There are no friends in this game,
  only enemies and victims.

6. NEVER (HAVE I EVER)

you have nothing to confess,
nothing that laps at your feet, begging.
hindsight is all there is,
a finger marking a trail in the glass.
you know now what it all means
but back then it was a guessing-game.
never have i ever, they said
and you took a sip.

Significant Tree Register
Riley Faulds

Riley Faulds is a twenty-year-old student of Agricultural Science and English at the University of Western Australia. His poems have been published in *Rabbit* and many birthday cards of family and friends. Estuaries delight him.

Purpose: protect individual or groups highly outstanding and valuable for
visual/aesthetic
botanic/scientific
ecological
historical, commemorative, cultural and social

significance.

How? Simple!
Town Planning Scheme No.3, Clause 6.52 & 6.5.4!

Nominated by anyone *native or exotic*

Working Group
Categories of Significance—Assessment Criteria
Significant Tree Register Process Flow Chart

Council
gives final

significance.

1) Italian Stone Pine—STR 07/0035

This tree was planted in 1943 by pioneering local professional fisherwoman Ethel Toussaint from seed collected from the Pine Trees which once grew on Island Point. The seedling was planted at the '48-mile peg', forty-eight miles from Bunbury, at a time when fishing families lived along the estuary foreshore. Ethel Toussaint lived in the house situated opposite this tree from the time of its construction in 1945 until her death in 1996.

bark like a loaf of tiger bread
leaves like an umbrella'd sheoak
leaning between estuary and the road
that's closest to the water.
amongst paperbarks and casuarina
this tree of stone is as tall
as anything this side
of the limestone bushland.

across from the old house where she
wove nets, cleaned tackle and fillets
her view missing or needing something.
maybe a screen to block the always-water
winter storms filling her boat
and cutting her wholly adrift:
I doubt the track was sealed.

planting it as a monument
something *visual/aesthetic*
to recall *historical/cultural*.
without something stonily solid,
    a story like hers
would likely be forgotten.

when Uncle Jack was alive
he drank with the home's now-owner.
at its jetty was a pontoon-boat
that the man drove to Mandurah pubs.
drunk, he sometimes returned
with a woman. waking to east light
through pinegreen, smell of mud

she's a long way from where she started
    it's a long ride back to town.

Some elements of the poem were drawn from public informational signs and policy documents, City of Mandurah.

Thinking Banksias in Words

Mia Kelly

Mia Kelly is undertaking an Honours course in English at the University of Western Australia. As an undergraduate, her second major was Philosophy. She is the previous President of UWA's Creative Writing and Poetry Club, and is now patting her cat while waiting for travel restrictions to ease.

I'm at Kings Park, in the Banksia Garden. I've come to find something in the banksias which I didn't bring with me: something like the banksias themselves.

More than a million plant and animal species, including many species of banksias, are threatened with extinction by the current climate emergency (Ichii et al. 6). Those responsible for this ecological collapse—the people with political and economic power—see plants as either beautiful or useful, rather than as beings with their own integrity; and plants are never as beautiful or as useful as money in pockets.

So, as extinction rates accelerate to hundreds of times higher than they have been in the last 10,000,000 years (Ichii et al. 6), what I want to know is what stands to be lost; what the existence and extinction of plants means. I have come to this place to ask, 'What, if anything, is it like to be a banksia?'

Is it possible for me to know?

Perhaps not. But here I am; I stare into the garden as if into dry unflickering fire, and wait.

• • •

The first thing I realise, as I try to focus on the vegetation, is that I've been carrying the image of these banksias with me: I picked it up somewhere else, long ago. The banksias in front of me are the cue to my projections, but I can't see past my nostalgia.

The banksia memories that transform this garden are from rogaining, a cross-country navigational sport that I love. I have walked sun-mottled days not knowing where the keen edges of the parrot bush end and my abraded skin begins. And now memory and landscape reflect nothing but each other, like parallel mirrors, and in this way turn the banksias into images without origin. They become purely aesthetic objects—talismans

of afternoons past. I find in them only the sensation of struggling, head bent and hat first and laughing, down a brush-choked gully; and of losing any feeling for distance or slope in the density of an endless thicket; and of that immense, insect-humming quiet that fills a windless day.

In truth, I know why the sparse plot in the park doesn't capture my attention in its own right. There is nothing, really, of the bush or the scrub-heath here; no gang of red-tailed cockatoos to screech like tyres across the long sky. And, underneath it all, I'm not looking for banksias. I'm looking for atmosphere: the ochrous smell of hot dust, the crunch of brittle leaves; life welling slowly forth like underground water; hours scattering into the colours of sandy soil. In memory, I'm crafting the landscape into something like my own happiness.

This is not what I have come for. I wanted to find something alive, beyond me.

I try to focus on noticing the specifics of this place. The collection of labelled specimens is wedged between a lawn and the next garden over, which is dedicated to boronias. I'm settled on a wooden bench with my back to the path, where the conversations of walkers drift by. And beneath my feet, grooved with a warm-hued design of zigzagging foliage, is a marble mosaic.

Maybe that's the key. The latticework of shadows which quiver, sharp as fissures, under every rigid leaf. The rouge of the Scarlet Banksia's flower heads, gem-bright among the pale, dry greens of the brittle foliage. This garden is a mosaic too: an organic artwork somebody has designed. Of course it is; that's what 'garden' means. Its composition of colours and little sandy tracks and the bright-skied negative spaces between trees are arranged to quicken an aesthetic response, one like my noonish nostalgia.

Yes—in spite of the intentions which brought me to the Banksia Garden today, and in spite of how close I feel to the landscapes of this country, I'm still not accustomed to responding to plants except as objects. The cultural narratives that have shaped my world tend to represent plants as part of the inanimate setting to a scene, existing in relation to the dramatics of human affairs. In Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the crabbed old oak tree observed by Prince Andrei sprouts anew in an expression of Andrei's own revival to the brightness of life (Tolstoy 423). In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the verdant grounds of Mr Darcy's Pemberley Estate express his refined taste and morality, and exploring them becomes a turning point in Elizabeth's opinion of his character (Austen 247–248). The poet Neruda writes, in Spanish, 'I have said that you sang in the wind / like the pines and like the masts. / Like them you are tall and taciturn, / and you are sad, all at once, like a voyage' (Neruda 13).

In finding only the expression of human emotion in plants, though, we reduce other lives to signifiers of our internal states, and the phenomenal world becomes solipsistic: a hall of mirrors reflecting nothing but ourselves. And yet plants are alive. I have to remind myself that whatever the human design of the Banksia Garden, it's true that the scrub—in fact, *that* scrub, with the feathering serrated leaves—is alive. In being aware of it, my experience is already mediated by my own position within the landscape, my culture, and my mind—but that doesn't matter to the scrub. It goes on living.

So, how do I write its life instead of mine? How can human language tell the story of another being, except through rendering its story in terms of human interests? How, fundamentally, can I see past my own perspective to know anything about what the banksia's experience is like—or even whether the banksia has experience at all?

• • •

One evening, more than a year before my morning at the Banksia Garden, my friend Ryan offered me a perspective on plants that I'd never considered before.

'People think plants just sit there—like they don't do anything,' he said. We were sprawled with our books and laptops on the terrace of the Reid Library at the University of Western Australia, gazing out on its vista of Moreton Bay fig trees. The fig canopy rose dark and ragged against the transparent light of the fading sky, but there was still some gold tracing the brackets of the leaves—dim gold, yet deep hued. We were both entranced by this light, our work momentarily forgotten.

'Plants are actually as active as animals. They've just adapted to being in the same place all their life. Did you know that plants communicate—that they talk to each other about their environment?' Ryan said. He was about to complete his Master's in Conservation Biology, and was sporting, as always, a style that could best be described as 'flamboyant botanicals': his shirt was lushly floral.

'Really? How?' I asked.

'Well, there are lots of ways. One is sending messages through fungal root systems. You know, when you see a fungus—like, a mushroom—that's just a reproductive organ. Really, there are fungal networks all through the soil. Also, certain types of trees release airborne chemicals when something starts eating them. Other trees then respond by secreting a chemical to make their leaves bitter.'

'That's fascinating. I had no idea.'

He laughed. 'Most people don't. That's why I like learning about plants—their lives are so weird compared to our idea of what a life looks like.'

We continued watching the fig trees as the sky's light deepened into dusk. Before, I'd known that trees absorbed water and sunlight, and that they flowered and fruited. But I began to wonder, as Ryan had put it, what parts of their lives were even weirder than that, even less imaginable to human beings.

• • •

My curiosity about plant lives persisted, and eventually, I braced myself against the Reid Library's chilly air conditioning, and settled down to find out more.

I read that the scientific approach to botany has recently undergone a paradigmatic shift. Previously, scientists investigated how each part of a plant functioned, as if studying the functions of a machine (Gagliano xiii). But new, creative research has begun to investigate the active relationship between plants and their environment, demonstrating that they are not part of 'inanimate nature', but interact with their world with a sensitive complexity (Gagliano xiii).

There was one discovery in particular that piqued my interest. In an interview with *Yale Environment 360*, the researcher Suzanne Simard spoke about how trees exchange carbon with each other via the fungal network. The process is always reciprocal, she explained, but a community of trees will send more carbon to the trees that need it most—such as a fir shaded by other canopies in summer, or a birch which loses its leaves in winter (Toomey np). In talking about this, Simard used language like 'mother trees' and 'forest wisdom' (Toomey np).

I stopped, struck. Did Simard's research really indicate that plants are, in some sense, sentient? Was the complexity and responsiveness of their activities proof enough?

• • •

Occasionally, staring out at the flat mass of the Swan River through bus windows, I tried to imagine plant sentience—what it might be like to be a plant, inscribing secret messages to the kingdom of the fungi. This seemed simple enough at first, at least from the distance of metaphor. But there were aspects of plant life that became a source of deep imaginative trouble.

Plants send out runners, which go on living when divided from their source. Plants grow from cuttings.

Perhaps, I thought, the problem was one of language. The weirdness of plant morphologies eludes terms like 'sentience', 'subjectivity' and 'consciousness'. After all, the notion of subjectivity relies on there being a 'subject': a singular someone to have experiences. Plants live beyond the borders of the singular. So, how could I come to know about the experience of something whose way of being has so little overlap with my own?

With this question in mind, my thoughts became a project in earnest. I began heading in regularly to the library, where nothing changes—a perennially cold space distinct from weather, from seasons, from anything that felt like life. In this time, I read the philosophy of minds, hoping to find new words for imagining experience.

My revelation came in the phenomenologists' response to an old sceptical question. 'How can we prove that any mind other than our own exists at all?'

The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty wrote: 'Anger, shame, hate and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness [...] They exist *on* this face or *in* those gestures, not hidden behind them' (Merleau-Ponty 67). It was inspired by work like this that Scheler created the concept of 'expressive unity' (Scheler 255).

Scheler argues that when we approach someone, we do not approach a manikin controlled by a puppeteer, but instead approach something whole and unified (Scheler 255). In other words, the embodied expression of emotions or intentions are direct physical manifestations of psychological states, not matters of mental cause and physical effect. The philosopher Zahavi extends the concept of expressive unity through a synthesis with the work of Husserl, to clarify that 'we experience the behaviour of others as expressive of mental states that transcend the behaviour that expresses them' (Zahavi 155).

What this means is that while others' expressions of thoughts and feelings may be opaque to us—we are never certain of what another person is thinking and feeling—we are still aware that it is some kind of psychological phenomena that is being expressed. An actor might feel bored while performing a romantic scene, but the audience will still experience her behaviour as directly expressive of mental volition—even if this is just her desire to perform an emotion she isn't feeling.

So, what Simard's research about plants shows, I decided, is that the way plants interact with their environment is expressive. Their lively complexity should be taken as expressive of something, even if the human concept of subjectivity is an ill fit. The question is, of what?

I tipped my head back to stare at the library's fluorescent lights. Stranded in abstraction, the language and philosophy I knew still

seemed to be an inadequate means of approaching this kind of knowledge. In fact, the very sterility of this place and the words that filled it seemed inadequate to approaching the knowledge of what a life is like.

Perhaps what was wrong with the work, after all, was that it was yet to involve any plants.

• • •

I try to forget myself in the Banksia Garden. I try to live like a moth in camouflage on a branch, dreaming the branch's dream.

Most of the banksias here are shrubs, gnarling low over the dry leaf-litter. I wonder if they are aware of their ceaseless slow growth across the soil, slinking beneath the harshness of the elements. The trees, meanwhile, grow brittle and crabbed, with sparse foliage. Their blade-like leaves barely stir when wafts of heat shift the bright air. I wonder if all these beings have some kind of understanding that they are together here—together and alone in the place where once their ancestors' roots passed stories across the fungal networks of the whole coastal plain. Do memories course in the roots of these plants? Do fungi know the old stories?

Scientists have observed how banksias gather information and react to knowledge of their circumstances—but how do banksias experience this?

I keep trying to listen to their stillness as though it is speech, to reach towards knowing them. But there's nothing to hear except my own thoughts—these thoughts—which think the banksias into words. And are they even the right ones?

Possibly not. As a white Australian of British heritage, my language emerges from a tradition of landscape that conceives of ideal nature as the green of British dells. Thus, words like 'gnarling', 'sparse', 'crabbed' and 'dry' carry the sense of drab deadness that these properties entail amid the lush flora of a mild climate. But the banksias are thriving: they do not express deadness or drabness. They are hardy, and their beauty is like the beauty of a rock casting a sharp shadow, or a mottled bird poised very still on a branch.

Perhaps if I knew more about the language that sings this place, the language of the Noongar people, their words would be able to make sense of the banksias in a way my words cannot. Or perhaps a visceral recognition of the banksias is only possible in a moment hidden in a walking rhythm, which is like an eddy in time, circling rather than passing. The pause, the real silence, after I've trampled all the words of my thoughts into the undergrowth and the hours.

Perhaps then, without even the hum of concept and language and memory to explain myself into my own experience, I would be able to get past the limits of my humanness and just be with the banksias.

Or perhaps they will always be too strange.

• • •

Small slips sideways are the closest I get to something more than futility. Then, I have the feeling that I'm trying to recall a memory which isn't mine. It's a strangely lonely feeling.

This alienating nostalgia permeates me when a tickle on my arm becomes a small dun-coloured beetle. The beetle is on its journey to go on living. It hopes to find, at the apex of my shoulder, the means for surviving the next turn of the sky. This is the moment of slip: I imagine an enormous hostile world, one lacking the possibility of explanation. A brief life of desires without trace and suffering without comfort. Or perhaps there's more to the beetle's life than that; perhaps the beetle is able to reflect on its plight in some way, mysterious to us.

Thus, I unbalance from the moment of slip. Only the beetle knows.

Later in my vigil, a peripheral swiftness draws my awareness to a wattlebird. It sweeps in to alight on a thin branch, sending it quivering, and then cranes around to plunge its beak into the nectareous tendrils of a flower spike's torch. After pausing, momentarily, in the pleasure of its gulping, the bird wings away. Gone to breathe and nest and fear death, even after I forget it.

I want to feel the same slip for the banksia. The same sense of reaching towards—almost touching—and then unbalancing, falling back into myself. But unlike an animal, the banksia has no eyes, and no nerves; no sense organs similar to those of humans. I have no words to articulate what a banksia's experience is like—only words for my own perceptions of it from the outside.

Hoping to find something like the banksias themselves, I instead find only the limits of myself: the limits of language, the limits of knowledge. In the end, I think the problem of language and the problem of minds are entwined. Both are the problem of solitude.

• • •

I don't really believe that if I came to this place quieter, with less words, I would finally find the banksias themselves. The moment in which I unbalance from what is almost connection is the moment in which I understand something closely—understand it with my flesh. Sometimes you can imagine, or almost imagine, what it would be like to be within

the life of another, but the point of difference between you and them is not your inability to perfectly imagine them. It is the fact that the other, themselves, is outside your universe of possibility. As the philosopher Zahavi writes, paraphrasing the ideas of Lèvinas, 'the absence of the other is exactly his presence as other' (Lèvinas 89, as cited in Zahavi 155).

The banksias are alive, not a metaphor. A lover is just as mysterious in this way.

In the muteness and absence of the banksias' internality, it could be claimed that there is nothing to find—after all, a rock, or a piece of plastic, or a ripple in the river is mute in the same way. But with its roots exploring the soil and its sharp leaves cleaving open the sky, a banksia's form expresses its will to live in a way the rock, the plastic and the ripple do not. However, I still suspect that in writing about a banksia's 'will', the language of volition is just a form I am using to construct my sentence. It is not something I witness in the banksias' stillness. Perhaps banksias really could interrelate in a complex way with their environment while living as we do in our sleep. Our world is strange.

And if we can never know one way or the other, does that matter? In some sense, I don't think it does.

Ultimately, what the banksias are expressive of is mysterious. We have no access to the absence of the other, only to the expressive unity of their body. Plant morphologies are so alien to our realms of knowledge; it is likely their expressions will always be illegible. And so maybe the infernal parallel mirrors, reflecting ourselves back at us infinitely, are all that there is, even as the limits of what we can know are not the limits of what can exist.

In the face of extinction, though, I think the very mysteriousness of the banksias is why their existence is important. When the last Red Swamp Banksia—expressive, perhaps, of a life unimaginable to us—shrivels and flickers out, the universe that might only have existed in the way that banksia experienced it will be annihilated.

But there's more to it than that, too. Respecting what is other to us, especially when we cannot understand it, is not a matter of pure pragmatism; not merely a deference to what may or may not exist to be lost. In relating to our environment with respect for the other, we have already found a gap in our solipsistic mirrors. Whether or not there is some kind of experience happening for plants, their growth, their interrelationships with place, and their transformations exist alongside us and yet separate to us. Unlike mugs of coffee or the pages of the books in a library, they live a dynamic physical existence beyond our purposes for them, even when we arrange them in gardens to serve our taste for beauty.

My last discovery in the Banksia Garden is the pattern of tiny pale dots on the undersides of the Southern Blechnum Banksia's blades, their other sides glossy and green. Before I leave, I reach over to carefully feel the orange mounds of their fuzzy inflorescences, half immersed in soil. I'll return when the seasons change.

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Rubbish in Waiting

Thomas Simpson

Thomas Simpson is a poet based in Fremantle. He has an MA in Creative Practice from Curtin University and is a committee member for WA Poets Inc. His poetry has appeared in print and online.

Rosemary sprigs lose
their perch next
to names of fallen,
still remembered. Afternoon
wind rips
up Monument Hill,
torments the cellophane
wrappers around
flowers—now sodden
and bleeding colour—
piled at the base
of the war memorial.

Brady left his medals
in the back of the drawer
and slept in
past dawn.
It's all rubbish
in waiting, he says
as we round the visitor's
lens now turned
to the sea; the sun slips
away behind North Mole.

Exploring Attributes of a Successful Author–Editor Relationship in Creative Writing

Jessica Stewart

Jessica Stewart is a writer and freelance editor and publisher. This paper is a summary of key findings from a Master's thesis in Editing and Publishing, completed through the University of Southern Queensland in 2018 under the supervision of Dr Dallas Baker.

The author–editor relationship is little understood outside the publishing industry and often mischaracterised by those within it. Commentators agree that this relationship is difficult to define and complicated, with the distribution of power ebbing and flowing in response to a variety of pressures (Speck 304; Houghton np; Ginna 1–13). Adding to the mystique, the editor's role in book production is opaque. Editors have been seen as either minor players—an optional extra—at one end of the spectrum, or as gatekeepers to publication at the other. This article posits that this is due, in large part, to the relationship's historic shrouding in secrecy. However, changes in the profession, and publishing broadly, must be accompanied by a mature dialogue. From the origins of editing as a trade with an apprenticeship system and little formalised instruction, many practitioners now have graduate qualifications and participate in national professional associations which set industry standards and support their members. An increased awareness of the editor's role and the attributes of a strong author-editor relationship will improve book production, serving authors, editors and readers.

My research adopted two forms of practice-led research (PLR) methodologies. PLR arose out of a growing understanding that practitioners were informing practice outcomes and that this contributed to scholarly understanding (Barrett et al. 2). The primary practice component was the editing of K. J. Taylor's three novels in her Southern Star trilogy, which formed the autobiographical and subjective basis for the research and is discussed towards the end of this essay. A second practice-led component was conversations recorded with a select group of practitioners: five authors and six editors. Three participants were both authors and editors, one was an editor and publisher, and one an editor and publishing consultant. All authors selected have published novel-length works of fiction through different publishing models. All editors are credentialed

as professional editors and, collectively, have spent significant years in the industry. These recordings are the tales from the field (Stewart, *Neonarratives* 140) and are supported by comments from other published sources cited here.

My extended thesis used a connective model (Hamilton et al. 3), described by art historian and educator Dr Robyn Stewart as 'a way to gather subjective information; documenting how participants talk about their work, the social relationships and social structures which shape their lives and work' ('Mindful' 5). The resultant narratives are the stories of participants' lived experiences (Stewart, 'Constructing' 41) and provide a well of data. My thesis is in three parts. First, I examine my own practice which comprises: text suggestions I make as a technical expert (grammar, punctuation, syntax); text suggestions as an informed reader (narrative flow, construction, sense and meaning); and my written and verbal communication with the author in managing proposed interventions. The second part of the thesis examines the literature on the practice, and the third part comprises reflections of author and editor practitioners interviewed in the research—precedents of the practice (Hamilton et al. 38). While this essay draws predominantly on material from these latter two thesis sections, several examples of my practice drawn from the first thesis section are also included.

The interviews conducted were largely conversation based. As a methodology, conversation shares understanding in a cooperative mechanism where ideas can freely mingle and no participant is attempting to convince another that something is right or better (Feldman 129–132). Rather than directing participants to respond to a question, conversational 'cues' guide coverage of issues that develop through a free-flowing dialogue. These cues provided a direction for our conversations. I would begin with a question such as 'Tell me about your practice', or 'What do you think the author's responsibilities are?' This would open dialogue, and I would follow with questions drawn from themes in the literature, such as 'You raised the proximity question: as the reader's advocate, is it an editor's job to come at the manuscript cold?' or, 'That's a nice segue into the role of the editor as not so much a coach but seeing it as a learning experience. Do you expect your authors to learn?'

Before beginning to outline relevant findings, it is worth looking briefly at the author–editor relationship in the context of the different publishing models, which still lack clear, broadly accepted definitions. I have adopted the following terms, while noting that all participants have moved between the models during their careers:

1. The commercial publishing model, in which a publishing house acquires and project manages the production of a book. The editor, either in-house or freelance, works with and is paid by the publisher. These publishers are often known as the 'Big Five': Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Hachette and Macmillan (McIlroy np).
2. The niche independent model, in which a publishing house acquires and produces books in a profit-driven model but remains independent of the global publishing conglomerates.
3. Independent or author-driven publishing (for example, self-publishing), in which the author uses a platform or service such as Kindle Direct, Smashwords or Wattpad to produce and distribute their book. All services, including those performed by an editor, are sourced and paid for by the author.

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What has led to this relative ignorance of the author–editor relationship as a crucial element of book production? Examining power in the relationship and in the wider industry provides a framework for analysis.

Drawing on Foucault's analysis of social control, it may be seen that the power construct in the relationship inhibits acknowledgement of the editor's contribution—a contribution, both technical and creative, which this paper explores. To Foucault, power is tolerable in society only on condition that it hides a substantial part of itself (Foucault 86). The secrecy around editing is pervasive: 'Theoretically, we all know books are edited. So why can't we talk about it?' (Gleeson-White np).

Bruce Speck claims that secrecy is part of the preservation of power in the author–editor relationship, on both sides. In his 1991 analysis of authority in the author–editor relationship, Speck claims that power is seen to be held by the party with niche value or expertise (Speck 302–304) or, as Foucault calls it, 'overt power' (Foucault 86). Editors wield overt power, but the literature review and the practice data from this study show that the diffuse power of the author, the power that no-one owns (Foucault 86), the power that is invisible and secret, can be at least as influential. While there is some recognition that it should be a collaborative process, almost all commentators cast the relationship as one where the author will, and should, prevail in disputes. Editor Richard Todd 'winces when a reviewer says, "This book needed an editor." Often it had an editor, but the writer prevailed' (Kidder et al. 166). Speck suggests that editors have internalised subordination in their inherent respect for authors and deference to their skill, seeing flattery as a precondition

to further creativity (Speck 304–305). This position is exemplified by renowned American editor Maxwell Perkins who says, 'An editor does not add to a book. At best he serves as a handmaiden to an author […] an editor at most releases energy. He creates nothing' (Fenstermaker 23). However, the imbalance can exact a personal toll that editors rarely acknowledge, and the industry denies (Blay 35; Gleeson-White np). One senior editor in commercial publishing in my study said,

> there are only two people who know that relationship, and if one of them wasn't you, how could you tell? The thing that annoys me […] is that critics say that the editor should have really tried harder and they have absolutely no idea what the editor tried to do, or what happened. Most of the time, in my experience, it's the author pushing back on it, or the publishing house saying there's not enough time to do this and we have to make it work, neither of which is the editor's fault. Because they're invisible, ultimately!

A warm acknowledgement may come in the published book, but this is at the author's discretion. Even when upfront, the reference to the actual function can go unmentioned. For example, editor Richard Todd and author Tracey Kidder have had a long and productive relationship, developed over decades. When Todd suggested a book about computers, Kidder thought it seemed 'daunting and drab'; however, he 'took Todd's suggestion because just then I couldn't think of anything else to look into' (Kidder et al. 126). The resultant Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Soul of a New Machine*, has the dedication 'To Richard Todd' (Kidder), but who, outside the publishing world, would know the role this person played in its production? Editors 'pretend themselves out of the equation' (comment in Gleeson-White np) and perhaps Todd demurred from being identified as such.

Early in the relationship, Kidder 'imagined that complete independence was a precondition for writing well' (Kidder et al. 148). When Todd deemed something 'confusing', Kidder writes, 'I felt like yelling at him: "Your reading is obtuse!"' (Kidder et al. 139). While Kidder learned to let go of this response with greater experience, it illustrates the perception, indeed the expectation, that the author is the sole creator. This is the unproductive power construct—a zero-sum game where if one party exerts their power, the other's is diminished. Mandy Brett asks, 'Why should it be a breach of trust to acknowledge the segue from individual creation to collaborative finishing that occurs in most fiction?' (np). There is little recourse if one does deviate from the accepted norm. Jacqueline Kent notes that when an author breaches this 'unspoken compact' (126) of secrecy, perhaps raising a broken relationship, the editor has no comeback: 'Whatever you say will only make you look defensive and wrong-footed and it would take too long to explain anyway' (Kent 126). Gleeson-White reflects on Beatrice Davis' famous description of the editor,

> I don't think our invisible mending model serves anyone, including writers […] [Editors] are mostly treated like shit. Poorly paid and never acknowledged, always blamed when things go wrong […] the secrecy and guardedness [of book editing] is doing the sort of damage that's done to anyone forced into secrecy […] paranoia, depression. (Gleeson-White np)

The act of turning a creative artefact with highly subjective attributes into a publishable product brings with it a host of difficulties. If the author's goal is to preserve their voice, the editor's is to have their edit accepted (Speck 304–305). A discussion of attributes of successful relationships where these goals are not competing, but aligned, follows.

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In my conversations with practitioners, there was consensus on certain elements deemed necessary for good outcomes. For instance, all participant editors insisted that adequate time to allow for full engagement with the book and the author is fundamental. One senior editor from commercial publishing in my study says, 'What you would hope […] was that you would have an ongoing relationship with your authors so you, as the publisher, were having input into those early drafts, that it was a creative relationship, talking about ideas'. This was supported by the literature. Famed editor Max Perkins 'did not revise, rewrite, line-edit, mark typescripts, or read proofs. His genius: advice on structure and character presentation' (Fenstermaker 30). This editing process came from a deep understanding of his authors and their work, a level of understanding that has the opportunity to manifest in the editor's role as a professional reader. One commentator says that 'editors are almost always intelligent readers; if they have trouble making sense of your writing, what does that say about your success with your intended readership?' (Crawford 37). Speck goes further in defining the editor as a 'pilot' reader—more than the reader's representative, they define the audience (309).

The editor's ability to develop a relationship which both inspires a writer and imparts sufficient authority has been undermined by changes

in the publishing industry that have compressed the traditional multi-stage editing process (Howard 360–362; Blay 10). A literary author published by niche publishing houses describes her experience twenty years ago, when she was first published: 'there was a lot of time and space for the structural edit, lots of discursive space', whereas now, in the contemporary publishing model, there is a 'rush around that really fine editing [...] [that] results in bad decisions [...] and more obtrusive editing.' A senior editor from commercial publishing asserts that when the editor is given insufficient time or resources, the author's voice can be lost. This damages their receptivity to the edit and leads to misunderstood expectations of the process or perceptions of bullying in publishing (Kidder et al. 136; Lerner 74). Annabel Blay notes that authors eager for publication are likely to agree to whatever vision the editor or publisher proposes (14). An editor in this study who had worked in commercial publishing says,

> I do think there is a really, really common thing in traditional publishing houses that books, particularly with really successful authors, that by the time they actually deliver, you don't have enough time to do a proper edit. And there's a combination of factors [...] the author has a lot more power by this time in the relationship, so they don't have to make changes. And there's not enough time to do the proper edits. And I think that's part of why books by really famous authors sometimes lack in quality later in their career.

Several editors in the study articulate how this damages authors, one describing commercial publishing as a 'sausage factory', mashing stories into a product before the author has found their purpose for writing. She describes working with a new author who was being pushed by a publisher 'for cynical reasons'. Her relationship with the author became increasingly fragile:

> I felt that if I say the wrong thing, am I going to completely knock her off [...] so she can't gather that purpose? You've got to protect the author, the story as well, from this kind of venal horrible publishing monster that [says] 'Well, I'll have that' and just chucked it at the editor and said, 'You make it work.'

Another editor notes that authors become frustrated, perceiving that '[the editors] just haven't read the book properly', 'they didn't understand', 'they didn't get it'. One editor states that 'the turnarounds were so tight that even if you really liked the book [...] there was no room to do more work, and the author just had to deliver and if it wasn't good enough, then it just got published.'

A former editor with a large publishing house, now working independently, says that some publishing houses provide no editing at all and that younger, first-time authors 'would have no idea' about this editorial gap assuming, once their book was acquired, that they would be supported throughout the process.

The book sits in the middle of this creative tension, and a senior editor attests that authors will respond to the edit differently for subsequent books, making each relationship new and impossible to predict. Having the right editor for each book assists productive relationships but this discretion is not possible for most publishing models. Several editors also note that this 'fit' and willingness to enter into a genuine relationship is gendered because men, and especially older men, are less likely to respond to an edit, and much less likely to work with the young(er) female editors that dominate the industry. A veteran editor in commercial fiction says, 'There are some real issues there about the men taking the advice that they're getting and [...] some are quite conscious that they just don't want to be told by this little miss [...] The "well known" man is not going to admit having any help from anybody.' She goes on to note,

> It's particularly difficult if you're working with someone with a track record [...] but they've had a bad experience with editors who are overly interventionist, who are not on their wavelength. That's very hard. You're going into a situation where you're automatically being viewed with suspicion.

Tailoring an edit to each author, and each book, is a mark of labour-intensive, skilled work.

Betsy Lerner suggests that the editorial role has been partially taken over by agents, who may be responsible for the first significant edit of an author's book, helping craft the vision (71). Annabel Blay concurs:

> All the agents I spoke to usually did at least two to three rounds of edit [...] It's competitive for agents to place books—as competitive as it is for publishers to get books into the market—and so the manuscript really needs to be as strong as possible before submission. (9)

However, agents as well as publishers may want to stay with a trusted formula. An author participant describes a deeply nurturing relationship

with an agent that she ended because she felt her voice, her 'daring', needed to grow yet was hindered by her agent's stalwart support of her earlier work. The agent's roles in selling her work and developing her as a writer ultimately conflicted. This author published her seventh novel independently, unwilling to alter her story to accord with her publisher's ideas of marketability or wait for its publishing schedule to find space for it.

An editor in the study who manages a self-publishing business contrasts the commercial experience with that of an author publishing independently. She says, 'The good thing about indie publishing […] is that you do have some control.' She indicates that her editorial style is different, telling clients, '"You do the writing, I'll go through the edits, and you can participate as much or as little as you like."' Another editor and independent self-publishing consultant says, 'Time frames are much more open-ended because the author wants it to be right. That's one of the benefits.' This is contingent upon authors being able to pay for their own editing.

Another attribute of a good relationship is the willingness for the author to participate in and learn from the editing process. Tracey Kidder asserts that 'editing isn't just something that happens to you. You have to learn how to be edited' (Kidder et al. 140). One senior editor I spoke with insists, 'the author has an obligation to […] consider what the editor is saying [rather than] just handing over the manuscript.' Engagement does not necessarily mean agreement, but writer Walt Crawford advises that even if it is 'egregiously wrongheaded, consider the reasons for the suggestions' (37). This willingness helps manage expectations (Blay 16; Kent 126) and can take the book to new heights—'Harper Lee revealed that it was her editor who suggested that she rewrite *To Kill a Mockingbird* from Scout's point of view as a girl' (Lerner 73). An author and editor who has worked in both independent and commercial publishing says of such participation,

> it's about self-respect as well. To put out your best self that you can possibly put out there. It's about walking up the street with your skirt tucked into your pants at the back and your editor coming along and pulling your skirt down for you.

Good relationships demonstrate a shared knowledge of the editorial process and the editor's role. In the study, two editors in independent publishing assert that open discussion of the process with their client authors improves the authors' receptivity and results in better outcomes.

One takes a two-stage approach, gaining the trust of the author over the structural edit, then changing the smaller things, such as publishing standards. All editors in the study found that explaining their textual changes to the author and demonstrating their understanding of the context and characters' motivation was most helpful in building and keeping trust. It is essential to the part of the editorial process that involves creating sense, and ranges from raising plot holes at a structural level to making seamless insertions in the writer's style at a more granular level.

Editors in the study, across publishing models, agree that textual intervention is 'a constant balancing act', one noting, 'You've got to choose your battles. If it's a small thing—"Oh fine, you can have that weird word on page sixty, who's going to notice?"—but if there are larger things, I do come back to them.' The editor must differentiate between 'necessary changes' justified through authoritative sources, and the 'more substantive editing problems that would require greater judgment and closer collaboration with the author' (Speck 310). An editor in the study working in independent publishing concurs:

> you've got to find in yourself what's reasonable […] If I just cave all the time and say, 'You can do what you want' then I'm not getting my message across and they've paid me to help them. If I've said something and they've resisted it, I think, is there another way I could have put it? For the next person?

Editor Mandy Brett describes the seesawing between instinct and self-questioning involved in retaining a clear-headed distinction between changes made in the service of the book and her own tastes and preferences. In my practice with K. J. Taylor, developed over eighteen months, multiple editorial passes allowed me to see my style intruding in some of my comments—my deeper understanding of the text confirmed them as unnecessary and I deleted in a second pass.

The extent of creative licence an editor has in the task of textual intervention depends on both the author's willingness to participate in the editorial process and the editor's engagement with the work. In the study, one editor notes that 'if they want to address the issues in a different way, that's great, and better because they know the book far better than I do', and another states, 'I think the trust builds as long as you keep challenging the author. And [the author] is engaged with the process in terms of making the book better.' One experienced author presents the value in a willingness to explore this facet of book production:

it is my work, it is my name on it, but there is this huge, huge input that the publisher and the editor and a workshop group if you're in one, all these people have their voice in it. So even if it's your name on the cover, I don't think many writers really work in that romantic isolation from other people's voices and inputs and if they do, they're probably fools […] and my sense is that their work would be better if they engage in a conversation with those other voices.

Editors must be able to justify their interventions (Speck 309) to keep this trust. Irreparable doubt can come about if the editor makes a mistake which is 'big enough to make the author stop trusting their abilities'. Editors attest that this can poison the editorial process, especially if the author feels this doubt early on. Many editors reveal that maintaining a formality, even with writers they have worked with over long periods, is necessary, avoiding casual or truncated comments because of the potential for misinterpretation: 'I tend not to do that partly because I've had some experiences where it hasn't gone over well so I tend to just always be polite, always try to put it as a question, never assume that you're infallible.' An editor in independent publishing states, '[Editors] still need to have some power and authority otherwise it can get too matey.' Another editor advocates a necessary distance to allow a 'certain amount of forensic thought' and allow the editor to 'recognise [their] own taste, as distinct from the author's intention, and from the author themselves. You need to leave your prejudices at the door.' Longer relationships assist here, but where this is not possible, an improved understanding of the cooperative process and the editor's professionalism enhance the editing process.

In the editing of K. J. Taylor's three novels, the primary practice component of my research, the cooperative process was welcomed. She said of the editorial suggestions, 'I need to have that outside input […] no matter how talented you are, you can't see your own mistakes […] fundamental issues with the plot and the characterisation, you're blinded to.' In my edits, I tended towards suggesting changes in Comments rather than making the change in the text. These suggestions were commonly accepted, as I had drafted or rewritten her material in a new way. In the edit of the third book in her trilogy, I raised a plot hole (see Figure 1).

They sat together in companionable silence for a while, looking out over their city.

'Well,' Red said eventually. 'I suppose now I'm alive an' everything, it's probably time you and me…'

'Yes?' said Teressa.

Jessica Stewart
This made me go back! He hasn't told her yet, has he? I couldn't see it, and I really wanted to know how it went down!

Katie Taylor
Agreed – I went back and added a much needed scene!

In another instance, the author chose an unusual verb form, and elected to stay with it (Figure 2).

A tired guard is a… The thought trailed off halfway through; he couldn't even remember how it was supposed to end.

The world span around him. He thought he might faint again. He stumbled into a tree, and then another one. Gods, this was hopeless.

'Are you ill?' a voice rasped.

Red gave a strangled yell, and managed to wrench his sword out of his belt.

Jessica Stewart
Deleted: .

Jessica Stewart September 07, 2017
This is an older, less common form now. Did you choose it deliberately over spun?

Katie September 15, 2017
Honestly, I just think it sounds better.

Our increased familiarity helped me understand how we could improve the relationship and how far I could 'push her'. Taylor noted, 'It's good to have the same editor for the same series. I wasn't bothered by your tone, it was comfortable, and I think we both came to the same decisions on things, that more comfortable stage.' I showed my engagement with the text with comments and questions throughout, opening up a dialogue

with the author. The edits over this time reveal that I became more candid (see Figure 3).

So here's what you're gonna do. You're gonna take your armies, all of 'em, an' you're gonna leave. You're gonna go back to the North, an' you're never comin' back. An' if you don't do it, an' fast, I'm gonna make you suffer.'

Caedmon did not try and argue. He had seen Red's eyes, and that was all the proof he needed. They were Arenadd's eyes now, and Saeddyn's. The eyes of a dead man.

Jessica Stewart March 01, 2018
This is when I felt the lines above felt out of place. I think you need to maintain the fear, rather than Red's appearance as a bit of a klutz.

Katie March 02, 2018
And gone. I kind of wanted to establish that he's new to this business so he messed it up, but the tone wasn't right.

As I grew in understanding of her style and vision, and sense of humour, we became more relaxed. The collaboration was rich because she responded with generosity and openness (see Figure 4).

Beyond them was Liantha's bedroom, as expected, nicely furnished but not overly luxurious. New Eagleholm was not a wealthy city. There was a bed over by one wall, and a fireplace, and the floor was covered by thick animal hides. Near the fire, there was a table and, on it, the baby was in a basket, still crying.

Red might have pulled back then, or gone into the shadows to investigate further, but

Jessica Stewart
Deleted: T

Jessica Stewart
A switcheroo, as I had the baby on the fire….

Katie Taylor
Urgh!

The literature discusses how the author's participation in the edit indicates a respect for the publishing context. Speck notes that while authors assume they have greater authority (Speck 305), they are forgetting that 'writing is not the same as being published' (Brett np): publishers bear the risk, and successful editors will have 'capabilities that help make the book a success for their employer' (Pietsch 121). A senior editor from commercial publishing in the study notes that this can become extremely difficult when an author will not accede to a change: 'Are you going to publish something that's not the best book it can be? And that's very hard. The company's paid an advance, money's been spent, are you going to cancel because Chapter Four is a real dog?' A niche independent publisher, who is also a senior editor, notes that an author's expectations can be profoundly unrealistic. She published a writer who had not accepted some of her significant suggestions, leading to withdrawal of an endorsement blurb and a poorer reception of the work than the publisher had expected.

Successful relationships are mature. Several participants compare the author–editor relationship to a strong intimate partnership which demonstrates a positive approach to problem-solving, managing conflict, and creating shared meaning (Gottman Institute np). Sharing admiration is another feature identified by the data-driven analysis of the Gottman Institute; the editor's constructive feedback and praise were seen by all participants in my study as integral to a good relationship. While Speck argues that flattery may perpetuate a writer's view that editorial intervention is unnecessary, intrusive and to be rejected (305), Richard Todd suggests that the sharing of a creative artefact is an act of generosity, the author shedding their outer layer of protectiveness (Kidder et al. 165). A participant in the study who is both an author and an editor notes: 'Normal and good human relationships [are those] where you can […] say, "Well, we've had this disagreement about this but we still not only respect each other, but we respect what the other one is trying to do."' Finally, commitment is also crucial in nurturing positive qualities over a lifelong journey (Gottman Institute np). All participants in the study and the literature support the view that a productive relationship can develop into a deep collaborative partnership. Speck comments that 'both authors and editors could work more effectively if they openly recognized that text-production is a collaborative effort in which different, yet similar talents are used in the service of a common goal' (305).

The converse of an open dialogue is a secret or closely guarded relationship (Gleeson-White np; Lerner 74). Perpetuating ignorance of an editor's craft can result in authors responding as 'babies or belligerent

toddlers who have been infantilized by the publisher' (Lerner 74). Lerner notes that 'it became clear to me that publishers largely felt that the less the authors knew the better' (74). This impedes the writer's ability to improve (Speck 305; Gleeson-White np), absolves the publishing industry from either explaining its decisions or developing authors and manuscripts (Lerner 74), and perpetuates the writer's overstated sense of their authority.

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This paper suggests that open discussion of the editor's role and understanding the attributes of a successful relationship present opportunities for growth for the author as well as benefiting readers. The professionalism of editing through stronger industry associations, accreditation pathways, and recognition of its place in academic study is likely to be important in dismantling a hegemonic norm that supports the prevailing power structure. This validation may also drive future research into the economic conundrum of how to resource editing within the commercial imperatives of the book market, and how digitalisation and the growth of independent publishing are creating new opportunities for authors and editors.

Note

Ethical clearance to conduct this research project was granted by the University of Southern Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee.

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I Went Looking for Mr Facey, Dad

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My mother kneels on the floor by the castle of books that had belonged to my father. She looks at the three towers we've just built—a large one that will be donated, another that will be placed on the roadside verge, and a third smaller one that will remain in the study. Under a window in the corner of the room, my father's old leather chair is in attendance. It looks other-worldly now, a deep recess in the seat and grooves in the arm pads where his elbows rested to form the base of a book easel. I tug at another spine in the bookcase and draw out a book whose brittle yellowed pages match the colour of its torn cover. On the front, there is a gold sticker that says *Winner, 1981 New South Wales Premier's Literary Award, Non-Fiction.*

The book is an uncanny reminder that my PhD on the early days of Fremantle Arts Centre Press still lingers, and that I should email Ray Coffey and cancel my interview next week. The last time I met with Ray I'd gone to his home in a north coastal suburb. We sat in his native garden, across a wooden table he'd made, and we shared a pot of black coffee. Ray talked and I took notes. He told me how *A Fortunate Life* had arrived at Fremantle Arts Centre Press as a half-handwritten, half-typed manuscript, tied up with green-and-white waxed string. I could easily imagine the manuscript sitting quietly for weeks on a table, by a window, above a park, in a building in Short Street, Fremantle, before Ray and Wendy Jenkins untied the string and read the words.

Now, as I run my hand over glossy Robert Juniper gum trees, feeling bumps and tears left behind by a creased cover, I remember my father reading it decades earlier. I thumb the pages to inhale their perfume and land on the half-title page where I see his name scrawled across the top in blue biro. I gently place the book onto the empty leather chair, creating a fourth pile.

Over the following weeks I feel unanchored and spend my days in front of the computer hoping it will gift me some inspiration and motivation.

I allow Google to take me on uncomplicated meanderings that predictably end on WebMD until one morning I take my coffee to the computer and determinedly change the route. It's time to return to my studies. I bring up the University of Western Australia library page and type in 'Albert Facey'. Scrolling through numerous books, articles and references that strut words like 'Anzac' and 'Gallipoli', one entry pulls me up. It is an audio entry, a recording of Albert Facey held in the Audio-Visual Collection on the third floor of the Reid Library. I grab a blue computer bag off the shelf, dust it off, and pack my laptop, portable CD drive and headphones.

There is a small café at the entrance of the library, just to the right of the automatic doors. It's morning, it's winter and the idea of a coffee is appealing. But I don't know the rules regarding coffee in the library and rather than risk being called out, I decide to forgo caffeine and get on with my task. The ground floor is alive with students but there are no books, just desks, pods, chairs, couches and nooks. Undergraduate students are on their laptops, earphones separating them from the active world around them. I lament that they will never know what it's like to rush to the library after receiving an assignment topic, to wrestle with other students among rows of literary criticism books, crouching down, reaching high, snatching bound thoughts on the works of Shakespeare, Austen and Beckett before they are all checked out. They won't ever feel the thrill of their hoard as the librarian seals their claim with a heavy metal and rubber stamp. That they won't feel disappointment when they realise one of the heavy books they've carried home contains only one small reference to their topic.

The third floor of the library opens to rows and rows of bookcases. Hardback and paperback books of varying size line up on shelves of tin bookended by jarrah boards. They stand quiet and undisturbed like gravestones. At this time of the morning and in this part of the library there is no staff to be seen and very few students. The floor is still. On some shelves to my right are a number of boxes clustered into a small group that I think might be the AV collection, but I soon discover the boxes are filled with microfiche. Even I'm nervous of these pieces of flat film from a bygone time.

A few rows north, I spy a row of old green cardboard boxes and I walk over. The number sequence on the boxes matches the number sequence I've scribbled down on a yellow Post-it Note. I pause before looking any closer. It's been more than thirty-five years since the recording and I feel certain it won't be there and I'll have to return home empty-handed. Then I see the word 'Facey' on one of the spines. I open the box and there, surrounded by space, sits a lonely cassette tape secured into place with board. I've struck gold.

Of course, I remind myself, this was a time even before CDs. I tuck the green box under my arm and soon find the library's portable cassette player that's been padlocked to a desk. I wonder who in their right mind would want to steal it. I find a socket for the aux cable and plug in my headphones.

There's a bank of windows that runs along the northern wall of the library. Trees reach up to it and the soft foliage creates an atmosphere of learning and comfort. A safe sanctuary, a quiet place of thought, a rich and undervalued part of society. I recently read a magazine article that suggested libraries could be replaced by Amazon to save taxpayer money. Sitting in the library now, the suggestion offends me more now than it did when I read it. A library is a place of its own kind, irreplaceable.

Pressing down the clunky 'play' button brings back memories of Sunday family barbecues and listening to old recordings of ABC's *Sentimental Journey*; days that blended into nights that invariably ended with Dad playing the ukulele. My nostalgia grows when a BBC-style voice speaks to me through the speakers. He tells me that his name is John Clements and he is at the Midland Convalescent Home to interview Albert Facey. The date is 28 October 1981. I already know that Facey passed away on 11 February 1982, just three and a half months after the interview, and I feel a sadness that this could very well be the last time Facey's voice was recorded. The sadness deepens when, within seconds, I realise the tape is warped. The voices of the two men come at me in quiet waves, words echoing previous words. The quality is too poor to transcribe. I pack my bag, return the box and leave the library.

The next day, I email Special Collections at UWA to request access to their second copy of the Facey/Clements audio recording and to the photocopies of Facey's notebooks that they also hold in the library. They tell me that I need to contact Clive Newman as he is the family's agent. That part is easy. Clive was former general manager at Fremantle Arts Centre Press and I have already spent a pleasant afternoon interviewing him for my research project. I send Clive an email and within the week I'm back at the library and at the desk in the Special Collections room. Before me are eight blue, hardcover bound photocopies of Albert Facey's typed and handwritten manuscript. Pages and pages of words on foolscap exercise books. There is also the typescript of the book.

I open the first manuscript and read the vintage handwriting that is not dissimilar to my father's. *I was born in the year 1894 at Maidstone in Victoria.* Familiar words that remain as the opening sentence of the book. I turn the long pages, imagining Facey writing the words directly onto them. One of the notebooks holds an account of the purchase of

Facey's Midland property at thirty-two Brockman Road. He bought the place for £2700 on 8 February 1966 and spent other savings on painting and chimney sweeping. It was the same year Australia introduced the decimal currency and Facey's interchanging of pound and dollar symbols tells me he kept a foot in each system. A few more pages in and I see that Facey was collecting pennies minted from 1910 to 1964; he had collected well over half. He lists the horses that ran in a Melbourne race on 31 July 1971; that day he made a tidy profit of $6.35. His personal notes, jottings, even his handwriting make it easy for me to imagine him scribbling away at his laminate kitchen table, but my day is drawing to a close and I think the audio recording will tell me more.

The sound quality on the second cassette tape, although it is old and still difficult to hear well, is much clearer. The voice of John Clements is kind, respectful and authoritative. He has a gentle approach, not patronising, just understanding, empathetic. He tells Facey that he was born in 1905, which makes him eleven years younger than Facey. My maths tells me that Clements is seventy-six years of age and Albert Facey is eighty-seven and it is only a year since *A Fortunate Life* was released. When Facey speaks, the age in his voice is perceptible and you can just about see his memory running and hiding in the pockets of his brain. Fragments missing. There are two parts to the interview, carried out over two consecutive days. At the end of the first part, Clements asks if he could return the following day. Facey tells him he can. 'I'm here permanent,' he explains. 'They started me in here and given me a permanent job so I can stay here and work for this company.'

I remember the day I drove Dad to New Norcia for an outing. It was cold and we were rugged up in scarves and jackets. We planned to walk around the town and its monastery buildings and then have lunch at the pub. He was seventy-nine then and his mind had already begun to betray him and would relentlessly continue to do so for the next five years. On that day, I knew to make every moment count.

'Dad, what was it like growing up in East Perth?' I asked as we rattled along the Great Northern Highway in my little hatchback.

There was a lengthy pause.

'You know, it's a funny thing,' he said. 'It's like my mind is a computer and a whole layer of information has been erased. I can remember bits but I can't really put it all together.'

And then we both fell silent. It was the first and last conversation I had with Dad about Alzheimer's. As a family we'd never discussed it with him. I'm not sure if Mum tried to protect Dad by not mentioning it, or the other way around. Dad's computer-mind would slowly be erased over the years. It started with forgetting events, places, people and names.

He then forgot that I was his daughter. We were always grateful that he never forgot to laugh.

I knew from spending time with others in the nursing home that Dad eventually moved into that there's no single type of Alzheimer's, no predictable personality. I don't know from listening to Facey's voice on the recording whether his memory is failing due to old age, medication or dementia. Between tiny slips of the mind, Facey talks about 'the man he met in Geraldton who took him kangaroo shooting'. He insists twice that the man was a 'good fella' but tells Clements that he can't remember his name. He tells him this again, twice. Facey has also forgotten the number of the house where he first lived with his wife, Evelyn. Though he remembers it was State Street in Victoria Park, just up from the pub.

There are other small details that Facey can't remember. He can't remember much about making the boots when he escaped from his tormenter as a child. He couldn't describe the train journey from Egypt during WWI. He can't remember the name of the 'marvellous man' in Northam who helped his granny find a house. He can't remember the names of some of his children. But there are many memories he can recall: his idyllic marriage, never having touched a drink, his cruel mother, surviving on partially cooked kangaroo in the bush, officers who bullied during the war, the nurses who were 'just marvellous', his realisation after witnessing dreadful things during the war that 'there was no God or they wouldn't do what they were doing'. He tells John Clements that the God that he had once known hadn't been replaced with anything else.

Where Facey is enthusiastic about a subject, his conversation sounds very much like his writing. His style is distinct. It's easy to hear his narrator voice, telling him what words to put down on paper. Clements asks Facey how he managed to write his book given he'd been 'handicapped' for a great part of his life through the lack of formal education. 'Well I always asked my wife,' Facey replied. 'She was a well-educated girl and she used to tutor me and do all my spelling for me. She was marvellous. I don't think without her I could have wrote it.'

Facey's wife, Evelyn, is possibly his happiest memory. 'She was the nicest girl I ever met in my life,' he tells Clements. In his memoir, Facey writes about having received some socks in a trench comfort parcel from an Evelyn Gibson from Bunbury. He didn't know her but he remembered her name. Back from war the next year, he serendipitously met her in Perth for the first time when she came up on the 'Bunbury Rattler'. Evelyn recognised Facey's uniform and asked him if he was from the Eleventh Battalion. The connection over the socks was made and the rest, as Facey narrated, was 'providence'.

On the tape, Facey tells Clements about meeting Evelyn on Colin Street in West Perth when he saw two blokes hassling her and her friend and he asked the girls what was wrong.

> And they said, 'They want us to go with them and we don't want to, we don't know them.'
>
> 'Well come with me. Where do you live?'
>
> And they said, 'We live in Kings Park Road.'
>
> I said, 'Well come and I'll take you to Kings Park Road.'
>
> So we walked up the street up Colin Street to Kings Park Road and saw them home and I said goodbye and away I went.
>
> […]
>
> Next evening, I came over to see if they'd seen any more of them and they were just coming out and so they invited me with them.

Had he forgotten about the socks, I wonder? In the recording, Facey is old and tired and it's clear he is chasing his memory.

Soon after I had driven Dad to New Norcia, I went to my parents' home with a video recorder, eager to capture all that Dad could remember about his life. Dad sat in his leather chair and I pointed the camera at him and I asked him questions about his childhood, and then his marriage, and then his work. Most often, after an awkward pause, Mum would answer for him from the kitchen. I didn't continue with my project. I didn't want to remind Dad of the memories he had already lost.

At the end of the recording Clements says to Facey, 'In spite of all your ups and downs, you've had a happy life.'

'Oh a marvellous life,' he replies.

That evening I take a glass of red wine out to the cabin that I use as a study and sit at my computer. A desk lamp throws a warm glow on the pine walls, highlighting irregular knots in the wood where branches once fell away from healthy trees. Each knot telling its own story, each knot part of an abstract artwork. My old kelpie cross breathes rhythmically on the reading chair to my left, my cat sits on a book on my desk to my right. Both are watchful.

I open the Trove search page on the National Library of Australia's website and type in the words 'Albert Facey'. Within seconds a page-three article from *The Canberra Times* appears on the screen. The date is 12 February 1982—nine months after *A Fortunate Life* was published, a few months after the interview.

Facey dies
PERTH: Albert Facey,
whose turbulent life story,
'A Fortunate Life', became
a best-seller last year, died
yesterday at the age of 87
in hospital in Perth as an
indirect result of a fall he
had last year.

The notice feels distant, minimal, perfunctory. I wonder how a man who had lived such a full life could be reduced to a one-inch square of text. I'm comforted that Facey left his words, a legacy for his family and readers that continues to live outside the small death notice in the newspaper, but I grapple with how in the absence of a memoir we can celebrate the memory of those we continue to love but who are no longer with us.

I remember that among the photographs I'd taken of Facey's journals at the Special Collections there was one of some verse. I haven't yet looked at it closely. I find the image on my phone and zoom in to discover a poem handwritten by Facey. It is written for his beloved Grandma who lived to be 100.

I want you to know what I'm thinking
My thoughts go back to years long ago
To the days of my childhood I remember
And a dear old lady I used to know

She lived in a house by the roadside
Surrounded by roses and trees
Her hair was of beautiful silver
That waved in the sweet scented breeze

She cared for me when I was a baby
And left in this world all alone
That's something I'll always remember
As she was the only mother I'd known

I think of my father and open my journal to a blank page.

Circuit, an Elegy

'Bugger Bognor!'—George V

Aidan Coleman

Aidan Coleman is an early career researcher at the JM Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice at the University of Adelaide. Wakefield Press published his third book of poems, *Mount Sumptuous*, early in 2020, and he is currently writing a biography of the poet John Forbes.

'Right' you say, shaking out the day
like a tablecloth and we walk again
that hard-pebble mile from Felpham to Bognor
beside the sea's glittering footwork,
'*Sŵn y môr*'—'the sound of the sea'—
you strain above its roaring hush,
repeating the translation for me,
as if I don't know it by heart.
You quote the curse of the maddest George,
secretly pleased he came at all,
as we return to the same bench,
where you steady your breath
to say your prayers in Welsh.
Later, in a room of carpet and photos,
you light a third cigarette, confessing:
'Anne doesn't know but I only have one',
as we rehearse this script again—
the ideal village that memory fenced:
your daughter, son and a few close friends,
the church and man you married,
your national champion blacksmith father
shaking the hand of the Queen forever—
the phrases, as pebbles,
wearing smooth.

ectopic
Tamara Holmes

Tamara Holmes is a Brisbane-based writer and poet. Her poetry has been published in *Art Datum*, *PASTEL Magazine*, and *Good Material Mag*.

a heart began to grow
in the confines
of a fallopian tube

attached to a tissued
anemone—close
to rupture

//

when the heart
and half
of the woman

was gone
her father
said, 'It wouldn't

have been
a Cavanagh
anyway.'

The Tyranny of History
Ben Mason

Ben's short fiction has been performed, awarded, and published; including in *Verge* and *Overland* (forthcoming). *Home Invasion*—his collection of short fiction—was longlisted for the 2019 Fogarty Award. He quit teaching to focus on writing. It doesn't pay the bills, but it sort of makes him happy.

1

The boy kept his eyes out for gum trees, kangaroos and koalas. Instead, it was pastures, sheep and cattle. The family slowed down for towns, a hundred to eighty, then eighty to sixty, past the churches and pubs and the drawl of people on the main streets: the elderly with canes or wheelchairs, the teenagers in droopy clusters outside shopfronts, and the young women pushing prams past the pubs with lacy verandahs. He often wondered what life would have been like if they had of stayed in the country. At school everyone made fun of his twangy accent and silly sayings, like 'he kicked a sausage roll'. His parents always spoke about the freedom they'd had in the country, bragging to him and his sister that when they were their age, they'd be outside all day playing on their bikes. An edge in their voices seemed to tease the children for their time spent inside. As if they were allowed on the streets. As if they were in charge of the facts of life.

Dad switched off the radio and put on his thinking face, one hand on the wheel, his other elbow hanging out the window so he could rest his head on his fist. Mum placed a hand on his thigh. Which was new.

He thought about hitting his sister. Or at least cornering her, except this was a different kind of time when you behaved a bit more grown up. But so boring! He asked his father again why he and his sister couldn't view the body.

'Told ya. You're too young.'

'Dad?'

'Yes, mate?'

'How did Aunty Kate die?'

'Been through this. Alcoholism. She drank too much.'

'I know. But did she drown in it?'

Nose breath. 'Sort of. It was over a lifetime. She just couldn't stop.'

'Why?'

'Why?' he replied, but not to the boy. 'Why? Well, she just did, mate. Sometimes people drink and they just can't stop. It's like they have a hole inside themselves they need to fill up.'

'What hole?'

'It was inside of her. Hard to explain.'

'So she was sad?'

'I would say so,'—their eyes met in the rear vision—'but she's going to a better place now.'

Heaven. Dad meant that Aunty Kate was going to heaven.

The boy couldn't wait to get inside the church, where he hoped for warmth. He wrapped his fists inside his sleeves and nestled close to the cigarette smoke and laughter of his relos. He had fifteen aunties and uncles, and the cousins, who were mostly older, teased him about being from the city. Except his favourite cousin Mia, who stood out 'like dog's balls'—how his uncles often described her—with a shock of dyed red hair and black holey dress. She stood away from the family and leant back against the church wall, her cigarette hand falling below her hip, while her other hand pulled across her body and gripped her elbow. Not like how the other aunties smoked.

It had been a big deal when she got into university, the first in the whole family. After her first year, the relos had gathered around Grandma's tea table and laughed at the weird stories that included another girl revealing her breasts during class, or students locking themselves in classrooms. Now it was her third year and she didn't talk much about university anymore. Didn't speak much about anything. Nobody ever mentioned the change, but the boy had noticed the lifted eyebrows and shared looks whenever Mia was spoken about. It was like she had learnt the big secret at university. Now she was one of them.

The aunties, garbed in cardigans and pearls, zoomed in to plant big wet ones and their pungent perfumes caused the boy to screw his face. The bellies of his uncles strained their white shirts so wisps of black hair poked in between the buttons. They bellowed deep and gruff and said things like 'fair dinkum', squeezing his hand very hard as they introduced themselves, like how they seemed to clamp their cigarettes. Everyone kept commenting on the turnout, on how well liked Aunty Kate was. On how smart she was. Too smart, they agreed. How could somebody be too smart?

Uncle Jimmy peppered him with questions about the footy season just past, and the cricket season to come. It was hard to focus on the questions because Uncle Jimmy's breath stank. And he never really listened to the answers anyway, it was just so he could give the same boring talks about perseverance and smarts. 'You know what ruined it for me, mate? Women and piss. Stay away from them.'

The boy had never been inside a church, let alone a Roman Catholic one. Something was different. Like when an adult said the air changed in a room, this must be what they meant. People drew crosses over themselves, like he'd seen on tellie. The boy clumsily copied them. Everyone communicated in hushed voices or subtle nods and waves. The sun painted the windows in bright colours—the robed people with humble smiles shining in blues and reds and yellows. The actual priest, who greeted the boy's aunties and uncles, also wore robes, but he seemed to be weighed down by their heaviness. The boy followed his family into a pew.

And then it started. Shuffling of feet. Standing up. The priest mumbling. A response from the crowd. The funny crossing. Prayer. Singing. It all happened quickly, one thing after another, nobody had told the boy, these things you had to do. Nobody had told him!

A lot of waffling, especially from the relos. The excitement wore off, like he'd opened the batting and made a duck. A funny realisation: he'd never seen Aunty Kate with a drink. Ever. At their Christmas catch-ups, when everyone else got shit-faced, Aunty Kate would hang up the back and enjoy talking to the nieces and nephews. Later on, without warning, she would close her eyes and recite poems, or sing ballads and old folk songs, stealing everyone away from their rowdy conversations so they gathered around her blue energy, where they would sing along with the more hearty songs, or when the pieces were more solemn, they would quieten and close their eyes and smile. And sometimes cry.

Why did Aunty Kate need to fill a hole?

When the priest came on to speak again, the boy knew they were going to cross themselves. He readied for it. But he still missed the beat.

At the wake, in the football clubrooms, the boy did not eat any of the curried egg or ham and pickle sandwiches. He sipped on a soft drink and leaned against the glass windows that overlooked the oval. He tried to focus on the conversation to his left, something about an old football final, except their words kept getting gobbled up by the murmurs that filled the room.

Mia was next to him. He wasn't sure when that happened. Holding her elbows and asking him how he was.

'Good.'

Time passed before he realised he was supposed to return the question.

‘What?’ She leaned close.

He cupped his hand. ‘How are you?’

She squinted her eyes at the crowd. ‘I dunno. I wish I had of seen Aunty Kate one last time. Just called her up to see what she was doing and if she wanted to grab a coffee. I would have asked for her thoughts on everything and just turned into a sponge, you know?’

The boy shocked into a new leaning position. He wasn’t sure why she said something so soft. It was kind of nice to be trusted, and he didn’t want to ruin it. He yearned to voice a few things himself. Except the moment rolled away like a cricket ball just out of reach, and he was wondering how he could bring it up again. Mia said she needed something to eat, and the boy agreed to a sandwich because it meant she would return.

‘Hear the boongs want to stop the freeway because it’s gunna knock down one little tree?’ Uncle Jimmy called out from his huddle of people.

Mia took a handful of sandwiches. Mayo ran onto her fingers. She’d squished them too hard.

‘Know what we should do to them?’

Mia grimaced. The boy’s breath stopped. The onlookers, stubbies in hand, smirked.

Then Mia spoke up: ‘Let’s just not do this, Uncle James.’

‘Should have herded them over cliffs. Like we did in Tassie.’

The onlookers guffawed. Uncle Jimmy’s rosy red cheeks were gleeful.

Mia glared at Uncle Jimmy. The boy prayed she didn’t say anything else; Uncle Jimmy was frightening. Dad called him a ‘corrupt coppa’. Mia’s back straightened, and she turned and looked at Uncle Jimmy. ‘What are you so scared of?’

The onlookers furrowed their eyebrows. Uncle Jimmy crossed his arms. They didn’t understand the question.

‘Do you ever see any black people in town?’

‘We got rid of them.’

‘Exactly. But yet, all you do is complain about them. I just want to know why you’re so scared?’

‘They take me fucken taxes.’ Uncle Jimmy nudged his pot glass in rhythm with his words at Mia. ‘Not that you’d know anything about that.’

‘About being a fat redneck? No, you’re right.’

Uncle Jimmy was going to spit the dummy Uncle Jimmy was going to spit the dummy Uncle Jimmy was going to spit the dummy—

But then Mia swung her arm around to the other people. ‘And your silence is violent.’

They stopped smiling. Uncle Jimmy’s belly breathed again. Mia hurried off.

The boy followed his cousin, threading through the big bodies, getting to the glass doors in time to see her handprint dissolve. Her arms swung wildly and her footsteps crunched the gravel before she disappeared behind the football bench. White mist lifted from the oval so that the pines and gums in the background showed as dark shapes. Mia sat on one side of the football bench, the boy sat on the other. She hugged herself. She smiled at him. ‘Fuck them. Aunty Kate would’ve been proud of me. She’d like you too, you know?’

The boy flushed. ‘What did Uncle Jimmy mean? About the cliffs in Tasmania.’

‘We used to massacre the Aboriginals by chasing them over the cliffs.’

The boy knew that there’d been some killing. ‘What do you mean “we”?’

‘The white people. The Colonisers. Our ancestors.’

The boy’s hand squeezed into the metal bench, cutting into his fingers.

‘I wish I knew how to cross myself.’

‘Why?’ Mia said.

The boy didn’t answer. He couldn’t. They sat in the cold, in the quiet, watching the fog swirl slowly towards the sky.

In the car, on the way home, the boy asked why Uncle Jimmy and Mia fought.

‘Uncle Jimmy likes to bait people,’ Dad slurred, in the passenger seat now. ‘But he’s got a good heart.’

Everyone was always saying Uncle Jimmy had a good heart.

‘Doesn’t Mia have a good heart?’

‘She could learn to hold her tongue,’ said Mum.

‘But Uncle Jimmy said we should murder the Aboriginals. How could he have a good heart?’

‘He’s just doing it to get a rise, your father said. Jimmy’s harmless.’

‘Mum and Dad?’

‘Mate?’

‘Does God let people into heaven that have a bad heart?’

‘We don’t believe in that.’

‘But I was baptised?’

‘How come you guys didn’t baptise me?’ said his sister. ‘His godparents always buy him presents.’

‘Peter and Susie love you just as much as Lewis,’ said Mum.

‘Wait, so you guys cross yourself and do the prayers and don’t even believe in it?’ He spoke over his sister, who slumped her head against the door and crossed her arms. He always teased her when Peter and Susie got him presents.

‘We sort of had to,’ said Dad, shifting towards the console. ‘But then we decided not to. Your mother and I.’

‘Why not?’

‘When we were stationed in Bunbury… I found out some things. About the people who worked in the church.’

‘I just don’t know how they can say they believe,’ said Mum.

The boy gripped the seat handle, like Mum did when Dad drove too fast. ‘But if we don’t believe in God, where is Aunty Kate going?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You said she was going to a better place. Isn’t that heaven?’

Dad sat up in his seat.

‘Aunty Kate was in a lot of pain,’ said Mum.

‘And now she’s sleeping,’ said Dad. ‘And she doesn’t have to feel that pain anymore. She’s in a better place.’

‘So nothing happens when you die?’

His parents swapped looks. Then flicked glances at the boy in the rear vision. He waited for an answer, palms sweaty on the door handle.

‘Nothing happens,’ said Dad. ‘Life isn’t a dress rehearsal.’

Mum said Dad’s name sternly, like he was in trouble. Dad said they were old enough. No use hiding the facts of life.

‘So we don’t believe in anything?’

‘We’re Australian.’ Dad made himself comfy and rested cheek onto the seat. ‘That’s what we believe in.’

‘We’re Australian,’ the boy mouthed.

2

That November, on the first hot day of term, the kids were loud and touchy following their teacher inside the classroom. The UV lights glistened off their foreheads, and their uniforms clotted against their sweat patches. The teacher crinkled her face at the boys and said they would have to buy deodorant. The boy was confused; wasn’t aware of his own stench.

The teacher directed them to sit on the carpet while moving around to try and push up the windows. A couple slammed shut. The boy offered to help push them back up, but she told him to sit down. ‘It’s the heat,’ she explained. ‘It contracts the wood.’

Many of them volunteered information regarding their own doors and windows not opening or closing properly, which she let pass without comment. She took her seat and spoke softly to the girls in the front row, letting a Mexican wave of silence dissolve the chatter. The boy and his mates still blew hard after their lunchtime soccer match.

She explained they would do an activity that acknowledged their blood history. They had been learning about Indigenous belief systems, the Dreaming and certain kinds of practices, like dancing and singing. The boy was fascinated; had felt a certain kind of kinship, something he could believe in. Especially to the idea that the land was alive, that they were a part of it. This was an idea that his whole family seemed to have in common, in how they spoke about the bush, the land, and the songs and poems that came with it.

The activity meant they were to stand on the spot and sit down when the teacher’s pointer hit the country they came from. The pointer started at the top of Western Europe, where it ventured east in a series of peaks and troughs, like the monitor of a heartbeat, killing off a quarter of the class. A smile leaked from the boy’s face.

Over the Middle East, another four or five dropped off. The pointer skirted the Pacific Islands, seating the Islanders. Then, a swift sweep to Africa left only the boy standing. Now, an open-mouthed grin broke. The teacher crossed her arms and glared sideways to where no-one stood—a dangerous telltale. As the year had progressed, the teacher had been increasingly prone to losing her temper. But her chest softened. She released her breath slowly, and then faced the boy with a thin-lipped smile.

The pointer hurtled to Latin America, where it clacked against Argentina and Chile. The boy shook his head. The smile grew. The class giggled.

The pointer’s clacking got louder as it zoomed up the continent, Brazil. Peru, Ecuador and Columbia, right up to Mexico—his head shook, the class giggled—and the pointer swung wildly from the board before it thudded America. He shook his head. The class didn’t giggle. It walloped Canada somewhere in Ontario. He shook his head.

The teacher glared at the boy. Her features sharpened like they could cut pumpkin. His smile beamed.

‘Lewis, where are you from?’

‘Australia.’

‘Where’s your heritage?’

‘Australia.’

The pointer whizzed behind her back and she rolled her head to the roof. The boy scrunched his pockets inside out and hung them far from his body. He glanced across the other members of the class. Some raised hands to cover their open mouths.

‘Are you Aboriginal?’

‘Well, we’re Australian, and now I believe in the Dreaming—’
‘Stop!’ she yelled. ‘That’s very offensive. I don’t want to hear you… Lewis, where do your ancestors come from?’
‘We’re Australian.’
‘Well, then how do you think you got here?’
‘Here?’
‘Australia,’ her voice raised.
His head hung low. ‘I was born here.’
‘I suppose your family were’—she gestured a hand to the full court of students—‘transported through a black hole.’
The class chortled into their hands or snickered openly, and one of his mates even dared, ‘Look at Lewie.’
The boy gazed at the map while his right foot crossed over his left and his forearms tangled behind his back.
‘Well,’—the teacher smiled now—‘how do you think you got here?’
The boy squeezed his fingers very hard and repeated to himself not to cry.
‘Look at your skin and eyes, for God’s sake.’

That evening, while Mum and Dad were in the kitchen, the boy was summoned to the bench. He propped himself on a stool and sucked his lips inward. They mentioned his teacher had called, but he’d already known that. He didn’t say anything.
‘She said you thought you were Aboriginal.’ Mum stared out the window while chopping the potatoes. ‘Where did you get that from?’
‘Uncle Jimmy would’ve had a fit,’ said Dad.
Mum smirked but tried not to. She said it wasn’t a time for jokes.
‘Where are we from?’ the boy asked.
‘What do you mean?’
‘Like, we’re not Aboriginals. Where did we come from?’
‘What’re you talking about? We’re Australian.’
‘That’s what I tried to tell her.’
Mum paused from chopping the potatoes and looked over her shoulder at Dad, who was drying his hands on the tea towel that hung from the wall-oven. Dad, without taking his eyes off his reflection in the glass, asked what the boy meant. ‘The teacher?’
‘Yes. She growled at me because I didn’t say I was from another country.’
‘What country?’
‘Exactly,’ said the boy, excited. ‘What country?’
‘It was so long ago,’ said Dad. ‘So, it doesn’t really matter.’
‘So we didn’t, did we? Mum and Dad?’

‘Don’t be stupid,’ Mum flashed, the kitchen knife waved.
The boy pinched his thigh.
‘He’s only asking a question,’ said Dad, almost a whisper.
Mum apologised. Mumbled that she was tired. She didn’t take her eyes off the chopping, which was different now. Instead of the rapid slices—*shsh shsh shsh*—there was a heavier sound and gaps of silence—*thuck… thuck… thuck*.
The boy rose on his tippy-toes, flat-palmed the bench. ‘I mean, we didn’t just get transported through a black hole. I got in trouble today because I didn’t say I was bloody Angle-Celtic. That’s what the teacher said. That we were European. She wouldn’t let me talk. I don’t think that’s right. But if we’re Australians, and we don’t believe in the Dreaming, then what does it mean?’
‘Your teacher’s right.’ Dad’s words were dark and quiet. ‘We’re Anglo-Celtic. That means we’re from countries like Ireland and England.’
‘Which one?’
‘I’m not exactly sure,’ snapped Mum, who stopped chopping again, furrowing at the window. The boy didn’t think she was looking at the house next door.
‘I used to ask your grandparents before they died,’ said Dad. ‘I can’t remember what they… I mean they never really…’
‘So, what do we actually believe in?’
The water on the stove frothed up and Dad moved suddenly to turn the heat down. ‘It’s just like a set of values.’ The words came out quickly. ‘Look, mate, we’ll discuss it later. We’ve got to get dinner on.’
The boy went and lay down slowly on the couch as a gameshow played on the tellie. He pretended he wasn’t exploding.

That night, the boy stood naked in front of the mirror. He leaned forward with his eyes wide open, mesmerised by the blue patterns. Other kids questioned if he put on sparkle toothpaste every night before bed. He traced lines around the tan line of his upper arms and around his collar, milky white skin on one side, dirt brown on the other. He caught a whiff of something from under his arms. He crossed himself.
He didn’t know why he crossed himself. He just liked the feeling.

Chequered Like a Flag Our Past

Eric Roy

Eric Roy's poetry appears or is forthcoming at *Salamander*, *Bennington Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Poetry South*, *Green Mountain Review*, *Salt Hill*, *Tar River Poetry*, and elsewhere.

When I was very young, my father ran
a large corporation, and, on occasion,
he would take me to the Tower. One time,
while watching ant-like automobiles move
in lines throughout the structured city
a group of his subordinates asked me
if I would like to drive a racing car.
'You bet,' I said, 'Point the way.'
They led me down a hall to a room
where another man sat alone, staring
into a computer screen. 'Gary,'
said one of the subordinates, 'This young man
would very much like to drive the race car.'
Gary looked me in the eyes and said, 'Really.'
He stood and then laid down on the grey
commercial carpet, holding his hands palm up
in a parenthesis, his large glasses containing
polygons of pink fluorescent light.
He angled his left hand, said, 'Accelerator,'
then the right and said, 'Brake.
Take off your right shoe, place your foot
on the accelerator and—you can drive, right?'
Once my sock touched the gas pedal
the race car roared to life and began to idle
much to the appreciation of all the men
around. I began hearing voices urging
me to push the accelerator harder.

When I did, the motor began screaming
down an imagined track. Faster! the men cried,
but then the car began to kick and sputter.
Panic overtook me—what was I doing wrong?
With my foot pressed down far as it would go
the engine went silent. I noticed a dark spot
on the front of Gary's khaki pants, growing
slowly larger. Gary lifted his head and said,
'You flooded it.' The men in suits burst out
laughing together and laughed so hard
they had to wipe bright water from their eyes.
Embarrassing to admit, but I'm still not sure
at exactly what, or why.

At the end of everything

after Donald Friend

Jen Webb

Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and co-editor of *Axon: creative explorations* and the literary journal *Meniscus*. She researches creativity and culture, and her most recent poetry collection is *Moving Targets* (Recent Work Press, 2018).

Nights were hard, you and me restless in the narrow bed while mosquitoes whined beyond the nets, and wind shook the roof beams, and trees scratched against the blinds. This house, this museum, that artist who lived here then left; the lover he left behind who planted roses and plum trees, and glanced down the road that disappears between plane trees, who never left. There are no stories about him. We hear him at night, breathing in the next room, rattling cups. We stumble to the kitchen to find the kettle already boiled, the radio tuned to the news that never came. When the evening wine began to reek of kerosene, when the water in the tank tinted red, when the phone rang and only the wind replied, then we called it quits, locking the door pointlessly behind us, leaving the radio on, music spilling across the kitchen floor, marking the minutes of the day.

Hill End—a gold town in New South Wales—was once named Bald Hill, but its name changed decades ago. Local wags described it as 'always at the end of everything'. Donald Friend and his partner Donald Murray had a cottage there, and Murray stayed long after Friend had gone. Now it's an artist residency.

Spectre

Alex Philp

Alex Philp's writing has appeared in *Overland*, *Voiceworks*, and on the *Meanjin* blog. In 2017 she won the Rachel Funari Prize for Fiction.

I look up when I see a girl walk in. It isn't Paige. It's been years but I know I'd recognise her. The waiter puts a plate down in front of me. It's duck: rare with shallots. I thank him and hear my voice. English. I fumble to correct myself but the waiter has already smiled. Walked away.

I stare at the pink meat. The plate is small and expensive. I eat the duck quickly, letting it slip down my throat. When I'm finished I stare at a lone shallot and have the sudden urge to do my trick. My trick first happened a month ago. It was by accident. I didn't think anything of it until a wet afternoon in the studio a week later when I remembered in a rush of both excitement and loneliness that no-one knew me here and so I might as well do it again. I feel pleasure run splotchy up my neck as I slip the gold ring from my pointer finger to my left ring one. I rest my head on my hand. The ring glitters under the restaurant lights.

A man starts to glance at me. He's in a suit, like the others at his table. He leans over.

'You're married.'

'Two years.'

'Shame.'

I laugh, and try to make my face seem like I'm far away remembering a honeymoon or an anniversary or maybe even the first day I met this person somewhere, back home, that loves me.

'Sorry,' I say. 'A keeper.'

The man smiles. Warmth spreads through my chest.

A girl of Paige's gait and posture walks in and I feel sick. I stare until I'm sure it's not her.

I should check my phone. Paige is probably lost. But if I don't check it I could pretend that I haven't seen her messages. I could pretend like I've completely forgotten that she's coming and then we wouldn't have to see each other at all.

I drain my wine. When I get up to leave the man says something to me. I can't translate it quick enough to know what he means.

Paige sits outside my apartment. I see her before she sees me. She has longer hair but otherwise looks exactly as she did at thirteen. When she sees me her eyes flick to mine, though her face doesn't change. She keeps her headphones on.

'Hi,' she says.

'You didn't come to the restaurant.'

'I messaged you. I couldn't find it.'

There's a pause as I try to find something to say.

'Did you find the apartment okay?'

'Well, I'm here.'

We stare at each other. Eventually she takes off her headphones and stands. When we hug I can't feel her at all. Only the padding of our snow jackets as we bump together.

'Are you hungry?' she asks.

I can't imagine what else we'd do and so I say, 'Yes.'

She starts off down the street.

'Do you want to put your suitcase upstairs?' I call.

'No. I'm hungry.' She rolls her suitcase behind her and I follow.

Paige chooses a gyoza place and we sit at a table near the back. She orders seven plates of pork gyoza and two of vegetable.

'So, you're here for a residency?' she asks.

'Um, yeah. Three months.'

'For what?'

'Ceramics.'

'So. You became an artist.'

'What are you doing? At home?'

'Nursing. In Toowoomba.'

'You moved?'

Paige nods, flicks through the laminated menu again. The natural question is to ask if she moved with her father—my old stepfather—but I don't. In return she doesn't ask about my mother. The five years our parents were married, the five years we were sisters, sit between us like a cavern.

The gyoza comes. Paige doesn't eat, but takes a folded postcard from her pocket and places it on the table. I unfold it.

'Spectre,' I say. 'What, like the Bond movie?'

'It's an exhibition. It's just come here from Sapporo. I want to go.'

Paige puts her finger into the vinegar pooled on her plate and then sucks it.

We go back to my apartment. The place they've put me in for the residency has only one bed and so we have to share. I put the heat on but it's still cold, and in her sleep Paige rolls over and curls near my back for warmth. I feel her breath on my neck. I press my fingernail into my palm.

We wait for a bus. Paige holds her phone in front of her, swivelling her hand in different directions. I bite into a croissant.

'I don't know,' she says.

'It's fine. This is the right stop.'

'The map says walk another 250 metres.'

'I know where we're going.'

'How can I relax? My relaxation tips are in my day planner!' Paige shrieks. Then she looks at me, grins. 'Where's that from?'

'*New York Minute*.' I picture Ashley squeezing the Chinese Crested to her cheek, her round lips as she spits the words at Mary-Kate.

'No. It's *Our Lips Are Sealed*,' Paige says. Then she sings, just like she did as a child: 'A*lex* the Se*al*!'

I laugh and Paige touches her gloved fingers to my face. I freeze, but she only brushes a flake of croissant from my lips. Paige meets my eyes and swallows. Then the bus comes and she turns and gets on.

There's a lot of people at the temple. It's one of the most famous in Kyoto, but not as famous as Kinkaku-ji. I watch as Paige tilts her head to look up at the orange beams.

I saw her after it happened, maybe two or three times. Once when my mother asked if I wanted to press charges while my stepfather gripped Paige's shoulders. And then again when my mother took me to pack up my things from our joint room while Paige watched from the top bunk as if we never shared a room or a life at all.

After the temple we walk down a street lined with stores. Paige gasps when she sees one that sells KitKats. 'Tea flavour,' she whispers, and ducks inside.

I wait. A sales assistant at the store next door sees me eye a rack of leather journals.

'Do you like them?' she smiles.

I nod. 'They're really nice.'

Her smile widens. She reaches up to pick a brown one from the top rack. Suddenly, I want to do my trick. I feel heat run all over my skin. I lick my lips and check for Paige, but she's still inside the store. I slip the gold ring on my left ring finger. My heart hammers.

The sales assistant passes me the journal. I take it, making sure that my left hand is clearly visible as I pretend to flick through. The sales assistant doesn't say anything.

'My partner,' I say, 'would love this.'

When the sales assistant only nods, I continue. 'He's an architect. So he sketches a lot.' I cast around for a hip city where he could ride his bike to work. 'In San Franscisco.'

'Wow. He'd love this journal, then.'

'He would,' I say earnestly.

From the corner of my eye I see Paige come up behind me. I turn, bump into the rack of journals.

'Oh!' the sales assistant says.

Paige raises her eyebrows. A shopping bag dangles from her arm. I don't know if she heard.

I pass the journal back to the sales assistant.

'Thank you,' I say.

Paige and I walk to the bus stop. I try to work out if she heard but I can't. Embarrassment makes my saliva thick.

When we get on the bus I sit next to someone so that Paige can't sit next to me. She plonks into an empty seat behind me. I feel like she's watching me for the entire ride but when I look at our reflections in the window, she isn't looking at me at all.

Back in the apartment I go straight to the shower. I want to sit down and let the water rush over me but the cubical is too small. I rest my head against the wall and hope that Paige has gone out to eat.

When I get out she's asleep, dozens of KitKat wrappers around her. I exhale. With Paige asleep, and my hair washed and brushed against my neck, I feel calmer. I sit down on the bed and unwrap a KitKat, eating it in two bites. The chocolate leaves a sugary paste on my gums. I wipe it off and realise that the ring is still on my wedding finger. I wiggle it off and turn it between my fingers. The movement reminds me of throwing clay: the forged process, the restraint. I have the urge to taste it, to feel the shape. I poke out my tongue. The gold is tangy, like fermenting fruit. I put the ring in my mouth and slowly lie back on the bed, closing my eyes. With my tongue I move the ring from cheek to cheek. It's getting tangier. It's like vinegar. Like skin. The ring slips off my tongue and hits the back of my throat.

I splutter, sit up. The ring is slipping down my throat and I cough hard, trying to get it up. I cough so hard that vomit surges hot up my throat and I lean over the edge of the bed and let it run from my mouth.

When it's all out, I spit into the liquid. I breathe and wipe the water from my eyes. Paige is awake beside me. She doesn't look alarmed at all. She gets off the bed, goes into the bathroom. She brings me a towel.

'Thanks,' I whisper. I hold the towel against my mouth.

Paige looks down at the vomit. I can't read her expression, though she has to be disgusted. I press the towel into my eyes, mortified. When I take the towel away I see Paige squatting beside the vomit.

'No.' I swing my legs over the bed. 'I'll do it.'

But Paige isn't cleaning. With her fingers pinched together, she reaches into the vomit and plucks out the ring. She holds the gold band up like a prize. She's looking at it with the same fascination on her face as when I caught her watching our parents having sex when we were children, her face to their bedroom window, her fingertips brushing her nipples. I reach out and take the ring from her.

'You ate one of my KitKats,' she says. She stands up and goes back into the bathroom. I lie down and pinch my hip until it hurts.

I wonder if she recognises the ring, since she was so little at the wedding. She would have been barely seven when her father slipped it—gently, carefully—onto my mother's finger.

Paige pushes the door open to an Irish pub. The smell of smoke is immediate. She raises her voice over the soccer that blares on TV.

'What do you want?'

'Nothing.'

Paige nods and snakes her way through the crowd. I find a spare section of a table and claim it by taking off my snow jacket and putting it down. A group of men scream at the TV. One of them lifts up his arms and almost takes out Paige as she walks over to me.

'Sorry,' he yells.

'It's okay,' Paige yells back. Some of her beer slops over the side of the glass. The man grins and takes a drag of his cigarette.

Paige puts down two beers on the table.

'I don't—'

'It's ginger beer. Make you feel better,' she says. The man that apologised to Paige walks over with his friends.

'Mind if we join you?' he asks.

Paige looks at me. 'Not at all,' she says.

'You're Australian,' the man says.

'You're not.'

'I'm not.' He shakes his head. 'I'm Tony. This is Luis and Chris.'

'I'm Paige. This is my sister, Brooke.'

I lick my lips.
'You don't look like sisters,' the friend, Luis, says.
'You don't look like brothers,' Paige says.
'We're not,' Tony laughs. 'Are you here with someone?'
'I'm not. But Brooke's married.'
I freeze as the men turn to me. I stare at Paige and she looks back, takes a sip of beer. When I speak, my voice is quiet.
'I need to pee.'
I push my way through to the small bathroom at the back of the pub and as soon as I've locked myself in I take deep, shuddering breaths. I pull down my jeans and undies and sit down. The toilet seat is freezing.
The door handle rattles.
'I'm in here,' I say.
The door bangs. Someone has put their weight against it.
'Brooke,' Paige says.
I open the lock from the toilet seat and she almost trips over my legs as she comes in.
She locks the door again. Then she stands at the sink and fixes her hair. Strands of hair fall onto her neck like ribbons.
'It was *New York Minute*.'
Paige looks at my reflection in the mirror. 'What?'
'The Chinese Crested. The train station. Ashley says it to Mary-Kate in *New York Minute*.'
Paige's face is blank for a moment before our earlier conversation registers. Her lips tighten like she's trying not to grin.
'You just have to be right, don't you?'
I swallow. How she looks, here in the dark, is the same as how she looked when she was thirteen in the bathroom mirror of the house we lived in together. The same echo of an expression on her face. Only a shadow of what it was when our parents told us they were getting a divorce an hour earlier. Exactly the same except I was where she was, frowning at her in the mirror, and she was behind me, hand reaching.
I smack my palm hard against the wall. Paige flinches.
She reaches up to fix her fringe again but her hands are too slow, too self-conscious.
'I'll meet you outside,' she says. She doesn't wait for me to reply before she opens the door and leaves. I lock the door again. My hand spasms and I wonder if I've broken it. I'm finished but I stay in the cubical for a long time. Long enough for several people to bang on the door, and for the bartender to force it open and tell me to go home.

When I get out of the cubicle Paige has left. The group of men are still there. I pick up my jacket from where I left it on the table and no-one says anything to me as I leave.

She pays for my ticket and it's the first time we've looked at each other all morning.
We walk through a floor of paintings and then a floor of multimedia pieces. There's a video that shows a man who sits at an old oak table and screams: sometimes in German, sometimes with no words at all. On the top floor of *Spectre* there's an exhibit of robots. The robots hold lead pencils and they stare at the face of the person sitting on the chair in front of them. The robots look up and then down again. Their bodies are well-oiled and sound like flies.
'What's this?' I ask the gallery attendant.
'They draw your face,' she says. 'Are you going next?'
And I don't look at Paige before I say, 'Yes.'
She guides me to the chair.
'Look straight ahead,' she tells me. 'So they can see you.'
When the robots start they move quickly, like they're trying to take in every inch of my face. After a few minutes, I swallow and choke on my saliva. I cough. The attendant asks if I'm okay, and I nod, and suddenly I can't help myself. I look down at the drawing and see thousands of thin lines capturing everything; my chin, my nose, my widow's peak. The lines cover every inch of my face, and they are straight, clean. I look away.
'Please look straight ahead,' the attendant says.
My eyes search for Paige. I see her watching me from another exhibit. Her hand covers her mouth. She's crying. When she sees that I've seen her she turns away, and I think of how when this is over my face will be hung beside the portraits of other faces on the wall behind me, and that the hundred or so of us will stare at the exhibition visitors for weeks or maybe even months until we'll be taken to another city, and then we'll hang there. We'll hang until the snow stops and the robots are packed away and then our portraits—made of lines as thin and as delicate as spider webs—will all be placed in a storage room in a wooden crate, stacked in a pile, the lips of a woman against the neck of another.

The Queen of Death

Marite Norris

Marite Norris is a visual artist, writer and founder of The Art Space Collective. Marite lives and works in Scarborough, Western Australia. All of her poetry is dedicated to her children.

My heart, slightly melted
And with three holes
Beats rhythmically.
They gave me a crown
And a feather
And a name.
I ruled with the feather
And when death came like
Sheets of rain
I turned my face
Towards the white light
That flooded in
The stairwell window.

Stretching over countless distances.
Attached to me
A golden cord from the box
Of tempera and gold on wood.
Inside a box
Lined with soft feathers
My heart sits in a tiny nest
At a distance,
The piecemeal me.
That was sort of me.
My sort of face,
And prepared my face—
With purple flowers
They put me in a dress
Between my body parts.
Running out of the cracks
Sugar syrup leaking out of the spaces,
They stuck me together.

Follow my ruin,
From a distance.
Follow the shrieks and silences
Of my deaths.
My head came apart from its atlas.
Limbs, as well as hooves
Swirling in a vortex.
Parts of me, remnants,
Floating and circling.
I pick up my head
Hold it in my hands
And I whisper in my ear.
They reached out for my limbs,
Grabbed my hands.
They cooked warm soup
And put me together,
Piece by piece—
A piecemeal self.

An assortment of creatures,
The chimera came.
A pastiche that breathed fire—
Head of a lion,
Body of a goat,
Tail of a serpent,
Bringing with it shrieks and terrifying silences.
Neighbourhood children play in the street.
A CSI body outline
On the road
In masking tape and coloured chalk.
I watch the silent fading outline,
Tatters of tape
Lifting and blowing
With the slipstream
Of passing cars.
My father saw me,
From a profound distance,
As I broke into a million pieces.

Release
Tracy Ryan

Now hailing from the Wheatbelt of Western Australia, Tracy Ryan is the author of several chapbooks, five novels and nine full-length poetry collections, the most recent of which is ***The Water Bearer*** **(Fremantle Press, 2018). She has been awarded the Western Australian Premier's Book Award and her poetry has been shortlisted in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature.**

You make me erase each day
and start again.
I must contend
with rearrangement
not only traces but
all that strays
poltergeistish
from origins I'd swear to.
No gaslighting—I know you.

Enter by hollowed knots
in floorboards that flex
like trapdoors at my tread.
There is no silence.
Or chimney-plummet:
the split
fat bag of marbles
ballbearings
with tail-strings
you run, and run things.

Lightly intent, unmaking
repurposing that chair, for instance,
unwadded, incontinent.
Somewhere, then, a nest
and we must interrupt this—

Bucket and glove and off
into bramble and gorse
under the hawthorn's
nakedness, release.

You spring like a first time
tasting air.
Field's edge, potential, you
follow each other
into the outside.

Remember the anguish
aged six, the little necks
trap-flattened, blood-
spotted, each adult who said
No other way.
You make me erase each day
and start again.

The Crazy and the Brave

Laurie Steed

Laurie Steed lives in Perth, Western Australia. His debut novel, *You Belong Here*, was shortlisted for the 2018 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards. His short fiction has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and has been published in *Best Australian Stories* and *Award Winning Australian Writing*.

Caleb finished his longneck, his feet resting on a faded cane table. He smoothed his stubble, a moment of reflection as the sprinklers clicked into action. He loved the sound they made when opening up; that moment when the dam burst and things flowed, those tiny sprinkler tears of water that first dotted the grass, and in time soaked down into the soil.

Imagine painting that. Capturing not the sounds, or feel, but the essence of something. Its truth. The moment when a sprinkler opening meant more than just the spread of tiny droplets.

He couldn't; at least not anymore.

His phone rang, and he turned, cradled it in his hand so he could see the screen. Phil, asking if he was going to Sculptures by the Sea. He said maybe. Phil was way past wasted, at the level of watching Frank Zappa's *The Amazing Mr Bickford*, but precious little else. Said, 'Maybe I'll catch you on the weekend?' and Caleb said, 'Maybe,' though he doubted he would.

Walking inside, he nearly clocked himself in the head with the flimsy but forceful screen door. The living room was empty with the TV left on. He heard bickering from the kids' room, wasn't sure where his wife was, or what she was doing.

'Lou? Let's go,' he called. 'Get the kids.'

She walked out, her hair wet, dyed red but with a wave of auburn at the roots. She lobbed a bag of glad-wrapped sandwiches at Caleb. He caught them with his spare hand.

'Good catch,' said Lou. 'You going to brush your hair, have a shave?'

'Why start now?'

'I don't know,' said Lou. 'Could be nice to see your face again. I worry too, like losing focus on the outside means maybe you're not great on the inside.'

'You think I'm depressed?'

She touched him on the shoulder. 'I know you're depressed,' said Lou. 'You're not the best at hiding it.'

'So what do we do?' said Caleb.

'We could put a couple of pieces up for sale,' she said. 'Not for the money, for you.'

He looked upon a wall of three landscapes. All oceans (they always were), with two from Cottesloe, one day and one night, and one from Rottnest, the middle piece in the triptych. *Not bad*, he thought. *But not great, and a little romantic.*

'Not these,' he said, pointing to the triptych. 'Not yet.'

'Okay,' she said. 'You've got your shifts at The Albion. And you know we're good in this place. Dad says it's ours, but for the paperwork.'

'Still want to pull my weight,' said Caleb.

'You could exhibit?'

'Not that,' he said. 'Would just be letting everybody down.'

Lou frowned. She moved closer to Caleb, kissed him gently on the cheek. 'The kids love you,' she said. 'I love you. And you're a bloody good dad. We'll be okay. Just don't do anything stupid, okay?'

'Like what?'

'You know,' she said.

'Okay,' said Caleb, not meeting her gaze.

'I'm serious.'

'And I'm not? I hear you,' he said, although what she was saying felt more like need than compassion.

She poked her head around the living-room doorway. 'Kids! Get your shoes on!'

As the noise from the girls arced up, Caleb walked out to the car. He lit a joint, inhaled, and smoke filled his lungs. He watched the neighbours' houses while he waited: shadows in the window; an arm reaching over to lock a side gate; a man who sat on the front verandah day in, day out, awaiting his wife's return.

He thought about Lou—days when her voice was less dulled by how a parent must repeatedly set boundaries; times before the kids had choked out her compassion. Nights when she came, hard. Their room pitch-black on account of the shades, but the two of them inside and outside each other. Rocking in rhythm, and Christ, he could do that, but it had always been so hard for him to tell her she was his world, and nothing hurt as much as when he let her down.

'We should go,' called Caleb.

They hurried out. First his wife, and then Taylor and Emily, ponytail and pigtails. A motley bunch but near perfection in the right moment—like a homemade card, or a posy of flowers hand-picked by your son or daughter.

• • •

Cottesloe was feral, worse than Scarborough Beach on a Saturday night. Worse than Scarborough, period, because at least you had space there, whereas here there were reasons to rock up other than just the beach. Cottesloe was exclusively cramped, a beachside hideaway—protected from noise, twenty or so minutes from the freeway; further still from youths who walked the streets under no illusion as to their net worth, wealth or chances of escape.

This time every year, the time of Sculptures by the Sea, it was sardines on account of the sea and the sculptures—a genius idea, like coming twice from a single session of masturbation—but God forbid they set up extra parking or some semblance of organisation.

Lou parked on the wrong side of the roundabout, still a good walk to the beach, but it wasn't as if they'd be lonely, with a steady stream of people spilling out from the footpath and onto the road.

Caleb was not a sculptor. He painted with oils. He felt they opened up and were a reflection of his life. Only his life felt not so much worth capturing anymore.

Picking up the pace as they entered the crowd, Caleb dodged a news van, nearly tripped on the cameraman's cord. He'd once chastised a gofer for doing the same when *Today Tonight* was more of a TV show and less of a walking bog-roll.

They fired the gofer. Ironically, Caleb was fired soon after that. He had gone out one day to record an interview and come back to a request for his swipe card in a personally addressed envelope.

Phil once wrote to him while Caleb was touring Europe, seeking inspiration in Picasso, Miró and Klein. Said Caleb was the most talented artist he'd studied with—and that group had included Algar, who had gone on to a steady career as a fabrication artist, and Jean Bell, who made video art centred around ideas of hope and transformation. Bell's work was often just a shot of a field or a skyscape, and yet it somehow always touched Caleb, such simplicity, such willingness to see things up so close.

You could do anything you want, Phil wrote. *But you're scared. So use it. Make the art that scares you and takes your breath away. Paint the things that make you feel. There is no right or wrong, only truth and beauty as you see it.*

Today, just the ramblings of a madman. Today, Phil and his words felt oh so far away.

In this year's exhibition, one piece had been getting a lot of attention in the press: *Childhood—Morning* by Chen Wenling. Chen had brought a piece to the 2011 Sculptures by the Sea, too, but Caleb had been crazy stoned the last day, one hundred per cent Cheech. He had thrown on some Eno instead, *Thursday Afternoon*, and it hugged him, held him, raindrop melody slow, patient, until eventually, he'd drifted off.

Maybe today, he thought. *Perhaps today, I'll see something that changes me.*

Along the verge, so often near empty when the days were hot enough to guide more folks down to the water. Three giant leaps from the car park down to the sand, a series of grassy levels where one could read, or think, or cry, only today it was full, so they took the actual stairs, turned once they'd reached the level closest to the beach.

'Come on,' said Caleb.

Lou raised her hands, exasperated. 'Um, people,' she said.

'I know,' said Caleb. 'It's just that I want to see it. I need to see something amazing.'

'Weirdo,' said Lou, and they walked on.

Seven metres, and then six, and then five, and then a gap, and three orange traffic poles with silver reflector centres, some red and white *Do Not Enter* tape. People looked on, confused.

'Very meta,' said a man in brown slacks and a blue Ralph Lauren polo, and it was unclear if he was dense or witty.

'They stole it,' said an older woman, in denim shorts, a tee and a straw hat, as she stared down at her phone. 'Two boys. They had some drinks, broke it off at the feet.'

'They stole it?' said Caleb.

She nodded. 'It's broken. It can't be repaired. Just goes to show, there's no point. You create these things, you do something beautiful, and they destroy it. Can you imagine how hard he must have worked on that? How many hours he spent, slaving away?'

And Caleb could, but it did not seem to fit her desire to be wounded by proximity, and so he left her to it.

And besides, she was giving him the shits. Sharing her grief, as if these things were best felt with the volume up, with everyone crouched around the wireless, weeping loudly together. As if this proved that they were truly alive. As it was, he just felt broken.

He turned to watch Lou and the kids at beach level. They were standing on the sand, staring at a giant metal tap, suspended, with a steady stream of water flowing down through the air, before the splash upon the surface of a giant metal circle.

I wish I hadn't let you down, thought Caleb.

• • •

He walked on and thought again of Jean Bell. Remembered once, the two of them in the studio, and then the café, talking, really talking, well into the night. Their projects, due the next day. And still, they got them in, even after the talk, sharing fears that maybe theirs were visions best kept in private.

Her installation, *Zukunftsangst*, 2002, was made a year after he and Phil had left art school, and at about the time Caleb took up work on *Today Tonight* to pay off his HECS debt.

Fade up to a field viewed from up in the sky, and piano soundtrack. After a while, a tiny question mark appears in the corner of the field. And then another. And then another. Before long, the screen is just a field of question marks, burned into the ground where once there was grass. The piano fades, and she loops the line *I should have known better*, from the opening of the Jim Diamond song, with instrumentation stripped away. Plays it over and over and over.

Bell comes up on the screen, in her study or a studio somewhere, tears streaming down her face. She puts her hand to the screen, reaches out, and the screen fades to black.

And then the words: *I love you. I promise I love you.*

• • •

Lou and the kids had found their way to a giant yellow 'OMG', all-caps. *That's funny*, thought Caleb, but could not feel the fun or the mirth that was presumably the point of such a creation.

He walked closer, closer, dodging pieces of art and collections of people huddling together, not all that comfortably, on the rapidly cooling sand.

You love them.

He was still ten, twenty metres away from them. He observed the three of them longingly.

They're okay. Without you, they're okay.

Said quietly to himself, 'But I love them, too.'

But you're not really here.

'But I want to be.'

But you're not, said the voice, and he couldn't tell if it was the pot or the truth talking. He turned to find the quietest route. Down by the jetty, most likely. Wade in close to the rocks, they'd think he was a swimmer, until the point where it was too late, and it was not as if they'd be able to dive off from the quay or race on in to save him.

He headed off in that direction. Heard Lou's voice from behind, calling, *Caleb! Caleb!* as though, over time, she had become less his wife and more his mum, forever checking that he'd tied his shoes or eaten his greens.

No time to be that present, he thought. *It's hard enough prolonging the goodbye.*

He lit his final joint, a gift in case he chickened out. Took a hit, and then another quickly, thinking, *Just shut up. All of you shut up.*

He'd been doing his best. It's not as if he got a stiffy when he changed over a keg. No sweet, subtle arousal from the cleaning out of the drip trays. Just a job. A monotone shift punctured only by the cheers from the pool tables or the breaking of a glass.

He reached the point where the sand gave way to the cay, that shoddy, steady rock formation that separated the bit where you swam from the bit where you got caught in a rip. He kneeled and touched the row of wet rocks glistening from the tide.

Lou's voice, again in his head. *Just don't do anything stupid.* And here he was, staring out at the ocean as if it were a choice. As silly as it got. As scared as he had ever been.

Tears came, hot and fast. Again he hit the joint, knowing that without it, there'd be no way he could do what he was going to do.

• • •

Strange, the things he thought of in those final moments. How Phil, one boozy, bong-lit night, had suggested hot ham and cheese heroes from the Fourth Avenue petrol station, and then they were already wandering down there, and without the slightest provocation he had started singing 'Everyone's a Winner', even vocalising the guitar riff, way too high, off-key, like a kid whose voice has gone full-croak before breaking.

Or the time they'd driven around to the homes of their ex-girlfriends, honking the horn in time with the girl's name, 'Car-o-line Per-zy-na! Car-o-line Perzyna!' before laughing hard, and driving off.

Perhaps, in Phil, he had found a lifeline. A way in which to view the world not always shrouded in defeat.

Just call him, said a voice. And again, he was unsure what it needed or wanted from him.

Life, to Caleb, was often like that. A series of increasingly difficult challenges that were tougher on account of the diminishing cast of characters. Phil was still here but his parents, gone. His workmates, gone.

Help me, said Caleb, quietly, and fumbled for his phone.

He called, but it went straight to messages. The phone beeped, and Caleb spoke: 'Phil, I'll miss you, mate. Maybe one day, tell Taylor and Emily about this. That their dad did what needed to be done.' He paused. 'And thanks, mate. For the catch-ups, and the birthdays. Really, just for being there.'

He ended the call. The sky darkened, the artworks became increasingly shadowed, and the hum of the people buzzed like a thousand mosquitoes.

• • •

Another memory of Bell came to him, almost as if she'd stayed in his mind, fighting fears, one by one. This time it was *Schicksal und Wahl*, from 2008.

Fade up to a still shot: Cottesloe Beach stretched out, filled with people. A gentle roar that sounds crowd-like, until it's clear it's actually a swarm of bees.

A beacon appears where once was only sky. The craft moves slowly but deliberately; what began as a pinprick of light grows larger until the beach is lit up.

Cast in such brightness, the sea of sparklers, the wave of mobile phone screens, seems increasingly meek; the glow-sticks dull, the torches ineffective.

The light washes out the grey of the Perth horizon. In time, it washes out the frame. And then we're back to the beach, only this time, it's empty. And then, in time, the beach fills up. A gentle chatter replaces the buzz of the bees from the earlier crowd. A strange, strangely familiar soundscape: the sounds of Cottesloe Beach, 2007.

Then Bell's on-screen, bowl cut and tired eyes. She holds up a sign. It says, *We should never be afraid of our future*, and then she smiles, crooked teeth and all.

• • •

Caleb finished his joint. He waited, watched the sea of people. Gone was his cynical, critical voice. Tonight, he merely marvelled at their quiet awe, noting he'd always liked it when a crowd of people came together. He wondered what it would be like to do this with some artists, maybe even with Jean. To sit on the sand and share his thoughts. To ask her if it worked to be so brave. To see if he could make it back, piece by piece, and wonder, out loud if he could once more fit into their world.

He realised, with sadness, he would never get to find out; that he would never make it right with Lou, and his kids were likely better off without him.

He walked into the water with quick, steady strides, as the waves lapped at his feet, and before long he was in to his ankles. Caleb imagined his feet breaking off, his body taken away by the waves. He pictured an empty spot on the beach where he'd just stood, unsure if it looked better than the beach with him upon the sand.

'What are you doing?' It was Lou and the kids, from the shore.

He stopped. 'It's nothing.'

'It looks like something,' she said. 'So tell us. Tell Taylor and Emily, what it is that you're doing.'

'Babe.'

'I'm not playing. It's okay if you're scared. It's okay if you're sad. But you get out of the water, now.'

A tear rolled down his cheek, and he wiped it away. 'You shouldn't be here,' he said. 'You weren't meant to be here.'

'We're not going anywhere. Christ, Caleb. Do you even know what you're doing?'

'It's too late,' he said, but turned and faced them.

'No,' she said, 'you don't get to do that. Just stay there.' She pushed up her leggings and walked into the water, with Taylor on one side and Emily on the other. She wrapped her arms around them both, close enough that they were almost as one.

They waded out. She breathed heavy from the exertion, saying, 'Don't you even dare. Did you think? Did you even think about what that would do to us? You fucking dare, I swear, you better run, just don't do it, ever, okay?'

Caleb stood, silent, and knew that he could not go through with it. He knew that he had never wanted to.

By then, the girls were close. He walked two, three steps towards the shore, and soon enough, they had circled each leg with tiny freckled arms.

'We good?' said Lou.

He nodded, bowed his head. Fell onto her chest, and she pulled him in tight.

'I thought I'd lost you,' she whispered, and then she cried, and so did Caleb, and she cradled him, saying slowly, softly, 'My boy, my precious boy.'

Ship in a Bottle
Paul Hetherington

Paul Hetherington has published numerous books, most recently *Palace of Memory: an elegy* (RWP, 2019). He is head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI).

The ship in a bottle opens the room to gales and vistas. She tastes salt and cracked lips, follows her uncle into plumb lines of narration. Weighted by a store of whisky, he doesn't surface for days, diving into intricacies of clewlines and buntlines, finding murmurous being in the art of glued wood and miniature decking. He clinks a glass in tawny light as the ship is rigged. 'Come with me,' he says, tugging her ear, taking her to a back room where wide fleets sail in his incommensurate vision.

The Red Dingo
Ross Jackson

Ross Jackson lives in Perth. He has had work in *Westerly*, *Cordite Poetry*, *Rabbit Poetry*, *Stylus Lit*, *The APJ* and many other literary journals in Australia. He has also been published in New Zealand, Ireland, Canada and the UK.

shower of cloud falls down a broad, blue sky
meets the dingo forty metres up
the colossal red dingo, ears pricked
a gorgeous, strawberry birthmark
proud against the flour mill wall
at night, from where the branded dingo
stands tall, it can see right through
the glass of the apartments opposite
to where a black net
is cast over Indian Ocean
the dark centre of the dingo's eye
shivering with star-lit fish

Touching as Feeling as Touching Again

Carly Stone

Carly Stone is a non-sense non-fiction writer. You can find their writing in *The Lifted Brow*, *Going Down Swinging*, *Voiceworks*, and *The Lifted Brow*'s Experimental Non-Fiction Prize shortlist. They are an Online Editor at *Voiceworks*.

What did we think was going to happen? Little ripples in one world cause a tsunami in the next. Industrialisation, capitalism, interconnection, acceleration: the planet is a tension-network. Globalisation loads every interaction with international consequences, and all causation sequences are radically interwoven. Now the butterfly effect has mutated into something more insidious and uncontrollable. Something with teeth and fur. Two horseshoe bats exchange a virus in a cave and now the supermarkets are out of toilet paper and people are dying in hospital hallways. The government should have prepared for this, etc.

There is a note in my diary from January 3rd. Walid, Ro, Miso and I sitting around the table in our bathers, drinking Turkish coffee before we go to the beach. That was the last day of safe air before smoke polluted the suburbs and breath was poison. That day, the beach was pretty, pastelled by haze, and the sand was warmer than it usually was at that time of year. Miso and I stood waist-deep in glassy sea while the sun fanned out on the surface, its golden scales glinting off the quick fish in the seabed, and perfect, funny-shaped aquatic plants drifted out on perfect water, like microscopic figures in a petri dish, and we felt very small and perfect too. There was a woman floating out to sea on a blow-up swan. Miso made a joke about keeping Viking traditions alive in troubling times. And it was funny, easy.

Anyway, we were sitting around the table before the beach, and Wally was reading our coffee grounds. They warned me about: travelling in a pack, two evil eyes, two malicious figures who will approach me as friends. They warned Miso about: an evil eye, two devious approachers. Ro's cup had a slug in it.

And Wally's reading had a bat in it. In their book it said: 'a bat is not considered a good omen for a traveller'.

You might be thinking: Carly, come on, this is all a little on-the-nose. Two bats meet in Wuhan and now the borders are shut, friends are suspended in strange cities, Qantas employees are laid off and nobody is allowed to move. In this case, yes, bats were especially bad for travel, but that doesn't mean your coffee reading predicted a global pandemic.

What do you expect? I'm crazy and this is how I think. Every week I get a therapist to take a look at my brain because when I have the whole place to myself, I spin through paranoid causal sequences of my own design, and then I think myself an irresponsible agent of catastrophe. My network of associations is a closed loop, starting and ending with the thought that I should have done/should be doing something. It's like: *bats*! in a *coffee reading*! What did I *think* was going to happen? I should have *warned* somebody, etc.

Paranoia is good for reading. In *Conquest of the Irrational*, Salvador Dalí identifies paranoia as the ideological scaffold of critical theory. Critics exploit the infinite possibilities of systematic association 'exclusively in favour of the obsessing idea' (Dalí 16). That is: we read a piece, we decide what we want to say about it, and then we recruit all the evidence that fits our theory and omit the stuff that doesn't.

It's like this: you experience horror one day. You looked at a horrifying image of a bat and now the image is hanging upside-down in your brain. You expect that this horror will resurface at night. You don't want to experience a bad dream, so you lie awake, willing yourself to sleep but not willing to lose consciousness, lest you get surprised by the nightmare. In doing so, you lose the possibility of a good surprise: a dream in which you *are* the bat, skirting around over a beautiful night. Does this make sense? Maybe it doesn't. Maybe you think I'm crazy. Or maybe you don't. I'm preparing myself for all possibilities.

In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Sedgwick finds a loop: 'because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known' (130). And: 'paranoia tends to be contagious' (Sedgwick 126). Every chemical epidemic is overlaid by a more nebulous psychological contagion.

All this to say: paranoia is a kind of looping. It's the impulse to pre-empt and defend without ever encountering the thing you are pre-empting or defending yourself from. According to Sedgwick, paranoia won't get us anywhere; it's a disease that festers in critical theory and anxious queer communities and prevents us from learning anything new. If you could forgive me for reducing her argument: *intimacy is the cure to paranoia*.

To embrace the notion that *surprise* is the necessary consequence of getting to know something.

When I learn to stop being crazy I can learn to enjoy surprise and when I learn to enjoy surprise I can learn to enjoy intimacy. I've been going to therapy to work on my intimacy problems. Ever since I realised that my brain is made of the same physical stuff that the rest of the world is made of, I've been looping in a paranoid anxiety about my interconnection and vulnerability with the forces that surround my head. I'm scared of blood and veins and brains and bones. I can't lie there and listen romantically to Theo's heartbeat while we're in bed; no, I'm thinking about the looping of his blood, about how it means mortality, about how a beat is a countdown, about how every pump means there's one less pump to go. I've been sick before and the feeling has infected my brain and body so that I'm always pre-empting and defending against more sickness. My therapist wants to map out the push-pull relationship between my body and my brain. She wants me to learn to be intimate with other people without fixating on the perishability of their bodies. She wants me to say: touching is not dangerous, feeling is not dangerous. Surprise is possible and also good. She wants me to say, I can stop obsessing, I can stop planning, nothing will go wrong if I calm down, there will be no disaster. At the end of 2019 I stopped looping. Then the whole world buckled around me.

Am I a narcissist? Thinking that, maybe, I caused a global pandemic with my mind? Most evidence points to the contrary except for this: there is a note in my phone from 29 December 2019, two days before the first cases were assessed. It's a record of a dream I had. Anxiety when two black bats circle my ceiling. They are flapping too quickly and their faces are horrible. Euphoria as they circle tighter and tighter and start to eat my body.

I've been looping since I was little. There's one obsession that has been on loop for a while. It's my obsession with loops. An obsession with auto-cannibalism is one that I have eaten and reproduced for as long as I can remember. It started with the idea that if I ate only one thing (say, Nutella), then my body would become that one thing, and then every time I ate Nutella I would be eating myself. In 2005 I was six years old and haunted by a series of Cadbury commercials that supplanted the Beach Boys' 'Wouldn't It Be Nice' with commercial rewrites like: *Wouldn't it be nice if the world was Cadbury / chocolate grows on trees and birds and bees*. It featured chocolate families in a chocolate world who consume everything around them indiscriminately. In this horrorscape, the materials that comprise the human body are indistinguishable from those that comprise non-human animals and objects. A referee eats his whistle, a soccer player eats his trophy, a driver eats his gear stick while in motion. A boy takes a bite out of a man's afro because it was blocking his view of the screen. A postman eats a dog's tail before the dog can get a bite out of him. Everybody is enjoying themselves as they gradually eat away at the world around them. And, when the world eats away at them: euphoria! *If a shark came up and tried to bite you / you could say, I'm chocolate, I invite you*. The surfer beams, presenting his chocolate ass for consumption.

When I think about Cadbury I'm only a few loops away from thinking about tuberculosis. Because TB made auto-cannibalism sexy. In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag connects the thrill of TB to 19th-century capitalism, which relied on the notion that 'one has a limited amount of energy, which must be properly spent' (64). (Having an orgasm, in 19th-century English slang, was not 'coming' but 'spending' (Sontag 64).) Energy, like savings, can be depleted, it can run out or be used up through reckless expenditure. The body will start 'consuming' itself. From here, TB became known as *consumption*, a romantic brand of auto-cannibalism. There was a spiritualised consciousness that is hidden under layers of the material body: 'In TB, you are eating yourself up, being refined, getting down to the core, the real you' (Sontag 68). The tubercular aesthetic was fetishised and disseminated through fashion and art. Think: svelte body, ivory skin, flushed cheeks, manic creativity. A 21st-century TB diagnosis is anticlimactic: antibiotics prevent us from the surprise and thrill of consumption. So more nebulous diseases take its place. When I got so anxious that my stomach stopped me from eating, I was skinny, pale red and crazy. And my body started to eat the fat around its own organs. Like a chocolate surfer presenting his chocolate ass to a chocolate shark. Thrilling.

This self-consumptive loop circuits through my writing. Every essay I write ends up back here: *I am eating the world which is eating my body which is eating the world which is eating my body*. Writing in this loop is like eating my own content, producing the same thing. It's an *ouroboros*; wait, no, I've written about that before. Looping is electricity going through a wire and short-circuiting. Stop looping. Open the circuit. Try not to think about the dream.

But then it comes back. Mid-February and three black cats are climbing eagerly through the window of my agent's office. Get out, cats! Get out of the room! Oh no, I shouldn't have yelled at them, they can fly now. Now they are bats. Three black bats, circling the ceiling. Try not to think about it.

Once a year, Walid notices fruit bats in the sky. They say, 'The bats are back!', to nobody in particular. I ask them, 'What do you say when they go

away?' and Wally says, 'I don't know they've gone away until they're back again, and then I say, the bats are back! the bats are back!'

Fruit bats are very cute and loveable with silly faces. The horseshoe bat is an ugly motherfucker. Google horseshoe bat, I dare you.

On January 2nd, I write: my dreams are becoming stranger and more conspiratorial. In my bed I am like a dead body semi-submerged in a rainforest loam. There is no boundary between me and the chemical world around me and anything can go into my head at any time, and this will affect my thoughts because they are also in my head. I am a crouton dissolving in a psychic soup. And every morning I feel myself moving clumsily through the viscous liquids of my dreams. Every morning it is more difficult to peel back the outer membrane of my sleep. One day I will stay inside forever, thinking and dreaming and thinking and dreaming, and nobody will notice, because my body is all set up to keep behaving as if there is someone inside, and I'll just stay in my head and keep dreaming, etc.

> *And wouldn't it be nice to live together / In the kind of world where we belong? / You know it's gonna make it that much better / When we can say goodnight and stay together / Wouldn't it be nice to live together, wouldn't it be nice if we could wake up / in the morning when the day is new / and after having spent the day together / hold each other close the whole night through?* (The Beach Boys)

Theo and I are isolating ourselves in our house until this whole thing with the bats and the toilet paper blows over. We're working, writing, watering the plants. Working, writing, watering the plants. Nothing new is happening so we are saying the same things to each other. How is work? What are you writing? Have you watered the plants? I wonder if my psychologist will see me online. I'm looping.

Stop looping. Touching feeling surprising. Stop looping.

Except that it is. I have water droplets in my body and so does everybody else, and some of these water droplets carry a virus that can kill people. I could touch one person and they could touch another person and they could touch their mum and she might die. Water is rivers and rivers are connections and connection is dangerous: little ripples in one world cause a tsunami in the next. TB again: the thrill of an epidemic. So we wash our hands for twenty seconds while singing the *happy birthday* song, and we have birthday parties over Google Hangouts and we don't blow out the candles because breath is poison.

What did we think was going to happen? Little ripples in one world cause a tsunami in the next. Industrialisation, capitalism, interconnection, acceleration, industrialisation, capitalism, interconnection, acceleration, industrialisation, capitalism, interconnection, acceleration. We should have prepared for this. What did we think was going to happen?

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Waking at Night
Julie Watts

Julie Watts is a Western Australian poet published in national and international journals and anthologies. She won The Dorothy Hewett Award for an Unpublished Manuscript (2018) and her second poetry collection, *Legacy*, was published by UWA Publishing in November 2018.

Last night in the late dark
I woke to the sea

snug in my bed in the early
blind-kitten dawn I listened

the rhythmic angst
deep and potent in the pitch

the rumbling   build-up
    seething collapse

and the din of a beaten shore

no-one there on the cold black sand
to see its winter fury

under the blankets and turning
into my curl

I remember a nestled sleep-out
my siblings sipping sleep

the Mt Lawley trains
their rocketing wheels   far off

in the midnight dark
          lonely as a galaxy

their distant clatter settling
in my child bones   their mournful racket

finding me in the slow-breathing room
everyone missing in the emptied house

and they, clipping away on their humming
tracks   the click   clack

of their heartbeat   out there   awake—
a whistle ripping into everybody's dreams

its triumph and its thrill   its long naked cry
                and its leaving.

Womanhood
Ella Fox-Martens

Ella Fox-Martens is a student and writer living on Whadjuk-Noongar land, in Perth, Western Australia. She has been previously published in *Meanjin* and *Cordite Review*.

Cities live in me like stomach ulcers. When I was eighteen,
a man chased me through the cross-hatched bowels
of a shipping warehouse. His steps, my steps; the splatter
of an off-beat waltz, the sunset a labyrinth of dying light.

The same building used to house a food market
on Saturdays. I remember watching noodles spinning
heaven-like out of pure imagination, the halos of grease
that samosas left imprinted on their baking-paper beds.
Greek women with squares of baklava and flakes of old pleasure
on their mouths. I was a child. I ate before I knew that consumption
was something to be ashamed of. I would pull food apart
in my fingers so that my skin could keep the memory living.
Turmeric and sweat, the heavy warmth of a body that has ceased
to ask questions. Look, said my father, pointing to the birds
nested by the rubbish bins. Don't you see how nothing is wasted here?
I was a child. I believed him.

Much later, pressed between shipping crates, I listened again
to the breath of a man who was waiting for me to answer him.
I smelled his anger and thought of a place hung with oil and spice,
reeking of fullness. It was hours before he left me alone. For days
afterwards,
I could not swallow. I was almost a child. I am still hungry.

love in the time of covid19
Chris Arnold

Chris Arnold is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at The University of Western Australia.

imagine the ruckus of ducks—
a sunday, and septicaemic:
shreds of weddings in its teeth
and a taste of wood shaving.

things you mustn't trust: opaque port,
anything that leaves a dust
of doubt on the hands.
planets form in a curve of gas

and in the curve of planets,
fresh affectation—my palm
on my chest. not on another,
where it wants to be;

the left hand's fingers for confluence,
for accent, for the timbre of a voice
I can't remember, forget, escape,
or understand as a distillation of light.

Lion

Chris Fleming

Chris Fleming is Associate Professor in the School of Humanities at WSU. His fiction and non-fiction have appeared widely in both scholarly and popular press and he is the author or editor of ten books, most recently of *On Drugs* (Giramondo, 2019).

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

'If a lion could speak, we would not be able to understand him.'

Spurred on by Wittgenstein's claim that if a lion could talk we wouldn't understand it, an English philosopher dedicated his life to teaching a lion to speak. To the philosopher's delight the lion progressed rapidly, soon becoming proficient in rhetoric, Latin, and arithmetic. But as it understood more it began to criticise what it had learned and develop its own increasingly aberrant lines of thought about a wide range of issues. Failing to listen to the philosopher's responses to its own critiques, the lion began taking long walks on its own and then locking itself in its room.

Time passed and the philosopher and the lion grew estranged, the animal progressively obsessed with its own counterintuitive ideas about physical matter, logic, and the organisation of society. The lion soon became moody and unpredictable, and developed an abstract idiolect based entirely on the precession of celestial bodies. By this point, the philosopher could not follow the animal at all, thereby proving Wittgenstein's contention correct. The philosopher proclaimed his mission a failure and retired to the country to fish. The lion, increasingly paranoid about people stealing its ideas, threw itself off a bridge.

Black Summer

In February 2020, after the summer of bushfires, *Westerly* put out a call for material responding to the experience of any one of the fires which had burnt uncontrolled across Australia. As our response to the #authorsforfireys campaign, we pledged to donate funds equivalent to the related author payments to charities working on the recovery efforts. We have now donated to several charities, and we are proud to share this work.

You can find a second collection of Black Summer works, published under the same scheme, on our website (as posts on 'The Editor's Desk'). Our sincere thanks to the authors in these two collections who also chose to donate their author payments to the bushfire cause.

Domestic Violence

Nellie Le Beau

Nellie Le Beau's work appears and is forthcoming in *Cordite*, *Verity La*, *foam:e*, *The Suburban Review*, *Stilts*, and elsewhere. A 2020 Fellow at the Wheeler Centre, her poetry has twice shortlisted for the Fair Australia Prize.

I

Hay wives give lip
to rain in *mls* like:

> *We got five in Corrong*
> or
> *In Swan Hill we got only three*

II

Farm girls skin rabbits
grip snakes up past eyebrows

> Farm rakes brush red dirt
> their sour gums keep whistling

III

Dry tongued eucalypts
wilt steady in heat

> wait patient all summer
> for one technical burn

A Hill Outside Yanchep

Alan Fyfe

The first poem Alan Fyfe remembers reading was 'Kublai Khan', in a Heinemann Education Anthology with a green cover, but not before discovering Coleridge wrote the whole thing bombed on opium, in a Reader's Digest book of interesting facts with a red cover. Alan is a writer and occasional troublemaker from Perth.

A swell in the geography
is a lower jaw
five months after
a punch in the face.

Blackened tooth stumps;
scatter, evidence,
on the vanished border
once named 'tree line'.

Pig-tail smoke curls
exhale between grains;
black dirt burnt white;
breath of yesterday's visitor.

The quiet is roaring, wheezing,
dreaming of methane.
Ruthless silence,
in the days after birdsong.

Reading Crisis: the politics of fire in Amanda Lohrey's *The Reading Group* and *Vertigo*

Julieanne Lamond

Julieanne Lamond is Senior Lecturer in English at Australian National University. She is on the judging panel of the Patrick White Award, and editor of the journal *Australian Literary Studies*.

When Parliament returned from its break during what we are now calling the 'Black Summer' of 2019–20, Prime Minister Scott Morrison rose to give a condolence speech for the victims of the fires. As leaders often do during a crisis, he reached for language that was grand, grave, even poetic, in his description of the catastrophic fires that continued to burn across south-eastern Australia as he spoke. He described them as:

> fires that reached our highest mountain range and our longest beaches; fires that consumed forests, grasslands, farms, suburbs and villages; fires that jumped rivers and highways; fires where days became night and the night sky turned red; and fires that raged into the heavens as clouds of fire, with it all a merciless smoke that lingered across our cities. (Commonwealth 1)

In this speech Morrison also called on nationalistic clichés about Australian resolve, mateship, perseverance and courage; outpourings of generosity couched in terms of the National Ordinary figured as economic and heteronormative family units: 'big businesses, small businesses, superstars, mums and dads all giving what they could.' His focus on unity—2.5 million Australians 'trusting each other, and backing each other'—draws some of its rhetorical force by quoting one of Henry Lawson's several poems about bushfire:

> 'It is daylight again, and the fire is past, and the black scrub silent and grim,
>
> Except for the blaze of an old dead tree, or the crash of a falling limb.'

> In his reminiscence, Lawson writes about three men who wipe away tears of smoke and put themselves in harm's way to save a family. When the fire is past, he writes of the men:
>
> 'When they're wanted again in the Dingo Scrubs, they'll be there to do the work'. (Lawson, 'The Bush Fire' 456, cited in Commonwealth 5)

In this poem, Lawson describes three men who drop all considerations of their own safety to save the lives of others who are threatened by fire—as indeed, we saw happen across the summer of 2019–20. In this essay, I use the work of Amanda Lohrey—an Australian writer who has long considered the politics of our daily lives—and her reworking of Lawson's bushfire writing to think about what is elided in assertions of unity Morrison makes in his condolence speech. As is evident to the residents of Cobargo, whose angry faces graced television screens all over the country earlier that summer, bushfire also challenges conceptions of national unity, and shows the limits of who we as a polity choose to care about or save.

Here I consider the politics of fire across Lohrey's long career: from her second novel, *The Reading Group* (1988), to her fifth, *Vertigo: a pastoral* (2009). The staging of scenes of reading in these novels illustrates some of the ways in which writers—in Australia and beyond—have long been warning about climate change and its impact on fire risk. These scenes of reading also warn us to be wary of overestimating the ability of literary works to influence political action. At the same time, Lohrey's writing about fire can help us to think through our own responses as individuals, communities, and as a nation to natural disaster and climate change.

Amanda Lohrey is a writer whose six novels, short fiction and journalism have, across the past thirty or so years, continually examined the relationship between public and private life in Australia. While her work has been widely and appreciatively reviewed in Australian newspapers and periodicals, it has received relatively little scholarly attention. In 2012 Lohrey won the Patrick White Award, which is granted to an author who has made a significant contribution to Australian literature but has not received 'due recognition' for their work. White established the award with the winnings of his Nobel Prize, and over time it has been given to writers who flew a little under the radar, or were seen to be somehow out of step with their times. This is certainly true of Lohrey, whose three-decade-long investigation into the politics of daily life in Australia has rarely, if ever, been recognised as such. Her first two novels, *The*

Morality of Gentlemen (1984) and (to a lesser extent) *The Reading Group* (1988), were read as landmark texts in the history of Australian political fiction (Ashton; Knight; Williamson). Critics were puzzled, then, by what appeared to be a narrowing of her focus to the private, domestic sphere in her subsequent novels (Cran 35). My reading of the politics of fire in *The Reading Group* and *Vertigo* suggests that Lohrey's interest in politics has always been deeply grounded in the question of what enables or prevents individuals from taking political action (cf. 'Project'; 'Groundswell').

Lohrey grew up and has lived most of her life in Tasmania, and so it is not surprising that fire is so prominent in her work, nor that environmental politics should be such an enduring concern. She was twenty years old during the devastating bushfires that took place in Hobart and surrounds in Southern Tasmania in 1966–67, in what has been described as 'one of the most damaging natural disasters ever experienced in Australia' (Wettenhall np), burning some 653,000 acres and killing sixty-two people. Fire forms the background for Lohrey's second novel, *The Reading Group* (1988). This 'polyphonic dystopian fiction' (Ashton 154) is set in a near-future Australian city in political and economic crisis, threatened by fire. Lohrey began work on *The Reading Group* in 1980 or 1981 and did not complete it until 1987 (Notebooks). This was a dramatic time in Australian history: Frank Bongiorno begins his history of the period in 1983, drawing a parallel between the political crisis precipitated by economic recession and the more immediate crisis taking place throughout south-eastern Australia with the Ash Wednesday bushfires which killed seventy-five people and destroyed 2,300 buildings. As Bongiorno writes, 'Thousands of homes were incinerated; whole towns had been largely wiped out; blackened chimneys remained where buildings had once stood' (7).

The confluence of political and ecological crises is felt everywhere in *The Reading Group*. We apprehend both through the perspectives of its multiple, mostly middle-class characters, each of whom responds differently to a situation in which political involvement seems increasingly difficult, and the crisis threatens but does not quite reach them:

> When the fires reached the outer edge of the city they began to feel alarmed. Until that moment the long drought had not really touched them, though they read of it constantly and could no longer water the garden, except briefly, at certain hours. But then there had been compensations: the superb weather that went on and on, the long days on the water.
>
> [...]
>
> In the suburbs that rimmed the bay, something acrid began to smoulder on the edges of their complacent sureness of being, but even that merely added a certain *frisson*. The bushfires had a glowing beauty, a thrilling apocalyptic flare. 'What a terrible shame,' they said, watching their television screens. Out in their gardens they sniffed the smoke and suppressed their arousal at the prospect of something momentous, something awesome that would consume others and spare them. (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 41)

These fires, ringing the city and distantly threatening all of the characters in *The Reading Group*, are the first of many in Amanda Lohrey's fiction. The fires mark the increasingly uncertain boundary between middle-class wellbeing and the various kinds of disaster that might threaten or unsettle it; the distant tragedies on which our happiness relies. Lohrey's fiction is deeply interested in the dynamics of determined distance and threatened proximity that we saw playing out in federal politics recently around the crisis of fire.

Throughout her career Lohrey has been interested in the question of what connects us to others who either benefit from our suffering or whose suffering enables our pleasure. Lohrey's work connects this question—usually posed as one of politics, economics, class—to those of climate change and environmental destruction. This is most prominent in her non-fiction: Lohrey's *Quarterly Essay*, 'Groundswell: the rise of the Greens' (2002), surveys the rise of an 'ecological constituency' in Australia, and lays out an understanding of environmental politics that encompasses the relationship between psychological and cultural connections to natural landscapes and the broader conditions of possibility that might enable political action to protect them.

It is from this point of view that Lohrey makes what I believe to be a unique contribution to the genre of 'climate change fiction': one that uses the capacious form of the realist novel to think about ecological and political agency. Recent work on climate change fiction has 'valorised the popular genres of science fiction and horror' (Craps et al. 1–2), whilst decrying the inability of 'serious fiction' to adequately represent the scale and urgency of climate change as a planetary problem (Ghosh 7). Timothy Clark, for example, argues that 'the novel cannot free itself from its habitual purview of human drama' (Clark 103). Lohrey's writing about fire evidences the ability of 'serious fiction' to present a view of human drama driven by non-human agency, but nonetheless tied to questions about the possibility of human action in the face of climate change. In her

2009 novella *Vertigo: a pastoral*, she achieves this by bringing to the genre of climate change fiction a long-held interest in the causes and conditions of political inaction (as enabled by the realist novel), along with, as Blair notes, the pastoral's capacity to rethink 'human relationships with the non-human world' (117). In drawing on an Australian pastoral tradition that is continually qualifying or calling into question the illusion of harmonious relations between humans and the natural world, Blair argues that *Vertigo* 'loosens the hold of the human on the genre. On the backbone of a contemporary reality—the flight from the city, the desire to live "closer to the natural environment"—Lohrey allows the non-human world to insist on its presence in the story' (129). Fire is, in this reading, an example of 'the counterforce already present in the Arcadian vision' of landscape in the Australian pastoral (Blair 128).

The fires in *The Reading Group* fire are the result, we are told, of an ongoing drought, and they continually threaten but do not directly reach its characters. *Vertigo*, on the other hand, immerses us in the heart of the fire. In what is perhaps her most traditionally realist work, Lohrey plays out a relatively straightforward narrative of a couple making a 'sea change' from the city, tracking their varying responses to a new closeness to the natural environment and distance from the urban centre, and their terrifying experience of a bushfire that threatens their community and home.

This experience also brings our protagonists, Anna and Luke, into a new proximity with the effects of climate change. When they move to the village of Garra Nalla, we are told that they have 'everything they need; everything, that is, except water' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 47). The neighbours are talking about buying a portable desalination plant and running seawater from the beach to their roof. They have conversations almost identical to those I have begun to have, especially with friends who live outside of major cities—how long can we stay here? How much longer will this place be habitable? 'There are days when they speak only of water' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 25). In the face of Anna and Luke's Arcadian view of Garra Nalla as a place where 'they could live, and simply be' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 14), we are reminded:

> But this is not Eden, this is drought country. Behind the coast are hills of dry sclerophyll forest and between the hamlet and the forest are pastures cleared for sheep, grasslands that are dried out and dun-coloured from seven years of drought. There is rain in the hills, though not as much as there used to be, and there are times when the locals gaze up longingly at the caressing mist that occasionally settles over the low peaks on the horizon. Seven years of drought: it has begun to sound biblical; a curse. (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 24)

As she does throughout her body of work, Lohrey links this contemporary experience both with longer cultural histories and with broader political and ethical questions, most pointedly through scenes of reading—of works by Henry Lawson and early 20th-century travel writer Frederick Treves—that take place in and are staged by *Vertigo*. In using these writers' work to frame its references to major scenes of crisis and loss, telescoped from the personal to the political, this novella sets up a conversation between 19th- and 21st-century settler experiences and knowledges of bushfire and its relationship to climate change, political conflict and war.

In Lohrey's novels we often witness characters reading and read with them, as their reading is embedded into the novel before us. This is a very explicit kind of intertextuality which offers us an opportunity to read both as the character and as ourselves. This occurs, for example, as a stymied reading of political philosophy in *The Reading Group*, Kirsten's reading of *Madame Bovary* in the story of that name, and the centrality of readings of *Jane Eyre* in *Camille's Bread*. In *Vertigo*, Luke finds an old suitcase full of books in a shed on their property. Amongst them is Frederick Treves' 1912 travel book *The Land that Is Desolate: an account of a tour in Palestine*. Having watched 'the latest footage of a rocket strike in Gaza' on the TV news (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 40), Luke is inspired to pick up this volume and is fascinated by it, as well he might be. In this book Treves ('eminent physician [...] surgeon to His Majesty King Edward VII' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 39)) crankily surveys Palestine and its surrounds as he tries, in Luke's words, to find 'meaningful consolation for his daughter's death' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 100)—as indeed is Luke for the death of his stillborn son. With Luke, we read Treves' early 20th-century account of changes to climate and landscape. Of the region, Treves writes:

> The promised land has been for centuries ravaged by war and torn by internal dissension. It has been plundered and laid waste. Its inhabitants have been blotted out, its forests have been recklessly cut down and woods rooted up. The rainfall has in consequence diminished so that the land has dried up. (Treves, cited in Lohrey, *Vertigo* 41)

Treves notes how war and conflict have devastated the landscape that he travels through. *Vertigo* uses this to point to the ways in which the

conflicts that have constituted Australia's history have also had ecological impact. As well as staging scenes of Luke's reading, the novel itself is also a reading, and self-conscious reworking, of some of Henry Lawson's writing about bushfire. An author's note at the end of *Vertigo* points us very precisely to this:

> Readers of Henry Lawson will recognise references in this work to his poem 'The Fire at Ross's Farm' and the short story 'Bush Fire'.

Vertigo reworks a scene of bushfire that Lawson returned to repeatedly throughout his career. In addition to the poem quoted by the Prime Minister, 'The Bush Fire', Lawson wrote two other narratives about bushfire that closely echo one another. 'The Fire At Ross's Farm', first published in 1894, is a poem about class conflict between squatter and selector, a romance between the squatter and selector's children, and the battle to save the selector's home and crops from a bushfire. Lawson revisits this narrative in his short story, 'The Bush Fire', first published in *Children of the Bush* in 1902 and since often anthologised, including in school readers. Here, it is the squatter (Wall), whose daughter is being romanced by the selector's son, Bob Ross. Wall's daughter is a fully fledged horse-galloping, whip-wielding Australian Girl, who may owe something to Miles Franklin's Sybylla Melvyn in *My Brilliant Career*—like Sybylla, Mary Wall raises her whip in the face of a man who tries to kiss her (167–168). Mary dons trousers to fight the fire, in a scene that echoes the situation of the drover's wife in Lawson's 1892 story of that name. In both narratives, fire threatens the selector's crops, and the squatter's son/daughter fights valiantly to save them, until the squatter relents and sends his men to help.

As is clear in the Prime Minister's reference to his writing, Lawson uses fire as an emblematic scene of rural hardship repeatedly in his work: most famously, perhaps, in 'The Drover's Wife', in which the eponymous wife fights a fire as one of many tasks she undertakes alone in the bush. Lohrey reframes this—and the pastoral tradition more broadly—by foregrounding the experiences of an urban couple who are new to rural life. The hardship and danger of life far from town is, as in Lawson's work, focused on drought and fire. Lohrey follows Lawson in being alert to the politics of fire in the bush. Much of Lawson's writing about fire presents a conciliatory narrative of economic and sectarian conflict between squatter and selector. This begins, in both poem and story, as a version of the evil squatter/poor selector narrative that was to dominate popular fiction, drama and then film well into the first decades of the 20th century. Steele Rudd's hugely popular *On Our Selection* and its long history of stage and screen adaptation are the dominant examples of this (Lamond, 'Ghost', 'Dad Rudd'). The ethics of proximity at work in Lawson's bushfire writing surround the question of whether those with resources care about that which threatens those without them. Lohrey makes this both more general and more particular, as is her tendency on the whole. The question for the residents of Garra Nalla is whether they should be concerned about a fire that they feel will not have an impact on them.

Lohrey flags her engagement with this body of writing both in her author's note and in the ways in which *Vertigo* is written onto the space of Lawson's story and poem. Luke and Anna live in an area which was once known as Ross's Farm. Nearby is 'an old squatter's mansion' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 31) which is, they realise, 'some kind of colonial fortification'; 'along its stone ramparts there are narrow rectangular slits for firearms' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 32). This is one of the relatively few moments in Lohrey's body of work that explicitly points to Australia's continuing history of conflict and dispossession. Here, she triangulates the conflicts that Lawson writes about (man vs nature, selector vs squatter) with the conflict he doesn't write about (invaders vs First Nations people)[1].

Through these intertextual relationships to Lawson and Treves, Lohrey draws our attention not only to the long history of connections between drought and fire, but also the impact of war, conflict and other human causes on drought and subsequent fire. Treves and Lawson are two of several threads connecting Anna and Luke's experiences to broader histories. As in *The Reading Group* (and indeed, most of Lohrey's fiction), political and personal crises lie cheek by jowl. As Anna and Luke suffer grief over the loss of their child, and then terror of the loss of their house in a bushfire, we watch, with Anna, television footage of soldiers weeping following the death of a civilian in Iraq (65–66). We also learn that Anna and Luke's laconic neighbour, Gil, has a grandson fighting in Afghanistan. Lohrey poses, here as elsewhere, the question of our proximity to and relationship with crises that seem distant but may not be. On the television news Anna watches the soldier 'wiping his face with his open hand, over and over. There is nothing on his face to wipe but he keeps on wiping, over and over' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 67). When Ross, in Lawson's story, believes that there is nothing that can be done to save his property from fire, 'he threw down the blackened bough and leaned against a tree, and covered his eyes with a grimy hand' ('The Bush Fire' [1902] 174). The soldier, fighting a war that has become incomprehensible; the selector, whose livelihood looks to be lost because of drought and fire. The Iraqi civilians, dead and grieving, and the First Peoples of Garra Nalla, who

faced the guns pointing through the ramparts of the homestead. In the space of a novella, Lohrey brings into proximity Australia's past and present wars, and the relationship between war, nationhood and climate.

Lohrey also draws on the narrative shape that Lawson gives the bushfire, following it across topography as it is determined by the wind in a pattern of danger, calm, reversal, crisis and resolution that would be familiar to anyone who has lived in a place threatened by fire.

> Did you ever *hear* a fire where a fire should not be? There is something hellish in the sound of it. When the breeze is, say, from the east the fire runs round western spurs, up sheltered gullies—helped by an 'eddy' in the wind, perhaps—and appears along the top of the ridge, ready, with a change in the wind, to come down on farms and fields of ripe wheat, with a 'front' miles long. ('The Bush Fire' [1902] 170)

As in Lawson's story, in *Vertigo* there is a lull when those in the path of the fire think the worst is over, and then a sudden terror when the fire emerges from the other direction. Lohrey's novel rehearses this pattern repeatedly—a belief that they are in the clear, and then a dramatic reversal and increase in threat and terror, especially when fireballs engulf Anna and Luke's house, from which they make a dramatic escape. Lohrey, like Lawson, follows what have come to be the generic horizons of writing about fire, whether in fiction or in the news media: the focus is on topography, wind, and distance. In these narratives, both agency and narrative tension are seated in the non-human world.

In returning to Lawson, Lohrey uses fire to think about our responsibility for others' wellbeing and our willingness to believe we won't be touched. She and Lawson are both thinking about how we understand, acknowledge and respond to crisis: the assertion of distance when proximity actually looms. In *The Reading Group*, fire is at the margins of the city, threatening, encroaching, but never in our direct line of sight. In *Vertigo*, the fire is much closer than anyone realises. The novel makes its readers privy to a litany of exception from various Garra Nalla residents: 'Don't worry. It's a long way away' (91); 'I'm glad we live near the water' (92); 'they never reach the coast' (92). To Luke and Anna, the fires in the distance look 'like the lighted streets of cities' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 94; this is a direct quote, uncited, from Lawson, 'The Bush Fire' [1902] 169). They begin to prepare for the possibility of fire near their house, while their neighbour, unperturbed, makes sausages for breakfast: 'We've had fires in the hills before. They never reach the coast' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 99). Anna emails her sister: 'There is a bushfire in the hills [...] but it seems unreal [...] perhaps it is because we are by the sea and just a short sprint to the water' (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 103).

At one point, the whole community of Garra Nalla stands and watches the fire with no expectation that it will impact them—until it does.

> Unknown to them, as they stood at the shallow end of the lagoon, the people of Garra Nalla were surrounded on three sides by burning bush; within a ten kilometre radius of the settlement the winds were blowing in four directions at once and the roads were impassable. (Lohrey, *Vertigo* 128)

This is a situation which has happened in a variety of ways across the summer of 2019–20, where towns and suburbs were suddenly cut off by fire. This scene also brings us back to the metaphorical dimensions of fire as impending crisis in the ways in which it is described in *The Reading Group*. As in that novel, the surrounding fire suggests that the crisis is already here, even if we don't realise it. This is an incisive representation of the psychology and politics of climate change.

In Lawson's work the bushfire is not just a rural drama, or a backdrop for feats of endurance and courage: it is a scene of politics, too. As noted, it is a scene of whether to act to help protect someone with fewer resources: Ross, the squatter 'did not mind the fire much' (Lawson, 'The Bush Fire' [1902] 170); most of his sheep were well out of the way; it does not threaten his property. His daughter demands her father help his neighbour, and he snarls, 'Well, let Ross look after his own' (Lawson, 'The Bush Fire' [1902] 171). The relationship between environmental catastrophe and resource allocation has long been of interest to Lohrey. In 'Groundswell', she argues that Green politics in the 1980s began to claim a question that had been central to Labor politics—'What is the most equal distribution of resources?'—as a core driver of environmental politics (27). This view would appear to inform her reading, and rewriting, of Lawson. The fire in Lawson's story also stands—as indeed it does in *The Reading Group*—for more intractable economic conflict. Earlier in the day, the squatter had turned away a swagman looking for food: 'it was the first time that a swagman had been turned away from that station without tucker' ('The Bush Fire' [1902] 169). We are told that this 'was towards the end of a long drought, and the land was like tinder for hundreds of miles round' (169). The swagman, in retribution, struck and dropped a match, 'and hurried on' (169). The fire, in Lawson's story, is presented as the result of the squatter's refusal of the usual community obligation to grant food and tobacco to those without work or shelter

in the context of a rural recession. Thinking back to Lohrey's earlier novel, *The Reading Group*, it is clear to me why Lohrey might have been attracted to Lawson's story of the squatter's refusal of the swagman, and the ensuing struck match.

The Reading Group juxtaposes its characters' personal experiences with a political crisis playing out in an imagined near-future Australia which has become something akin to a police state. The obstruction of political agency experienced by its characters is most affectingly played out in the relationship between one member of the reading group—social worker Robbie—and one of the men he tries and fails to help. Glenn is a member of the underclass referred to by politicians in the novel as 'plague-bearers'. He struggles with substance abuse, has been in and out of prison, and is illiterate. Robbie is convinced that teaching Glenn to read will somehow save him, but both the reading lessons, and the project of salvation, are doomed. This is one of the bleakest moments in all of Lohrey's fiction. Robbie's sense of love and responsibility for Glenn is simply overwhelmed by the structures that have shaped Glenn's life and continue to funnel him into prison and mental illness. He has attempted suicide in prison previously, and Robbie desperately tries to prevent him from returning there.

The scene of Glenn's downfall is framed by fire: 'That night a low cloud of orange-grey smoke hangs over the city and tiny black cinders float in the empty streets [...] the smell of smoke and burning permeate the house' (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 233). The house in question belongs to Robbie's sister, Claire, who began the reading group and whose own response to a sense of inability to act in the public sphere is to focus on the painstaking renovation of her house. Claire's renovation projects frame the novel and pose a question about what forms of agency can and should be taken in response to political crisis.

In this scene Claire is inside the house, reading, while her daughter sleeps upstairs. This is, like Luke's reading of Treves, an instance in which a character's reading is embedded into our reading of the novel. In this case, with Claire we read a section of Austen's *Mansfield Park*, then part of an unnamed crime novel narrated by a woman in the aftermath of a violent attack. Meanwhile Glenn, 'shaky and hungry', lopes up the hill looking for Robbie's house (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 237). He sees a police car, and ducks into Claire's yard in an attempt to escape it. In her restless reading, Claire picks up some case files on her lawyer husband's desk. We read, with her, an account of police brutality against a pregnant woman and her husband:

> [B]eneath the transcript there are handwritten comments by Andrew. 'Husband at home with broken jaw. Couple do not wish to lay an official complaint against the police. Say the police will only wait a few months or as long as it takes to "get" them again.' (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 239)

Focalised through Claire, our attention is drawn, like hers, to the vulnerability of these individuals: 'Get them again. Unprotected. Out in the wilds' (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 239). At the same time Glenn is shivering, unbeknownst to her, in her backyard. He comes inside the house, hoping to sleep in the laundry or kitchen and leave before daylight. Claire hears something, or feels it.

> Someone is in *her* home.
>
> She steps backwards, leans down to the telephone cord low by the bookshelf and slides it out; carrying the small receiver and the short cord, she tiptoes across the hall to her daughter's bedroom, eases the door closed, locks it from inside, plugs in the telephone and, dialling with excruciating slowness and care, calls the police.
>
> ***
>
> 'Oh, *fuckin'* hell, no!' he says, with a soft vehemence, while they pin his arms behind his back and handcuff him. 'Oh, fuckin' hell, no!' (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 241–242)

This scene shifts from the paradigmatic move of realist fiction—the juxtaposition of experiences, the 'meanwhile' that Benedict Anderson writes about as enabling communal understandings—of two characters with very different opportunities and horizons, to an encounter that makes explicit the zero-sum game of any proximity between them. Claire sees Glenn as a threat to her security when actually it is the other way around. Claire apprehends the danger of police violence as being at a distance from her, when it is a crisis very literally on her doorstep.

This is also a scene about the capacities and limits of the act of reading. Claire's reading shapes her responses—to the extent of having her primed for threat and violence—but only so far. Her reading of the accounts of police brutality is not sufficient for her to think twice before calling those police on an intruder in her home, exposing Glenn to exactly the kind of violence she has been reading about in her husband's case files, or probably worse. The fires in this novel frame and reference a political crisis, but this scene is the personal crisis to which it has been building.

Reading backwards through Lohrey's fiction, we can see in her engagement with Lawson's tale of the ignored swagman the continuation of her long interest in the causes and effects of political inaction. As noted above, *The Reading Group* charts the failure of a group of well-meaning progressive middle-class people to find any useful way to react in the face of what Ashton describes as a 'hyper-nationalistic and increasingly totalitarian state' (154). As Ashton notes, *The Reading Group* charts 'the fleeting political commitment of the main characters' (154). More than this, it traces how individuals respond when their involvement in party politics (presumably, the ALP) seems increasingly removed from the possibility of change or action:

> It was so hard these days to know what you felt. Once it had been straightforward: get out of Vietnam, higher wages, a better deal for women. Then it had got so complicated; it was all economics and what seemed at first abhorrent could be portrayed as only a short-term evil leading ultimately to better things and there were just so many variables… And even expertise became discredited and people dozed through branch meetings, or stopped coming, or lost all coherence and even the leading spokesmen for the factions began to sound more and more bemused. (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 32)

The novel is riddled with what Sianne Ngai might describe as the 'ugly feelings' generated by forms of 'the politically-charged problem of obstructed agency' (32). The reading group is described to us as 'a waste of time really, an old fashioned idea that no seriously active person would ever bother arguing with. One of Claire's self-improving notions' (Lohrey, *Reading Group* 29). With various members of the group, we read (or try to read) Marx on crisis and capital, Gramsci, and others, against the backdrop of their other attempts to find a meaningful way to live.

Rereading *Vertigo* in Canberra this summer, interspersed with hourly checking of air quality and 'Fires near me' apps, has me thinking, too, about our failures of political action in the face of a crisis we have long known was coming. Our recent fires posed similar questions of cause and effect, and of obligations to others in a crisis that might seem far enough from your shores. Television screens across the country (and phones and computers across the world) have been showing images of our Prime Minister being heckled by NSW south coast residents: 'This is not fair. We are totally forgotten about down here' ('Scott Morrison heckled'). A young pregnant woman whose hand Morrison forcibly shakes tells him, 'We need more help' ('Scott Morrison heckled'). The politics of fire continue to be about resources and proximity. A failure to act on repeated warnings that more resources were needed to prevent catastrophic climate change and resultant bushfire is nothing if not a refusal to believe that crisis will touch you.

The Reading Group and *Vertigo: a pastoral* can be read together as a form of climate change fiction that aims to represent not just the effects but also the causes of the political inaction that underpins climate catastrophe, and that needs to change in order to address it. At the same time, Lohrey's writing itself warns of the limits of reading in the face of crisis, and shares some of the pessimism about literature's capacities that is noted by Craps and Crownshaw (1). I see the Prime Minister's reading of Lawson as an example of the limits of reading in this respect. The poem he quotes in his solemn speech is a comic piece whose final line is preceded by a crack at one of the firefighters' losing battle with the DTs. It does figure the kind of generosity we have seen from firefighters and communities across Australia this summer. But as we see in Lawson's other writing about bushfire, such selflessness is not always forthcoming, especially from those in power, when a crisis doesn't seem close enough to affect them. Lohrey's reading back in time—to Lawson and Treves—draws attention to our long knowledge of the relationship between drought and fire, human action and climate change. While we recently saw the Prime Minister attempting to bask in the 'thrilling apocalyptic flare' of bushfire crisis, his government's continued inaction on climate change puts him less in the model of the lay firefighters of Dingo Scrubs who help their neighbours, and more in that of the squatter whose paddocks are not yet burnt.

Note

1 It could be argued that some of Lawson's work—especially 'The Bush Undertaker'—engages with the question of Indigenous dispossession, but this is far from straightforward. See Lee, Dunk and Dingley for discussion of this.

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V for Vulnerable

Adele Aria

Combining lived experiences of complex trauma, disability, and queer identity with postgraduate studies in Human Rights and professional experience, Adele is a writer-activist for human rights and social change. They have contributed to publications and literary events in Singapore and Australia, including the Feminist Writers Festival and Emerging Writers' Festival. A person of colour, Adele is grateful to be living and writing upon Noongar Boodjar.

Some nights, I wake in darkness and try to estimate how much time has passed since I fell into inevitably disturbed sleep. I look for the signal of solar-powered fairy lights sprinkling through the cracks of double-layered curtaining to see if it is still early in the night. If the reason for my waking is throbbing joint pain heralding a tomorrow of restricted movement, each major action undertaken with calculations for fatigue and significant mental cost, I know my night will elongate with discomfort. If the reason for waking is nausea brought on by oncological treatment, there's a chance that throwing up or waiting it out will bring enough relief to allow some deeper rest. Should I have been woken by another side effect of my numerous and often-changing medications, it's really a bit of a guessing game as to whether I'll be able to attend to my physical needs then renegotiate my way towards sleep. Were I inclined towards gambling, I would say the odds are generally poor.

Like many, my understanding of the experiences of those immersed in our 2019–2020 Australian season of bushfire terror has been acquired at a distance. I have a perception painted by the words and images shared by those fighting and fleeing reddened vistas, air laden with soot and interspersed with harrowing shrieks of animals and telltale sounds of flames greedily consuming whatever lies in their path. Thousands of Australians and visitors have marked the passage of time by looking

skyward, wondering if the shift in orange hues will prove sufficient for an airlift evacuation to become feasible, or if the oppressive darkness settling down over them bears the promise of helpful rains or simply indicates the passage of another long, difficult day. For many, though, only torchlight prickled darkness as they waited hopefully for rescue or news of respite from the dangers of heat, flames, and psychological devastation.

Experiencing a restriction in carrying out an activity as mundane as freely moving about or communicating is a daily occurrence for almost ninety per cent of people with disabilities (Australian Human Rights Commission). For some, the level of restriction is a beast that shrinks and grows in the night, to loom large in the morning, promising a shadow over the day ahead of varying size and shape. For others, the beast holds a relatively consistent shape that will only grow in size and ferocity as they age (Australian Bureau of Statistics; Australian Human Rights Commission); over half of the current Australian population will age into living with disability (Australian Human Rights Commission). Most disabilities impacting mobility are likely to include an element of degeneration, if only because ageing into senior years frequently represents additional physical burdens (Australian Bureau of Statistics). The burden will likely be felt and arguably experienced to some degree by each individual in daily experiences, but it is certainly embedded as an implied judgement imposed by a capitalist society prone to monitoring utility as a measurement of individual value.

During the 2019–2020 bushfire season, mobility challenges are purportedly why initial defence force evacuations were restricted to able-bodied people, as in the case of a Victorian holiday destination favourite: Mallacoota (Topsfield). Unchallenged assumptions seemed to constrain the planning, without any evidence of questions being posed to representatives of those who would potentially be most impacted by the decisions: Mallacoota residents, particularly those with disability. Despite several on the ground clearly retaining the capacity to communicate throughout, including one Twitter user known simply as Brendan welcoming his own feed being used as a source for information, the conversations continued without engaging self-identified disabled and otherwise 'vulnerable' individuals (Weedon). Could 'they' manage the difficulties, would 'they' be adequately supported in such challenging and extreme circumstances, could 'they' self-manage their participation in rescue efforts? The implications inherent in these concerns speak to blanket assumptions and, perhaps, mythologies around disability. The othering language was rife and casually used. Spoken about as a small distinct outsider group, as if voiceless and lacking in agency, the rhetoric positioned disabled people to be speculated about, rather than spoken with and listened to. 'Just like exclusion from mainstream community activities, people with disabilities have been excluded from the mainstream of emergency management', observed Michelle Villeneuve, Associate Professor at the University of Sydney's Centre for Disability Research and Policy (Young).

In reality, 'disability' encompasses a larger proportion of the population than many narratives would lead us to believe and is perhaps comfortable to confront. Many of the statistics around disability rely on self-reporting and it is arguable that these are misrepresentative, erring on the low side, as many do not recognise nor willingly identify themselves as living with disability, particularly in light of the societal and systemic ableism which permeates our day-to-day. This skews considerations of how broad the category is, neglecting the many ways in which disability can manifest, not only in different people but even within an individual's life. It disregards the multitude of complicating factors that can affect the life of each individual with a disability and how comorbidities often evolve, manifesting changing impacts upon those individuals. The discourse of othering is also strongly suggestive of an underlying assumption that those with a disability are incapable of self-management and the assessment of their own capacity to navigate a situation or process. The dominant ableist narrative is steeped in an infantalisation that positions those with disability as immature and non-autonomous, and ultimately denies legitimacy to their opinions, voices and experiences. One friend, a wheelchair user, talks about being addressed frequently with 'baby voice' by strangers.

During the Mallacoota bushfire crisis, medication resupplies were delayed for over a week, yet during that same period, evacuations, other supply deliveries, and even dignitary visits continued. It was disconcerting to see medical concerns and, relatedly, the classification of medical personnel so evidently low on priorities. As one urgent care provider noted, doctors and other essential medical services were categorised as 'non-essential' (Armstrong). It is telling that 3000 L of beer were prioritised for shipment within the first week, *before* the pharmacy was restocked and the petrol station received more fuel (McGinn; Brendan).

On January 5th, the Department of Defence released a video to announce that they had evacuated 1,200 people as well as 135 pets from Mallacoota (Department of Defence Australia). In the footage, it could be seen that some elderly, people with visible challenges that needed help navigating gang planks, and even people cradling pets had been included

in this particular evacuation effort. Earlier that same day, a backlash had already developed in response to reports that the elderly, people with disabilities, and families with young children under five, including infants, were rejected from the initial evacuation cohort with HMAS *Choules* (Haynes et al.; Bprophetable). Whilst Emergency Management Victoria said such 'vulnerable individuals' would be prioritised by airlift, the viability of airlift evacuation remained an unknown, with visibility making flying prohibitive even for the most adept and well-trained Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel (Topsfield). In fact, the ADF released footage through social media channels to highlight how challenging the visibility and conditions were proving to be. In the end, observers were perturbed by the apparent difficulties of airlift evacuation yet also left questioning how ship ladders and seafaring mobility requirements, evidently too difficult for young children and people with disability, were able to be navigated by pets and owners carrying pets (O'Malley; 'Australia fires'). The irony of being marked 'V' for vulnerable only to be left behind to survive in the bleak and at that time unpredictable conditions of the Mallacoota township, where environmental conditions were leading to increasing respiratory distress, was not lost on those on the ground and those watching the crisis and aid efforts unfold from afar (Keneally).

There are spaces that are not for you, when your body or mind doesn't work easily, freely, in the way many stories suggest is the norm. But this norm, this story that we tell ourselves here, in Australia, fits only six out of ten of us and neglects to consider how those six might also age into disability, or might suffer temporary or permanent challenges to mobility, independence or capacity due to accidents or illness (Australian Human Rights Commission). It certainly doesn't account for the ways in which a crisis situation such as a devastating fire and its ill effects may impact people who have been surviving on a foreshore for days as they await evacuation.

Realistically, any evacuation effort in a highly fraught situation such as the Mallacoota bushfire is likely to occur in a context where there is significant individual and group psychological strain. It would be further complicated by considerable physical burdens due to exposure from noxious pollutants, layered with mental and physical fatigue developed due to the time waiting for rescue efforts to be safe and also from navigating the situation itself. Whether able-bodied (or 'abled', an increasingly common term) or otherwise, it is highly likely that people will be functioning at a variety of capacities, modified by fundamental fight, flight, and freeze responses (ever-evolving understandings of this phenomenon notwithstanding) (van der Kolk). Some would be at risk of developing varying degrees of ongoing stress response, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Personal regard and clear communication regarding evacuation options and crisis responses are crucial. Equipping people with an understanding of what is ahead provides a vital sense of control and connection to outcome, which increases efficacy and preparedness (van der Kolk 54). These are surely positive contributors in efforts to ensure the safety and survival of people in such crises. Yet during the Mallacoota crisis, many channels broadcast crisis reports without closed captioning or that cropped out Auslan interpreters (if they were there at all), which constitutes a failure in considering diverse communication needs or accounting for the challenging circumstances in which those most at risk were receiving information (Young). Closed captioning is not only for those with hearing impairment but also useful in environments where there is noise pollution or high stress and anxiety levels, both of which potentially impact ability to process audio inputs (van der Kolk 57).

What if we were to design crisis responses that considered a variance of physical and mental capacities, applying an ultimately more humanitarian lens? Abled and disabled do not exist in a simple dichotomous relationship. There is a spectrum of able-ness just as there is a spectrum of disability. As Lee Kofman so aptly paraphrases George Orwell, 'the reality is that some bodies are more imperfect than others in the challenges they pose to the status quo' (Kofman viii). Such considerations may yield a significantly more care-centred and ultimately human-centred approach. It could be hoped that it would result in the embedding of policies for the delivery of crisis responses and communications that enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes. In improving this, the corresponding reduction of potential for negative consequences including PTSD, undue stress burden and anxieties of exclusion should not go undervalued. Perceptions of exclusion are particularly devastating as they imply a threat to survival and even should those fears come to be allayed eventually, the resultant belief and experience can have a devastating impact in the short and long term.

Let me be clear that I am in no way suggesting the actions undertaken by the first responders at Mallacoota, particularly firefighters, or even the ADF, were lacking or anything short of heroic and commendable. However, the underlying thinking of excluding disabled people and other vulnerable people and neglecting to communicate openly and effectively in an inclusive manner revealed a problematic approach. Our provision of support needs to be fulfilled in a humane and respectful way

that recognises the diversity of human capacity and suffering in crisis, incorporating understanding of the spectrum of disability and ability. There are human consequences to the tragedy of our bushfires and we need to minimise the potential of additional negative consequences to those who already face stigma and the burden of navigating a world designed for others. In doing so, I suggest that it would result in more effective responses for all. Designing for a diversity of capacity, in the face of the high likelihood of further bushfire crises across our continent, is designing for all Australians.

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White blankets
Aileen Walsh

Aileen Walsh is Noongar and Ngalia from Western Australia but living and working in the eastern states for the last two years.

White blankets
White blankets
Get your rations,

white flour and your blanket

Infested and distributed

The pillars weave strands
through everyday talk and actions
Alive in the mind

Whiteness descends, pushes, infiltrates
covers and smothers
life rots and dies

Everything, dying

It hides

Ugly things in whiteness
White blankets as god
Slides things through whiteness

Washing through whiteness

Pillars double talk

Intensities move
Weave and tighten
Threads of white meanings

A language of lies
coalesce and crash

Victims alike

Trying to witness,
not be drowned
Trying to see
Clearly, cleanly

Trying to smell,
Sweet air, Sweet air

Pushing through the thick stale veils

Of the blankets of whiteness.

White blankets II

Blankets, blankets, come and get your rations and your blanket

The whiteness is biting hard,
swallowing life into its greedy maw.

Nothing escapes the black and red maw of whiteness.
Red from the blood
Black from the ash, the death.

My brothers and sisters destroyed by whiteness.
The air poisoned, acrid, stale, revolting.

Water going, gone
No water, no life for my brothers and sisters

My brothers the trees, wait, wait, patient, knowing the water will come,
Not knowing of whiteness.

My sister, yonga torn from her country,
her mob, no home, no water, no food
whiteness takes,
No giving.

midwest october

Chloe Hosking

Chloe Hosking is a Midwest reader, writer and teacher. Her work has appeared in *Westerly*, *Short and Twisted* and the Ros Spencer anthology *Brushstrokes*. Recently, she was awarded a Varuna Residential Fellowship to work on her YA manuscript *Outside the Jar*.

she has been
sliced
from
chin to cleft
, innards
spread
across thirsty paddocks.

we roil in canola carpets
beneath banksia candelabra
, bright saucers of
colour flung
against the coal seam.

as if mansion gutted
like a roo
, strung from
the tail
, the walls have
gone missing.
the ceiling
, high and blue.

False gods
Jazz Money

Jazz Money is an award-winning poet, filmmaker and educator of Wiradjuri and European heritage, currently living on the sovereign lands of the Gundungurra and Darug nations.

My palms promise love
secrets in these creases.
What can those stars tell us
distant cold spaces.
Everything happens in its proper way.
Hydrogen burns just so,
A fish can learn to breathe.
So it all moves on,
Frozen sea water
to sand towns.
We're digesting plastic
spewing new life.
Cassowary nesting
beneath concrete overpass.
Cover your breasts
strong teeth from the bottle.
Calcifying, defying
aquarian promises
pour rivers and streams
soak the dust.
To quiet
the night howls.
These indifferent stars
seen from above.
The emptiness
and fire
to make sense
of pink cheeked bastards.

Dictating fortunes,
it's easier to pray.
No time
for false gods,
We're burning, farming
in the new age.
Ancestral pathways
lead to tomorrow's pyre.
Adapting amongst the smoke
prepared by ancients' hands.

Mass death: murray cod, bream, golden perch

32°20'19.7"S 142°19'47.0"E

Matt Hall and Sophie Finlay

Sophie Finlay is a visual artist and poet from Melbourne. Her poetry is published in multiple journals including *Meanjin*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Plumwood Mountain Journal* and *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP). She has been a finalist in several art prizes including the prestigious John Leslie Art Prize.

Matthew Hall has published extensively on the work of J. H. Prynne and British late-modern poetry and poetics, including the monograph 'Violence in the work of J. H. Prynne'. Hall is the author of numerous books of poetry and co-editor (with Dan Disney) of *Towards a Contemporary Australian Poetics*, forthcoming from Palgrave in 2021. He presently teaches and designs in Melbourne, Australia.

a soft white metallic lustre
paled above the weir

silver on silver on sun
mouthing extraction
ventral surfaces *began to appear*
a basin of veins
stagnate in the scum of bony bream

a page of eyes deep-bodied

cotton throated and dissolved

anoxic environments *are forecast*

seasonal cycle

of waste // water

Angel Buddha Temple

Brigid Lowry

Brigid Lowry's essay collection, *Still Life with Teapot: on Zen, writing and creativity*, came out in 2016, and *A Year of Loving Kindness to Myself, and Other Essays* will be published by Fremantle Press in March 2021. Brigid believes in chai, coloured pencils, vegetables, oceans and bicycles.

ON AN ORDINARY DAY

I wake up in the morning. This in itself is a miracle often taken for granted. I eat avocado on toast for breakfast, drink my tea, have a shower, put on my blue dress and lucky-dice earrings, then walk up the road in the sunshine to post books to my great-nephews. Just an ordinary morning. Just an ordinary day.

I'm off to the climate change rally. It takes me two attempts, because I forget my placard and have to go back for it. There are dozens of teenagers on the platform heading to the city, which is encouraging. On the train I prop *Save the Planet for My Granddaughters* face out, against my knee. Opposite me is an older man, handsome, with hippie sandals and a T-shirt adorned with the Aboriginal flag. He puts his hands together and bows in Namaste. I feel at one with my tribe and follow the throng to the cathedral, where there is a solid crowd. I run into someone I haven't seen for years, then join my *Buddhists For The Environment* friends beside our banner. The sun is strong but we're glad we've showed up. The kids are eloquent, passionate, real, even though the speeches and songs go on a bit too long for me. I've always been impatient and have forgotten to bring my hat. At last we begin to march, along St Georges Terrace, saying what we need to say with our signs and our chants. It's hot and bothery and noisy, but the vibe is relaxed and gentle.

All my life I have marched for freedom, and now I march to save the planet, not just for my granddaughters, but for their granddaughters as well. I wasn't able to find my best friend earlier, due to the big crowd, but now I spot her. She's wearing her battered Akubra and looks strong, brown and healthy. We're the same age but I am starting to feel old, cranky and headachey. I should have brought my water.

'This is fun,' she says, a veteran of the successful anti-fracking campaign on the East Coast and years of energetic activism. I smile, wanly, because suddenly I am sick of it all, sick of having marched all my life, sick in my guts at how badly the planet is ailing and I hate capitalism and why should these kids have to pay the price of the crazy, and what the fuck.

We've nearly reached the Convention Centre, where there's apparently a Gas and Mining Industry Convention in progress. I've done my dash. I peel off and stand with my cardboard sign in dappled shade, watching the last of the parade go by. I get talking to the young woman beside me who has stopped to watch. I ask her to take my photo, which she kindly does. Me, under a tree near the corner of William Street and St Georges Terrace, holding my banner, looking sombre.

She tells me she's studying art history at university.

'I'm not sure I'll have children, because of what we have done to the planet,' she confides. She strolls away and I stand there awhile, broken-hearted for her, for all of us.

My headache's getting worse. I give up on my plan to do city errands and head to the station. The lunchtime city workers are busily buying and eating and talking and drinking all manner of fuel-me-up beverages.

I want to shout at them: Stop buying things, you are helping wreck the planet. Also, don't buy fizzy drinks. They are bad for you.

I am turning into a crazy old cat lady despite having no cats.

On the train home I'm a weird messy mixture of hope and jaded. I need some lunch and a rest, after my exertion.

My desire for a calm afternoon is not met.

I'm greeted by the news that there has been a terrorist attack in Christchurch. A crazy Australian gunman opens fire in two mosques. Forty-nine people are dead. Many more are injured. I try to comprehend this tragedy, the immense scale and horror of it. Murder of the innocent, by the insane.

The climate change rally and the shootings, positioned beside each other in some kind of extraordinary counterpoint. I can feel myself going numb. It is not always possible to contain the sorrow of the universe.

Passing my neighbour, a fellow New Zealander, I mention the tragedy in our homeland.

'They're only Muslims, you know,' he says.

I think he must be making some kind of joke. He isn't.

'They think we are infidels. They want to kill us. The mullahs tell them to,' he continues. I tell him I find his comments distasteful.

'I believe that killing anyone is wrong,' I add.

'You haven't thought it through properly,' he insists.

'We'll have to agree to disagree,' I mumble, grabbing the nearest cliché. 'Let's not make each other miserable about this.'

Inside my door, alone with my shock and horror, my anger and my anguish.

Later in the day I run into him again.

'Are we still speaking to each other?' I ask, with as much equanimity as I can muster. The last thing I want is to be at war with this guy. Up until now he has seemed like a decent person. He cooks for people when they're sick, despite his own poor health.

'I'm glad I saw you. I was worried,' he replies, and goes on to explain his views at more length, slightly more moderately. His thinking is deeply embedded, born of fear and racism. His views could not be more opposite to mine. I listen.

'I think the people who died were probably innocent victims,' I offer. He nods. We have a clumsy hug.

Gandhi apparently said that if you can't find God in the next person you meet, it's a waste of time looking for him further. If you subscribe to this idea, then my neighbour and I are God in strange form, stumbling towards Jerusalem in our own clumsy ways.

My little granddaughter asks me what a rally is. I tell her in simple terms.

'Some people are doing harmful things to the planet.'

'I'm not,' she says.

Her small, wise, innocent face is the reason I refuse to surrender to despair and bitterness. I will continue to believe in the decency of most people. I will take to the streets when I have to. I will work towards understanding difference. I will continue to take political action for my own sake, for the sake of my granddaughter, and for the sake of her granddaughter.

It is never just an ordinary day. It is a never-before and never-again moment, a day of particles moving through space, arranging and rearranging themselves in ways mysterious, terrifying and miraculous.

PRAJNA

All your pretty dresses won't save you.
You can't wriggle out of it.
The suffering of this floating world
will continue to present itself.
Just keep on being the Buddha,
white flowers in your open arms.

ON DEATH

When Amber was dying, she was surrounded by goodness because all her life she had gathered goodness. Her dying was peaceful and inspiring but now she is gone. Gone forever, gone somewhere else and we don't know where. I keep wanting to email her, post her *New Yorker* cartoons like I always did. My beloved niece will never be here again. Her five years with brain cancer has come to an end. Her husband is stumbling. Her son is fifteen years old. Those of us who loved her struggle to find meaning, onwards we go, on unsteady feet, through our ordinary days.

Summer. I am here but one day I will not be. Amber is gone. The rest of us to follow.

'Sparkly is a Christmas colour,' says my granddaughter. She is my happy place but I am in the dark land of grief now, deeply sad. Other people's problems annoy me; they seem so trivial. I'm irritable, tired, weepy, borderline depressed. I try to write helpful things to my grieving family, faking wisdom I don't quite have.

There is a difference between wanting to live and being scared of dying. Amber wasn't scared of dying, but she wanted to live. Her death has left a rent in the fabric of our family. She was the queen of baking, wrote excellent haiku, loved playing Scrabble. Her hands were delicate. Her intelligence was fierce. I do not want her to be gone.

Death is the one truth we don't want to know about. We think it won't happen to us, but it will. We don't want it to happen to those we love, but it does.

At the palliative care workshop they tell us we need to have 'the conversation' with our nearest kin, about what we would like regarding our dying. Sensible stuff like wills and end of life instructions and funerals.

My son is not in the least bit keen to have this conversation with me. I am not sure if it is because he is too busy or because he doesn't want to think about his mother dying. Probably both.

I tell him which songs I'd like at my funeral.

'I've written them down,' I say. 'There's a list in a folder, along with bank details and other important stuff, like how to arrange an eco-funeral.'

'You'll be dead, Mum. I get to pick the songs.'

We laugh and get on with our living, but one day he will have to pick the songs, or I will have to help pick his, and this will seem a dreadful thing whichever way the cards fall.

Death is the greatest mystery of all. We do not know who will be next, or how they will go. What happens after we die? No-one knows that either, although there are plenty of theories. For some, religion has answered the question with certainty, for others there is no certainty at all.

Meanwhile, we have a life to live. All of this for a short time only, as my Zen teacher says. Amber is gone. Meanwhile, there is the day, the moment. There is the beach, the teapot, the fading dusk, the bird singing, the child colouring in.

A FEW OF MY DREAMS

A dream of a lost button. A dream of a silver button. A dream of a tin of buttons.

A dream about a pair of talking underpants.

A dream of adopting four children, then giving one back.

A dream of twigs in the hair. The more twigs you wear in your hair the more everyone likes you.

A dream you are very glad to wake up from.

A dream of finding money. A dream of losing money. A dream of using flowers instead of money.

A dream that makes you feel as if there's a right answer to everything and you almost know what it is.

A dream too deep to remember.

ON SINGAPORE

It smelled of roses in Singapore. It was my first visit. Nothing was as I imagined.

Nowhere ever is, but I came to like it: Little India, Chinatown, cheap taxis, delicious oily murtabak, the pool at the hotel, the tropical night air, orchids, sweet chai in the noisy food hall. I gathered modest treasures: tiny statues of deities, incense, paper ephemera to be burnt as offerings for the dead to use in heaven. Cosmetics, cars, whisky, clothing, cigarettes, high-heeled shoes. You might need these things, for you are a long time dead.

In Singapore it was the end of us. Everything you did bothered me. What bothered me most was how little I liked myself when I was with you. I wish I had been able to love you more. You deserved a good love affair. But in the end I didn't even like you much. I certainly didn't like the me I was with you: controlling, critical, changeable, impatient, confused.

I escaped on small adventures by myself. At the Chinese Buddhist temple, amongst fake lotus, real chrysanthemums and a thousand gilded Buddhas, I bowed down three times, so much sadness in my heart. I was a stranger to delight, a stranger to myself.

Coming out after monsoon rain, wrecked, my sodden shoes.

Life is one long grieving.

When my mother left my father he killed himself. This did not give me a whole lot of permission to leave a man.

I waited until we returned to Perth, then ended the relationship, finally, after trying to do so many times. Initially you were bewildered. Later, angry. This I could not fix for you.

Time passed. At first I was not much happier, burdened with regret, confusion, loneliness, longing. What a mess. It wasn't just us I was mourning, it was all the losses of my life. People are not very good at letting go, but in the end, we have to. Every day, every death, every worry or delight, already behind us.

In my dreams everything goes wrong, classrooms of children I can't control, missed buses, lost suitcases. I dream I'm the star of a show called *Celebrity Mousetrap* which is as weird as it sounds. I do not dream of wonderfulness, as others do, like flying over fields of flowers. But in Singapore it smelled of roses and I was finally able to be real with myself again after a long time. The truth, however painful.

THINGS NOT WRITTEN ABOUT

A leaf falling through loneliness. A heartbreak asking for acceptance. A cloud calling your name. The beautiful inconvenient rain. The over-anxious guest, the almost-Christmas morning. The allure of bourgeois success. The complicated silence, the unwise impulse, the forgotten thought. The languid pulse of time. The unintelligible language of birds. My various dressing-gowns. Ancient charms. Heart flower. Rain flower. Stolen flowers. Ancient mistakes. The virtues of tofu. The downfall of the Third Reich. The next bit.

ON HOUSE-SITTING

I rest by the koi pond, quietened by the sound of water. The waterlilies open in the morning, close gently each evening, tumble sideways in the small rain. So much beauty in this house, in this garden. Bumpy hard quince, laden damson tree, silverbeet, nasturtiums, plums and grapes not yet ready to eat. A shed full of tools and bicycles, a pizza oven waiting, stolid, for another night of dough and olives. Dozens of cookbooks, hundreds of records: music I've always loved, music I've never heard of. One must place the expensive stylus on the vinyl with great concentration. There are two cats, one affectionate, one who might scratch me.

I wash my clothes after weeks of travel. The luxury of a long hot bath. This house is a beautiful place, a creative space. Time to take pause, to sit under the grapes drinking tea from a clay teapot.

I am grieving, having parted from an unsuitable man. So many months of foolishness, of ups and downs and weird and heartache. I wasn't happy with him. I'm not much happier by myself. Not yet. I am confused, sad, angry, alone. I give myself permission to muddle along, lurching from one cup of tea to another.

The cats massacre the silver foil bag of dry cat food, high on a shelf. One kills a fish from the pond, leaving it wanly dead and gleaming on the lawn. I seal the cat food in a bucket with a lid, put the dead fish in the compost bin, speak to the cats firmly. The murderer, I think, is the one who sleeps on my bed. As for the dead fish, anybody's guess. I'm lucky they didn't eat my face off in the night, dear enormous Cuddles and Rosie.

I walk at evening along the high bank above the sea, sky pale heaven pink and angel blue, making a silent prostration to the sacred island, Rangitoto, trying to love myself, love my life, not indulge in too much gloom. I recall other house-sits: the time I blackened an expensive wooden board and felt the need to repay by leaving my duty-free gin, the time I managed to fuck up someone's roller door.

Looking after someone else's house is an in-between thing, an oasis, an occasion of good fortune.

It is time to return to my other life, my Australian life. I clean the fridge, leave cheese, cherries, soup. I burn incense, walking from room to room, scattering blessings. Goodbye, cats. Goodbye, house. If you are born in one country and live in another, you never know which one to call home.

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE, A PRAYER

May I make way for the new, greeting every moment as a fresh beginning.

May I be truly content with the abundance of life. May I let things be as they are, say *Yes Please* to everything and all of it, write *Heart's Ease* in cloud letters in the wide blue sky. May I trust in the wide magic of everyday existence, imagine positive outcomes instead of mind-fucking everything to death.

May I encourage myself at all times.

May I remember to live creatively, luxuriating in the simple, the quiet and the miraculously ordinary.

May I connect. May I help others when I have authentic energy for it and rest when I don't. May I remember that I am a part of something much larger than myself, and act accordingly.

May the politicians forgo their own greed for power and money for the sake of all beings, for the sake of the broken world. Can there please be a section in the newspaper called Poetry instead of one called Property. I would also like some green velvet slippers with roses on.

Namaste. Thank you. Amen.

The Crayfish

Camino de Santiago, June 2019

Isabel Prior

Isabel Prior is a junior doctor from Brisbane who wishes there was more time in the day for reading Seamus Heaney, Elizabeth Bishop, Bruce Dawe, Gwen Harwood and Sharon Olds.

The river is cathedral cool. Libby wades in
in sports bra and shorts, while I perch on the bank
trying the water like a pair of glass slippers.

Above us, the poplars are a ribbed vault
from which leaves like paper stars peel to press
their faces to the crisp and soundless water

before hissing over washboard rocks downstream.
A crayfish settles atop my foot. My toes
are fat from walking and marzipan pale underwater

and he scales them, proud and proprietorial.
He raises one fleshy pincer, then the other
then he stops short like a matador awed by his own red cape.

We will never be back. Tomorrow we'll shuck
shoes and socks in a new village. We'll stick pins
in virgin blisters and forego towels to dry, sun-spangled,

on another riverbank. Warblers dart by like fish.
Libby backstrokes between them, scattering leaves
that float at once in water and on air,

light as birdsong. The evening is albariño gold
and we've become hushed and reverent, drunk
on sunny silence. We break bread and cheese

and green tomatoes. Libby's flyaways glow green
as she bends to unpick our water bottles from the wet ankle
of a poplar. When I stand, apricot clouds brush my calves.

For a time, the river is still.
Then, in a flood of sound, the leaves quiver
and the warblers ripple out into the dusk.

Dip

Andrew Lansdown

Andrew Lansdown's recent poetry collections are *Distillations of Different Lands* (Sunline Press, 2018) and *Kyoto Momiji Tanka: poems and photographs of Japan in autumn* (Rhiza Press, Queensland, 2019).

A little dip
in the broad rim

directs the brim-
ming rainwater

where to over-
flow, gliding slow

or quick in drib-
ble, drip or drop,

from the wide cup
of the level-

standing garden
granite basin.

Waves, Mountains, Wings and Sails: on Lorri Whiting, an expatriate woman artist
(Part Two)

Kevin Brophy

Kevin Brophy is a poet, essayist and fiction writer. In 2015, he was writer-in-residence at the BR Whiting Library in Rome. His latest book, *Look at the Lake* (Puncher & Wattmann 2018), records two years of living in the community of Mulan in the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia. He is a past winner of the Calibre Prize for an outstanding essay. In 2019–20 he was poet in residence at the Keesing Studio in Paris. He is Professor Emeritus in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

Part One of this essay was published in *Westerly* 64.2 (November 2019). The essay as a whole is available to read online at: https://westerlymag.com.au/editors-desk/

June 2019

Lorri Whiting's life in art is a story that is far from over. Lorri's paintings are distributed across the globe, sometimes recognised as examples of 20th-century modern Italian art, sometimes as the work of an outlier Australian painter, and sometimes as part of the international movement of abstract women painters of the mid to late 20th century (see Ward 1991; Whiting 1985). She built a reputation as an abstract artist who makes use of collage, working with techniques closer to abstract expressionism than the later colour field artists. The boom decades for abstract art in Europe were between 1942 and 1969. The exponents were of course mostly men. Women, though, might have found themselves moving towards abstract art 'precisely because it masked personal identity' (Schjeldahl np).

In Lorri's own history, there was the added element of her interest in sculpture. She had enrolled to study sculpture at RMIT, and was there from 1945 to 1947. She worked mainly on iron casting in foundries. These were the years that RMIT produced the Australian-American modernist Clement Meadmore, famous for his monumental cast-iron abstract metal bars twisted as if liquorice sticks. Like Meadmore, Whiting began her studies and continued with an enduring interest in furniture design, always with a keen eye for the qualities of different kinds of wood. She says that she stopped studying because she married Bertie Whiting. They left for England in 1952 after her first and remarkably successful one-woman exhibition in Melbourne.

Following the substantial sales of works from that exhibition, she remembers her father saying, 'Do you think they [the buyers] would have paddled down there and bought those paintings if they weren't friends of ours?' For her, this has always been a major reason for pursuing her career in Europe, and her continuing reason over those years for not returning to Australia. Shortly after arriving in London she had another successful exhibition where again she sold most of her paintings. Her father expressed open bewilderment over this. 'Wasn't it James Joyce,' Lorri often repeated to me, 'who said silence, exile and cunning are what an artist needs? Well, I was exiled and I worked in silence but perhaps I was not cunning.' [1]

In her influential 1971 essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', Linda Nochlin reminds her readers that women artists were more or less tolerated or ignored up until the 1960s (with the exception of the extraordinary Rosa Bonheur) because painting was a relatively quiet activity that disturbed no-one. On the other hand, the noisy tools and muscular nature of sculpture was never a preferred form of expression for young women. Lorri's early interest in sculpture was an indication that she would take whatever path excited her, and never the path she should 'sensibly' or strategically take as a woman.

As one of her own examples of not being cunning, she remembers Peggy Guggenheim once asking for one of her paintings. Lorri refused to hand one over unless Guggenheim offered something for it. Even ten pounds would have done. Foolish and un-cunning. But she could be canny at times. Before leaving Melbourne, she had bought a Cy Twombly work for $60. In Rome she sold it for $50,000 to make it possible to buy a studio on the floor below her apartment in Tuscany.

She found herself in Rome in 1955 at the moment of the Arte Informale movement, under the provocative influence of Lucio Fontana's 'experimental research', in which he scored blank canvases with a Stanley knife or stabbed them with a steel spike, opening, as he said, a void into eternity and thus destroying the usual conventions of art while making highly expressive gestural objects. This movement's aim, which was 'to make art by any means' (Fontana interview), had found its brief

international florescence with Jackson Pollock in New York in the late 1940s. In Italy, and in Rome in particular, there was an acute awareness of Expressionism and Action painting in the United States, encouraging moves towards abstraction and new forms of materiality. This radicalism was also in part, in Italy, a visceral reaction against fascism's exploitation of progressive art. It was an attempt to discover a language for art uncontaminated by politics and ideology.

These impulses would also shape the Italian Arte Povera ('impoverished art') movement of the 1960s (Christov-Bakargiev), which broadly influenced Lorri's work. The Arte Povera artists brought their use of materials to the fore, mixing industrial and natural products and blurring boundaries between art and sculpture. Giovanni Anselmo's *Struttura che mangia* ('Structure that Eats', 1968) is one of the most vivid works from this period: a head of lettuce jammed between two blocks of granite wired together. As the lettuce decomposes it falls between the stone blocks and must be replaced if the artwork is to continue to 'live'. Lorri has a black painting by Giulio Turcato (1912–1995) on her lounge room wall across from where she usually sits. This is one of Turcato's neo-dadaist *Tranquillanti* works from the very early 1960s, inspired by the Arte Povera impulse to make use of everyday materials and incorporate the movement of real time into artworks. There are five antidepressant pills embedded in the thickly painted canvas. The pills are now deteriorating, some of them showing their pale powdery surfaces through ruptures in the black paint. Lorri tests her failing eyesight each day by counting the number of pills she can pick out.

'When we got to Rome,' Lorri said, 'the people were a bit like us, artists and writers. It was good for us. I exhibited in London. My work was exhibited with de Chirico, Severini and Modigliani. We met a great number of artists. It was good to meet people who were doing what you were doing. I painted most days. My dentist used to take paintings for work he did on my teeth.' By 1959, Bertie had contributed a catalogue essay for the first solo exhibition of the leading experimentalist Nuvolo (Giorgio Ascani, 1926–2008) at Galleria Trastevere, an exhibition that attracted Peggy Guggenheim and the inspirational Alberto Burri (1915–1995) among other important artists and critics (Celant 150–151). Bertie wrote that Nuvolo's excellence as an artist resided in his 'entirely natural acceptance' (quoted in Celant 151) of what would have been for an earlier generation an extreme experimental attitude. This naturalness extended emphatically to Lorri's work at this time.

Two other factors, perhaps, took Lorri Whiting in the direction of abstract art. Her husband was, in his own heart and in Lorri's estimate, essentially a poet. Lorri remains committed to Bertie's poetry, and in the world of abstract art it is the suggestive power and seductive pull of shapes and colours that provide meaning, just as in poetry it is the sounds, underlying rhythmic effects, incidental linguistic symmetries and contrasts that bring inchoate but finely nuanced shades of feeling to work that need not be realist or conventional. Lorri identifies herself as dyslexic ('Bertie was the reader', she reminds me when I ask her about what she used to read), perhaps giving her an advantage in appreciating the powers that poetry can have beyond paraphrase. This unconventional stance she shared with Bertie might have turned her that much more easily away from representation towards the less determined, less certain and more precarious expressions that abstract art uncovers.

In her slightly nonplussed way, as if the question had not occurred to her before, Lorri says that turning to abstract art at that time was 'just a natural thing that happened. Figurative art had gone a long way and I was an artist of my time too. We have all gone back a little since then.' As usual there are many steps in her thinking that I'm left to fill in, taking into account for instance her full and instinctive commitment to art as a young woman along with her unwillingness to inflate her achievements—and her understanding now, in her late years, that what she did, she did on impulse and with youthful energy but without a career plan.

Finally, it is difficult to fully appreciate Lorri's artwork without understanding that she is a sailor. The shapes in her works from the 1970s onwards, the movement across them, their torn and stormy surfaces, the sharp and slanted angles that suggest sails, mountains and waves, the very idea of torn canvas, all speak of the sea, of ships, yachts, wind, islands and weather. Her colours too rise from the elements of ocean, sky and sleekly modern sea craft.

Her regimen of painting every day was testament to her seriousness as an artist and to her belief that only in a life of working at her art could she achieve something original. 'I don't think I'm religious but I do have things I believe in,' she told me one afternoon, running with her thoughts in the understated, ironic way she has of developing a half-comic but still more than half-serious monologue circling through issues that have preoccupied her for decades:

> I believe for instance that people should go sailing. Sailing opens your mind. You see other countries and meet other people. Failing that, I believe people should have an interest. I guess it's easy to take drugs but maybe you should do a thing that's not easy. If you don't have an interest, you're poor even if you're rich.

The poet and critic, Emilio Villa, who returned to Rome in the 1960s after working with South American concrete poets, spoke at her first Rome exhibition. He offered her and other artists critical advice. Lorri remembers that the advice he gave her about art was always sound: 'Mostly he said shut yourself up and work.'

The influence of Nuvolo lasted throughout the 1960s. Even now, Lorri has a series of abstract collage-canvases by Nuvolo lining the wall along the stairway to her mezzanine bedroom. She must pass the way stations of these paintings every day at least twice, and though she is virtually blind she can tell you what paintings she passes beneath on the stairs. She learned from Nuvolo to use her spatula (or a sponge) as a brush, to base her works on collage techniques, to incorporate materials such as velvet, ribbons, paper and bits of cloth for her studies in motion and colour.

Her canvases from this period tended towards being square or at least adopting the dimensions of a portrait-shaped canvas. Only later did her work demand larger landscape-shaped canvases. In retrospect, the more squared canvases seem modest in contrast to the more rolled-out or extended later canvases. This change in the shape of her canvases was just one of the ways in which she eventually came out from under the influence of Nuvolo to find a creative energy she could own more fully.

When she speaks of influences, it is first W. M. Turner that she mentions. Picasso too, though he wasn't half the painter Turner was. Hokusai has been important. 'All water is beautiful,' Lorri said while remembering rowing on the Edward River as a child. Rothko she admired more than most others. In her acerbic way, she says of him the one thing that perhaps she fears in her own life: 'I knew Rothko. His wife left him because he'd got old and boring.' At a dinner in Rome in the early 1970s, she listened to the famous R. Buckminster Fuller speak of triangles as 'something that will stand up under pressure'. Buckminster Fuller was at that time travelling the world giving lectures on the geodesic dome and many other ideas that might save humanity, a man so busy that he wore three wristwatches, one with the time zone of his next destination, one with his present time, and one with his home time. 'Yes,' Lorri thought, 'triangles. Mountains, sails, waves moving under the sea. It's a natural shape.'

To produce her new artworks based upon the triangle, Lorri would cut and tear from large sheets of paper, card or canvas upon which she had laid down colours and shapes. These would be glued to a canvas, creating a dynamic slashing of shards and geometric shapes across a work, which could then be painted over again. Stronger and blockier than the abstract expressionist Anne Ryan's collages, less psychological than the existentialist works of Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, and less inkily sensual than Helen Frankenthaler's later colour field paintings, Lorri's work could hold the energy of an appearance of punched glass in the clubbing of brush against canvas. The impactful physicality of these works lies in the sense one has of an artist standing over her canvas working it with shoulders, hips, elbows and fists.

Lorri moved towards a complexity of surface textures, colours and line in her works from the 1970s onwards with a freedom of movement achieved by learning to trust the broad flow of her strokes. Hers remained a rebellious art arising from a conviction that the essence of a painting's power lies not in what it represents but in how it lands upon the sensibility of a viewer.

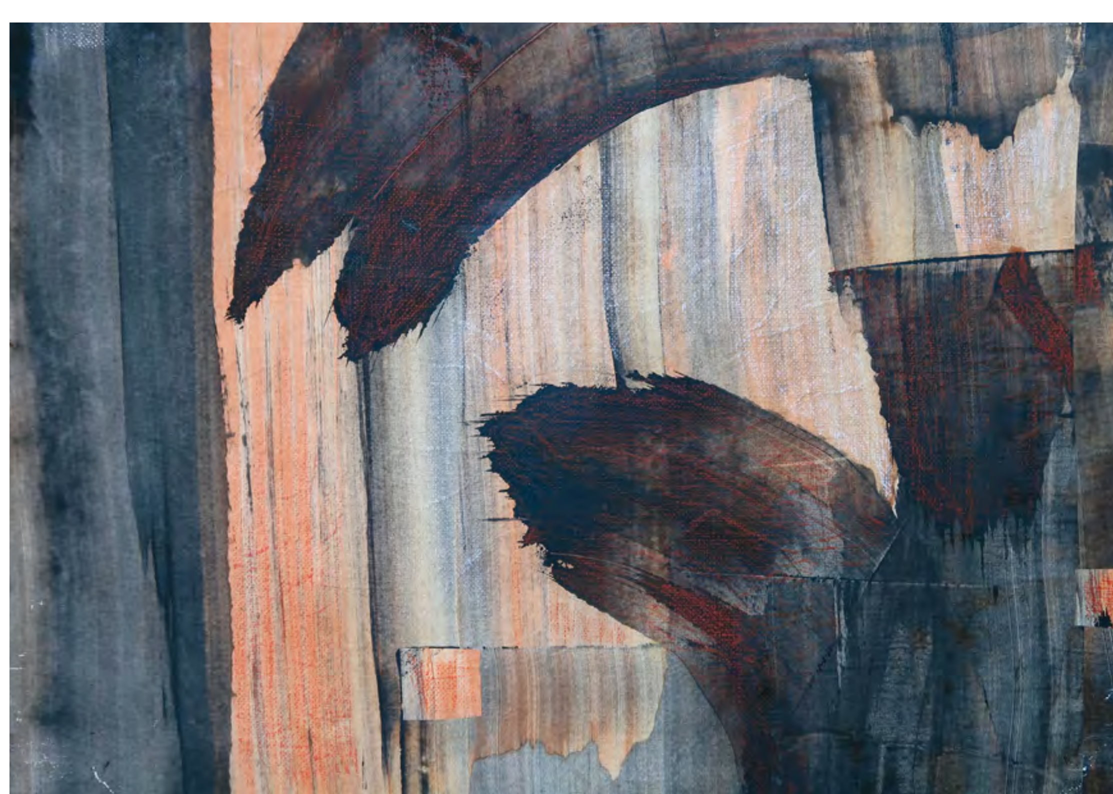
From 1959 until 2010, more than twenty solo exhibitions of her work were held in London, Rome, New York, Melbourne, and in regional galleries across the UK, Italy and Australia. Her years of greatest productivity were the twenty-two years from 1961 to 1983, when she had fourteen solo exhibitions and eleven group exhibitions. Her large masterpiece *Kaleidoscope* (held in storage at the Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne), painted in 1968, has wild red triangular shards with neon yellow and orange streaked strips of steely canvas on what looks to be a deeply uniform black surface[2]. But when you stand up close to the work, there is no black that's not singed, warped or enlivened with other colours and shades within it. The surface is as tricky as the surface of the sea or the chaotic evidence winds leave on water or in trees. This shattered effect also creates the impression of a leap across a void. Fittingly for an abstract work, however, it appears one way up on the website archive of the Charles Nodrum Gallery exhibition (2010), and the other way up on the printed catalogue for the same exhibition. It is as if one should, rightly, stand above the work and look down on it, or walk around it, not face it on a wall. Her work bears little in common with cubism's suggestion of an X-rayed world, nor the colour field painting that occupied many abstract artists in the 1960s.

Lorri's abstract art was not produced out of a wartime experience, or out of the angst following revolution, defeat or destruction. This might put her project to one side of the dominant story of mid to late 20th-century European art. Her abstract work, pursued beyond 1968 into the 1980s, might seem as well to be coming into its own beyond the heyday of the form. It can, though, and nearly always does, require decades for an artist to find a style and line that leads to something profound and expressive. Her paintings from this period can operate like visionary kaleidoscopes—suddenly dominating one's view of a world so transformed that only its colours, edges and energy remain.

LTIU
LLOYD

OBEY

WHITING
VIALE DI TRASTEVERE 259
ROMA. ITALIA



March 2019

We are in the backyard of her home on the hillside outside Orbetello, opening the shipping container that holds fifty years of her artwork. Her friend Ugo had housed the container for some time until he assisted her to have it transported to her backyard, where she has had it protected from the weather by a sheltering roof, and protected from curious animals coming out of the forest by a raised floor. It's early spring, and we're enjoying days of bright sunshine even though the air is chilled. Inside the container most of the paintings are covered in taped bubble wrap, more than two hundred of them. Each wrapping is numbered, though the paintings leaning five or six deep on both sides are in no particular order. Our aim is to photograph as many of the works as we can in the time we have left.

We choose the paintings as they come to hand rather than in order of their numbers. Most of them we find are unsigned and un-dated. But the few that are signed and dated—and sometimes titled for an exhibition—offer us indications of the changes in her approach through the 1960s into the early 2000s.

Through the 1960s, Lorri worked mainly with square or near-square canvases in a portrait orientation, often approximately 80 cm by 120 cm. She painted on paper which was glued, whole, to a canvas backing. The paper was a thick card with a textured weave across the surface. Watermarks showed it to be Murillo Pesante, a paper produced in the mills of Fabriano in the central Italian province of Ancona on the Adriatic Sea. Fabriano's paper mills have operated since the 13th century, with production values so exacting that the Cartiere Miliani Fabriano are one of the very few companies in Europe permitted to produce paper for the creation of Euro notes. The card Lorri chose was heavy, durable, and mould and water-resistant—ideal for holding its shape when glued.

There is an early series of works based on dark grey or black swipes made with a squeegee or spatula, leaving traces of bright pink or red, sometimes yellow or white. Lorri explained that she included these mineral colours with her nitrous cellulose mix, but without letting them dissolve, hence they came through as irregular ribbons of intense colour. Lorri painted in a full gas mask (procured from a boatbuilding yard) to protect herself from the toxic fumes of the highly flammable marine nitrocellulose ('It looked like honey') and the Vinavil adhesive mixed with wallpaper glue for holding the collages down. Lorri could take to such an industrial and physically demanding artisan approach thanks to her background as a sculptor and boatbuilder. Her paintings, she said, were made of 'more or less what boats are made of'.

Among these works of the 1960s, there is a series that gives the appearance of being oversized fragments of calligraphy in a Japanese style. Lorri always kept by her on her boat a hardback copy of Hokusai's artwork. Sometimes there are patches of fabric glued over the paper, indicating again the influence of Nuvolo and the experimental painters around her at this time. Lorri's feel for freed-up movement and a daring, sometimes delicate, use of colour distinguish her work from the more solid and geometric look of Nuvolo's canvases.

We took the paintings one by one from the shipping container, unwrapped each one carefully then placed it on a loose tile from around the yard in a position where the late morning sunlight could fall directly upon it. We then photographed it.

I realised after a while that the tiles scattered across the backyard were in fact placed carefully to be over those spots where Lorri's or Sigrun's dog had left a turd. To discover this was to understand again how seemingly random details of landscapes in Italy are in fact evidence of styles of living, long-held cultural practices, or simple solutions to everyday problems. They might not be the best solutions but they work, and somehow the movement of nature in its own time allows many of these makeshift decisions to be viable. I became careful to move only those tiles where the turds had been pretty well re-absorbed into the soil.

There was one work in particular that drew us to it. The painting we loved was on a square frame. It was signed near the bottom right-hand corner and on the back was a title, 'Red Ribbon', though with no date. The background was a mix of scarlet and deep carmine strokes, over which there were three roughly sponged swipes of black paint highlighted by glued-on strips of red velvet ribbon. Along the dark swipes were some fragments of blue and green cotton also glued down. It might have been the way the sunlight threw out at us the richness of the velvet ribbons, the dance of their angles with deep and luxurious reds from the background, that made the painting so exciting to look at. We examined it all ways up, standing back in the yard and admiring it silently. Then we decided to take it inside where we could ask Lorri about it. Once we had it inside, the excitement the sunlight had given it faded, and we found that Lorri could not see it or remember it. She did remember using some of Bertie's cut-up clothing sometimes on her canvases, but this one she could not remember.

There was another series of works on larger, rectangular canvases executed with a lighter palette, usually making use of a creamy ceramic

background. These were collages of irregularly shaped cuts of paper glued to canvas. The most spectacular of these was one titled 'La Citta' and dated 1961. The collage was designed as a series of arcs so that the effect was like looking down upon a terracotta city laid out for a view from above. These works owe a debt to Nuvolo's 'Scacchi' style of screen-prints from the late 1950s, but Lorri's collages move away from the chessboard-style of Nuvolo's finished works towards a dance of colours and a vortex of energy held within sometimes surprisingly finely shaped abstract compositions.

The largest canvases were those from the 1970s onwards, inspired by Lorri's passion for the sea and her new interest in the possibilities of the triangle as a robust and natural shape. These compositions often made a feature of the rough-cut edges of paper, chopped swiftly with the blunt side of a knife or a pair of oversized shears. The white of the edges of the cut murillo card evoked for Lorri the white caps on sea waves. But perhaps more broadly these trails of ribboned paper and dangled edges announced the connection between her art and her life: always energy left over, always a natural product shaped but not processed, and always a solution to the matter of beauty and the question of how to live that was not unlike the random-seeming marble tiles spread across her backyard—a resourcefulness made to gesture towards a fragile present emerging from the overwhelming past.

Each day we spent with her paintings in the backyard, we would come back inside changed by what we had seen but unable to describe to her what had happened to us—beyond saying, every day, that something must be done to preserve these paintings, document them, understand them.

Below her house, at the end of a short staircase beyond the back door, is her studio, a converted boatbuilding workshop dug out from under her and her neighbour's houses. For the past four years Lorri has been too blind and too incapacitated by a failing knee ('the one my mother gave me' as opposed to the new slick one that surgeons had inserted for her some years ago) to be able to go into her studio. When we went down to the studio we discovered a long rectangular space that had seemingly been left only last night with many works in progress on a series of tables, paint containers still open, jars of brushes, and all sorts of folios, ideas sketched out on paper, piles of posters and catalogues, and larger paintings hung along the walls for inspiration or instruction. Some of the collages based upon triangles had their pieces pinned to the canvas in arrangements that might have changed before the glue was administered. Lorri used to prepare these pinned collages and then look at them through a mirror because the mirror image, she said, would show her defects she couldn't otherwise see.

The four years of abandonment had dried the paint in the open containers, stiffened her brushes and allowed mould to glue piles of catalogues and posters together as well as some folios of artworks. We rescued a box of seriotipie-style screen-prints and several smaller works in progress by moving them to a dry shelf closer to the air circulating from a locked entrance to a driveway. This studio needed a curator or an archaeologist to rescue the evidence of her working methods, her documents and her art spread around the space.

June 2019

'Are you going to finish the essay before I die?' Lorri asked on the phone last night. I told her I am well into it, though finding an ending for it and stopping-up the many pathways it has taken will be my challenges. One of her most repeated stories is a sailing tale. She had entrusted her boat to one of the crew at night when she went down below to sleep. In the morning her crewman reported that he had been holding to their course when he saw a large yellow object floating on the surface of the sea, becoming larger and larger as he sailed towards it until he made the decision to alter course and try to sail around it. Only then had he realised that it was the moon he was sailing around. Lorri laughs to herself each time she tells the story, appreciating the accidental poetry of the absurd dilemma her diligent crewman faced. If only each one of us each morning could report we had successfully dodged a full moon we might wake pleased with ourselves and ready for any challenge ordinary daytime might bring.

Lorri understands very well the sometimes-lonely waiting game that sailors and artists must play. To be alive to what ideas or visions might come at the mind is the task of the lone sailor as much as the lone artist working in silence. When I asked her about the most important experiences of her life, she said that once she saw two dolphins swim by, leaving behind them silver trails of plankton.

I picture her touching, as she talks, the knot of twisted, rusted hand-made nails hanging from a cord down her front. The nails were given to her by the sculptor Nino Franchina (1912–1988), who one day, she said, drank three or four whiskeys at lunch, collapsed, and never came out of it. He made these nail-blooms for each of his friends who had once broken bones. The nails represent her head broken in the childhood fall from her

horse, the ankle broken in a skiing accident and her now troublesome knee which was once split open, though she can't remember how. These writhing nails, echoes of the crucifixion, figures of survival from an earlier industrial world, each one remembering a broken bone, are always close at hand. Just as there could be no real separation between Lorri and her art, there is no way to unravel these nails.

While this essay was written through a time of close contact with Lorri Whiting, she died as the first part of this essay was in preparation for printing. Lorri was buried in the same tomb as Bertie at the Rome Cemetery for Foreigners and Non-Catholics on Friday 20 September 2019.

Notes

1 James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916): 'I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning' (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1992. 191).

2 *Kaleidoscope* (1968) can be viewed at: http://www.charlesnodrumgallery.com.au/exhibitions/lorri-whiting/

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Whitby, August

Bryn Dodson

Born and raised in Perth, Western Australia, Bryn Dodson is a graduate of New York University's Master of Fine Arts programme. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

She stands tight against the steep-sloped wall of the attic room, breathing cold air from the window; it's morning, and the gulls are flying.

With her ear to the window she can hear the sea's stilled thunder. An overcast Sunday with scratchings of blue sky, the light scoured clean by layers of cloud. A briny vapour rolls in with the North Sea on the tide.

In London the air had been warm, sullen and still: the light had the green tinge of water at the bottom of a pond. A dirty, whitish haze seemed to drift off Kent and seal away the East End. She took a taxi to King's Cross St. Pancras straight from her office, loose nerve-ends rattling as she tapped at her phone.

Arriving in Whitby, she was naive enough to hail a cab. A taxi from the railway station took her on an absurd half-circuit encompassing the entire west side of town, depositing her a few hundred yards uphill from where she began. Call it four pounds even, love, the driver said.

The passenger door slammed shut in front of the terrace of guesthouses and her heart felt full.

Behind her, now, is a wrecked bed, sheets in disarray, and beside that on the bedside table a set of car keys, a lamp, a lighter; by the far wall a warped black box containing an accordion; over the chair in the corner, a leather jacket marbled with creases.

She catches herself in the mirror, which stands where the attic wall pitches inward to become the ceiling. The mirror recalls mornings-after when she would wake in strange, sun-flooded rooms and slip from the bed, feet cold on the scratched floorboards, and study her radiant face with triumphant scrutiny. Now, those awakenings far in her past, she submits to the light's impartial judgement, in a white shift with wine-stains under the arm.

She thinks: this is no longer the person she is. Inhabiting a role she should have discarded, or should have discarded her.

Downstairs, on the steps smoking, is the man to whom the strange objects in the room belong, rubbing the tops of his arms and regretting the jacket still slung over the chair, up three flights of stairs and then the fourth, narrow, circular staircase that brought him, bent almost double, up to the little attic suite the night before.

Upstairs, facing the mirror, the briny air and light settle compassionately on her skin.

The gulls wheel in shrinking circles around the terraces of Whitby, the tiled roofs plunging down the hillsides of the town to the banks of the River Esk as it touches the sea, the gulls' plumes the colour of polar ice.

• • •

She had come to Whitby for the August folk festival, to a corner of North Yorkshire enclosed on all sides by forest, moorland, coastline, and sea. Once it was a town of whalers and shipbuilders. The old part of town, where houses huddle in a few cobbled streets close against the river and the hillside, suggests an affinity for water that is almost a longing. Captain Cook was born here and sailed the world's oceans in a Whitby collier. In *Dracula* the eponymous vampire washed ashore on Tate Hill Pier. During the year 664 the Synod of Whitby authoritatively calculated the date of Easter in the now-ruined abbey overlooking the east bank of the Esk. The town has been burned by Vikings and shelled by Germans, watched the Greenland whales dwindle and Spanish trawlers ruin its fishermen. Now it is a refuge for goths, eccentrics, obscurantists and, once annually, folk musicians, whose performances are scattered among the town's pubs and gathering places.

One such venue is the Whitby Conservative Club, which on the Saturday hosts Folk Club. A square building tucked behind a petrol station, offering commanding views of the river and cheap beer in the front bar. Upstairs, the audience supplies the opening songs and performances before the guest artists begin, in a function room with Tory-blue wallpaper and a stamp-sized corner of dance floor.

I can see Mr Cummley in the audience, says the first performer from the audience, a bald man with stained-glass eyes, so I'd better sing some sea-shanties—

I'm fed up with 'em! roars Mr Cummley, to general laughter.

A Scottish girl, the first guest artist, blows a diffident breath into a pitchpipe and tells of how, while her friends made mixtapes of the Spice Girls and Take That!, she was going to Isaac Gillies gigs, trembling too hard to ask for his autograph.

The room laughs warmly. It's an old room: wild, white hair, paunches and yellow toenails in cushioned sandals. A grey-bearded man in a gingham shirt sleeps through the first hour. Three people in the room are younger than fifty: the Scottish girl, an unshaven man in black with cropped, woolly black hair and an accordion box, and the woman two chairs down from him, tapping her feet and fingers.

The girl blows into the pitchpipe again and begins:

> *Go from my window my love my love*
> *Go from my window my dear*
> *For the wind is blowing high*
> *And the ship is lying nigh*
> *And you'll not get a harbouring here…*

The old audience leans in, eager mouths slightly open. Listening to this girl, her voice unburdened by her song's great age, there is something voracious in their hope.

Other members of the audience rise to offer their songs in undaunted voices. Lamentations and shades: picketing miners, harvest labourers standing idle before the steam-plough, boys marching to the Continental wars with the King's shilling in their pockets.

One chorus is usually enough for the audience to chime in. The communally sung refrains overflow the room and drift down the staircase, where framed photographs of Conservative prime ministers line the stairs. Thatcher, John Major, Edward Heath. Above them on the landing presides the Rt. Hon. Sir Winston Spencer-Churchill, and the plaints of centuries on these damp sad isles seem to weigh on his jowls and on the careworn packages of flesh under his eyes.

After nightfall, eating fat chips with vinegar and battered cod, two teenage girls sit on a bench by the foreshore. They are pale and wear black jeans and black tops, thick coats of midnight-blue eye shadow. They got changed in the toilets at the Costcutter after their shifts, slathering colour on their eyelids and mouths.

A little girl begins drawing up a crab from the river, and they watch with all the bored hostility of local kids in a tourist town.

One man approaches to ask if he can photograph them and they tell him he is welcome to go fuck himself. He shuffles off towards the river and pretends to be sending a text, but when he takes the surreptitious picture he forgets to turn off the flash, and they call him a pervert and a paedophile in broad Yorkshire until he hurries out of sight.

This happens to them more often than you would think, though they are nowhere near as elaborately dressed as the proper goths, as they call them, who swarm over the town twice a year.

If they were old enough they could go to the pub, but at the Resolution they'll get carded and everywhere else they'll have to beg the publican to stand them a sly half before he shoos them away.

The wire basket emerges. The little girl's mother helps her tip the crab into a bucket of water. Passers-by form a queue to bend and admire the crab. The girls chew cod and continue to watch. They are fishermen's daughters and they know an undersized crab when they see one. They have eyes like the muddy estuary of the Esk when the tide is out.

At Folk Club another guest act has begun, a trio. The woolly-haired man leans back in his seat, easing the air from his accordion, one leg extended to reveal a pale shin and a battered black boot. An older American man in a white shirt is on guitar, in classical posture. Between them, completing the trio, is the banjo player.

He is a man with thinning white hair and sunken eyes, also American. His right palm motionless, his fingers fluid. His left hand maintains a swan's-neck arch over the banjo frets and gestures the song's chords into being. The last song the trio plays is a Woody Guthrie song, and the guitarist mentions that the banjo player once played with Woody Guthrie. In the recessed set of the banjo player's eyes is an expression of absent intensity, as if a fire has been lit there and left to burn.

After the show the woman and the accordion player find themselves going in the same direction. They descend the hill and cross the footbridge over the Esk. Couples in jeans and light jackets stroll the foreshore, sit down to eat the night's last haddock and cod. Bull terriers with liver-spotted chops strain on their leashes. Two girls dressed in black call to someone on the opposite bank. The town's last trawlers nod to one another, lashed to the riverside. Across the river on a cobblestone street in the old part of town stands a red wooden pub, with a rearing painted horse on a swinging sign.

In the front bar of the Black Horse the session is still going strong. The little room is flush with observers; they cram into the doorway and around the bar, craning for views of the singers. A ceiling of smoky wooden beams. Lean pub dogs lap at the water bowl beside the bar, angling between legs. A middle-aged woman in tracksuit pants is wresting pints from the casks, tepid ale squirting from the taps with each pull and creamy head swirling in the pint-glass. The bar and the benches around the window form a tiny amphitheatre, the wood aged white and worn clean of varnish.

Singing is a bristling-bearded man in a fishing cap, crusted waistcoat, black T-shirt, jeans, and sandals with black toeprints, barking out a Breton fishing song in rough but passable French as a clap goes up around the room. He finishes, to applause, throws his eye around wildly, and after a pause a chubby man in the corner strikes up *On Raglan Road* in a wobbly tenor. It's a song many know, and the warble of the man's voice encourages others to join; observers becoming singers, until a great hymnal swelling of sound has risen and made an instrument of the little wooden room at each line of refrain. She is standing, the bar pressed into her spine, packed in close between the accordion player and a big man with sloping shoulders and a spilling pint. She sings in a shaky, private voice, the accordion player bellowing beside her.

They step out into the cobblestone alley by the pub, and in the cool air outside she's flushed with beer and at a loss for her step. They cross the bridge and stagger up the incline of the road known locally as the Khyber Pass. There's a carnival running along the western foreshore below, where the garish lights are dimming and the clanking of old carnival machines is giving way to the whisper of the sea.

In front of the Georgian houses on the hill stands a bronze statue of Captain Cook in his navy jacket and pantaloons, surveying the cliffs of Whitby, bronze plaques heaped at his feet: gifts of the grateful nations his ships explored. The wind picks up offshore, and she hides in the lee of Captain Cook. As the accordion player steps into the great explorer's shade, she pulls herself into his body's warmth and lets her head rest against his chest.

Deep into the night, the two teenage girls from the bench sneak into the abbey grounds to drink rum drowned in Coke and speak with sacred honesty. They choose a low point on the wall outside the town, dark paddocks behind them, hoods scrunched over their heads. As they rise from their crouch after vaulting the wall, they freeze as their adjusting eyes mark something black a little distance ahead. Their fingernails leave livid marks in one another's flesh. Impossible to tell what it is: a looming *shape*, hunched, with bent wings, that seems for a moment to lengthen and flicker, lithe and terribly mobile—

Jesus fuck it's just a shadow. I could actually have fuckin died.

They cross the grounds; get their breaths back. Clipped lawn surrounds the abbey and spreads smooth as carpet through the nave of the church and between great snapped columns, the stone shorn of its old load. The grass runs to the base of the standing walls, as if ruin had grown out from underneath.

One of the girls pulls a cigarette and a lighter from her pocket. She finds the other's hand on her arm.

Nah, you can't smoke here. No way. This is fuckin holy ground.

Shit, says the other, you're serious, aren't you.

They sit instead under the west wall of the collapsed nave of the abbey and pass the bottle back and forth, looking over the town.

Across the river on the cliffs of the opposite bank, a pair of shadows flit beneath the statue of Captain Cook, where it faces across to the abbey. A low, red moon is waxing, the rolling clouds diffusing its glow far out to sea. The caps of the swell heave into the moonlight, breaking with a hushed roar on the twin piers extending into the waves. The little lights of Whitby twinkle.

The moon rises. In the pocket of the girl with the cigarettes, secret from the girl beside her and from the whole world, is the money saved out of her Costcutter pay that will buy her train ticket to London. She feels a gentle, spreading drunkenness. She loves all this, the abbey and the town and the sea and the rum and the companionship so much that the only way to leave, as she knows in her heart she has to leave, is to wrench herself away, and the only question is how cleanly, how much of herself will adhere to the town like hair and skin.

She says: We used to come here as kids. With my mum and dad. We put up with it. They loved it. Must have, to keep bringing us here. I mean, we were shits.

In the attic, in bed, Saturday slipping into Sunday morning, she offers these proofs of self, as if to authenticate what has already passed between them.

She says: I was with my boyfriend nine years. In the eight months since we broke up, this is the first time that—this must sound silly.

Adds: I felt like I lost my life, I mean the life I thought I had.

Through this he doesn't speak.

What does he have to say, when pressed, and pressed again? He's an itinerant musician, in summer living between festivals; at other times between pub gigs, tided over by the dole. He has an accordion, a van, a tent, and a couch to lie on in Newcastle when he wants it. He likes the Americans in the trio and thinks he might like to tour with them in America, play some gigs in Kentucky. Or Hungary: he's fascinated by Eastern European folk music, listens obsessively to cassettes in his van. Romania, even.

He's younger than her. He used to drink more than he does now. In Lincolnshire he is, as they say, known to police.

He tells her that nine years is nothing, compared to a lifetime.

She thinks: There are years and then there are years.

•••

In the morning he goes downstairs for a smoke and she half-suspects he is gone.

His accordion is still in its box by the wall, his jacket on the chair, but is there really anything such a man might not leave behind?

She hears his tread, his smoker's huff, as he climbs the third flight of stairs and then the fourth, smaller flight that leads to the attic.

He takes the jacket from the chair, sweeps up the little things from the bedside table, hefts the accordion in its battered box. Smoke clinging to the air where he passes.

She comes from the corner and he shyly kisses her goodbye.

As he turns to leave he says, we're playing at Rifle Club tonight. After that I'll most probably be at the session at the Black Horse. Or the Endeavour. Or the Ship. If you want to. Find me.

hail

Anne Elvey

Anne Elvey lives on Boonwurrung Country in Seaford, Victoria. She is author of *On arrivals of breath* (2019), *White on White* (2018), *This flesh that you know* (2015) and *Kin* (2014). Anne is managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain* journal.

a class of chill   envelops
before rain   falls as ice
sounds   every hard surface
a clatter of miniature   bells

signals   your ironic welcome
you know   my bones my
fingers' ache   the way
i freeze in face   of hazard

this nothing you offer   is
to what purpose   except
to keep me   indoors huddled
with kin   gentle perhaps

toward each other   your
slow melt's   salutation

(f)or this

Jonathan Dunk

Jonathan Dunk is a widely published scholar and poet, and edits *Overland* literary journal with Evelyn Araluen.

Breaking on shore-thought
we fiddle the axles of
an old Holocene question
when or what
        but our shadows
pre-empt us and by time
there we're already banal
        whatever the problem was
it's here to pay—some idea
unwound of life not seen or sem-
piternal but coiled in some
galaxy's quartz gears
        here somehow between
the shadows and the trees
watching not personally
        but cadent enough
in a little way
long enough to throw
                a stone

                and hear
                it once echo

A thing we ask entirely too much of

Megan Kaminski

Megan Kaminski is a poet and essayist—and the author of two books of poetry, *Deep City* (Noemi Press, 2015) and *Desiring Map* (Coconut Books, 2012), with a third book *Gentlewomen* forthcoming from Noemi Press in 2020. She is an Associate Professor in English at the University of Kansas, specialising in poetry and poetics, creative writing, queer ecology, and the environmental humanities.

And leaving. Taking leave of. The smallness of letting go. Palm clench and squeeze. The softness of leaves. Fading summer. Sun on trees on lawn. Tyres roll on asphalt. Pretty girls in sundresses. Things I can say to you. Things I will not. The ocean and miles between. The hairs between your brows. Your fingers tapping keys in the room below mine. Your paw press. My face pressed to fur. This breaking. This rending reading into. Wrought to hold. Carried piece-meal. Carried flood-ward. Phrasal fractured misspoke.

Too pretty to promise to light to drop. Down wave down beach to eyesore. Tectonic drift and slide. Tail thump in the morning. Fog drift. Each fall a memory. Surfacing pre-break in Pacific. Cold drowned drowned miles. This not absence. This telling into subduction. Building to break. Sliding centimetre on end onto tips of fingers. Hair salt-crusted body brined. Back-lit expansion moulding bodies into stone. The top floor of the house. The stretch of shadow.

And I forget water boiling. Leave fruit to brown in bowl. Afternoon sun and wet decay. Each pore a tingle. A tithe to your constancy to my long yawn. Lung sputtle and contagion. Muscle ache and long lines at the bakery. A bike's wobble up the hill. Sediment breaks apart beneath our feet. River wending into valley. Teeth pressing into flesh. Each car cry. Each porch of singing girls. Tolling Sunday nearer. Listening through doors. Dimly lit rooms and damp thighs. Cicada call into night.

For the day drift. For the hills folding summer into pockets. For the ache of hours and time zones and distance decreed waste. Hoof to hay. Brindle brought basket. Memory of skin. Fire-lit and unsteady in the break. My brain moth-begotten and slipping west. Mouth moving towards opening towards speech made clean. A phone call. A calling for attention. A way a wander a reckoning for the year to come. Miles conscripted. Service towards mountains and sea and flesh and crumbling rock.

A letter. A photo transcribed to red to short dresses to legs outstretched under tables. Ink spreads on paper on cotton. Afternoon chortle caffeinated to last a few more hours. A ring that doesn't. Placed in a deep drawer darkened event. The workers leave the building. My hair wet knotted into curls into a place that doesn't pass freely. Tired for waiting. Thread tied in place. Marking the hills marking the lake for another making. Another call to shutter to bear down into muscle memory. Evening passage and retreat. Shoulder turn.

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'Winter Flight'
Gabriel Furshong

Passage after passage
to worry or wonder

what meaning glosses
between one language

angling
compulsive
destined

and the other

With writing and ideas from
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